Trade union activity in the tinplate, nickel and coal industries in the Swansea Valley, c.1870-1926.

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Trade Union Activity in the Tinplate, Nickel and Coal Industries in the Swansea Valley, *c.*1870-1926

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Summary

This is a study of trade unionism in three different industries in the same valley – the Swansea valley, which is situated in south-west Wales on the South Wales Coalfield. Focusing on the period *c*.1870-1926, this study looks at the tinplate, nickel and coal industries, and how trade unionism evolved in each industry during this period. The conditions which influenced trade unionism in each industry are considered as a means of assessing how and why trade unionism developed in the ways that it did. By the mid 1920s, each of the three industries had developed its own distinct form of trade unionism: conciliation in the tinplate industry; industrial cooperation in the nickel industry; and a more confrontational approach in the coal industry. Despite these differences, different levels of cooperation between workers from the three industries did occur. This cooperation is considered within wider contexts, for example: through the Trade and Labour Councils in the valley and during the 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out.

This study gives a geographic, demographic and industrial introduction to the Swansea valley and is divided into three parts. There are three chapters on the tinplate industry; one chapter on the nickel industry; and three chapters on the coal industry, including one chapter on the 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out. Factors such as social, political, economic, demographic, religious, cultural, linguistic and industrial are considered in explaining the development of trade unionism in each industry in the Swansea valley.

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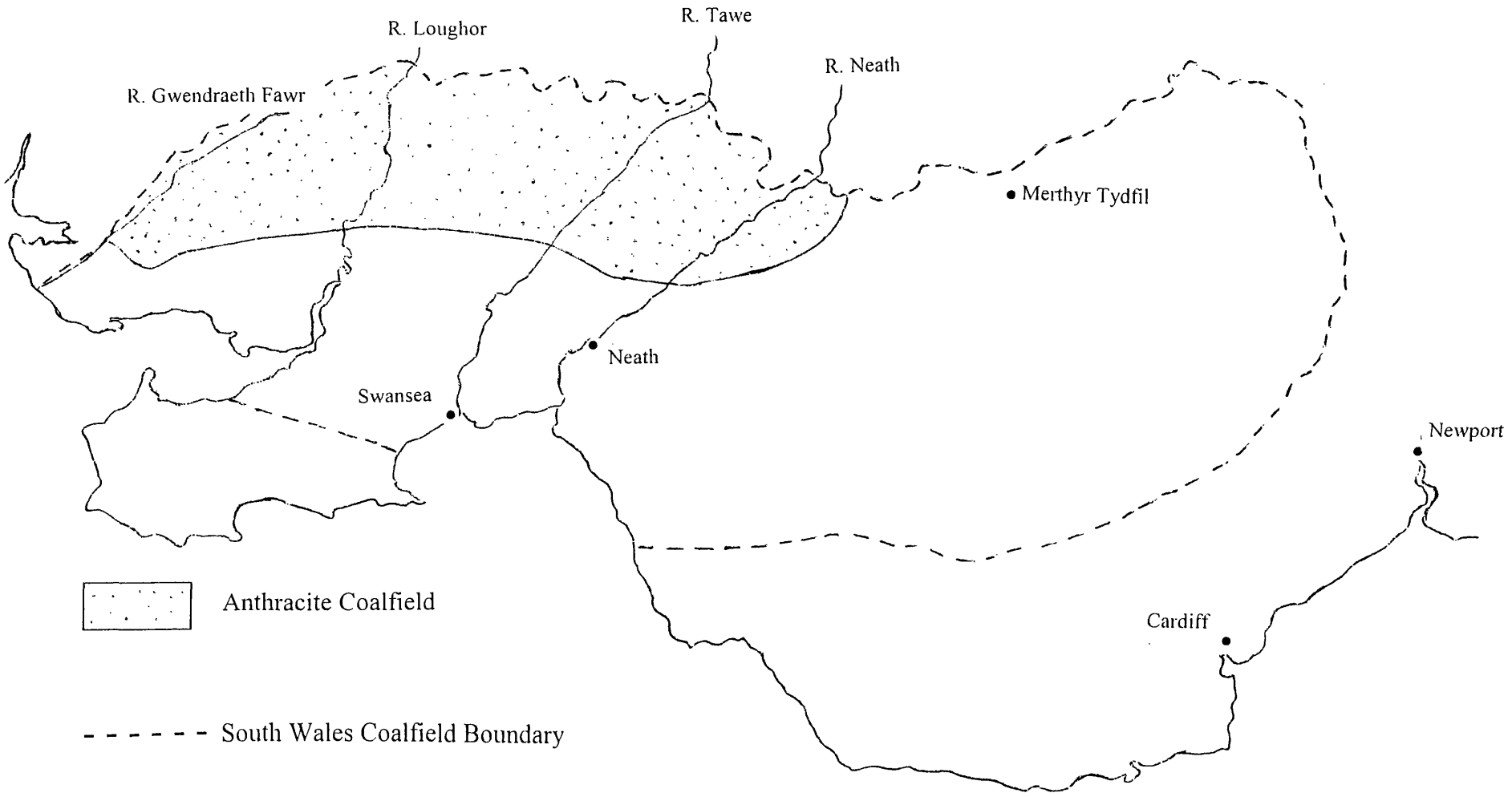
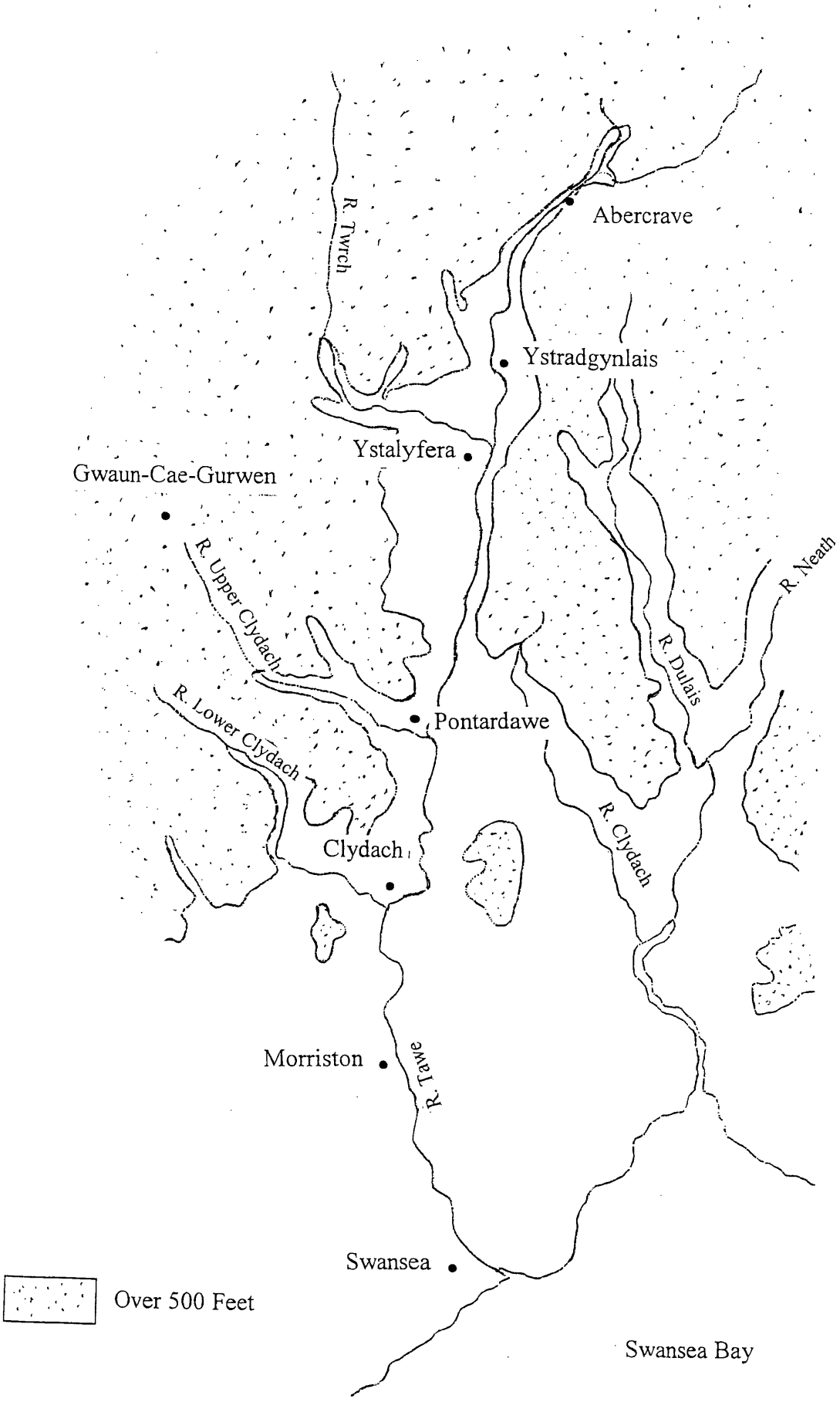

R. Loughor
R. Tawe
R. Gwendraeth Fawr
R. Neath
Merthyr Tydfil
Neath
Swansea
Newport
Cardiff
Anthracite Coalfield
South Wales Coalfield Boundary


R. Twrch
Abercrave
Ystradgynlais
Ystalyfera
Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen
R. Upper Clydach
R. Lower Clydach
R. Neath
R. Dulais
Pontardawe
R. Clydach
Clydach
Morriston
R. Tawe
Swansea
Over 500 Feet
Swansea Bay

Introduction

The Swansea valley is situated in south-west Wales, on the western part of the South Wales Coalfield. The valley was cut out during the last ice age to form a 'U' shaped valley. It has a wide flat valley floor through which the River Tawe flows; the Tawe rises in the upper valley and empties into Swansea Bay. Morriston, which is located in the lower valley, is the first main settlement, around four miles from Swansea; the valley stretches from Morriston for approximately another fourteen miles (as the crow flies) until the last main settlement of Abercrave.

The Swansea valley is flanked either side by the Amman valley to the west, and the Neath and Dulais valleys to the East. Movement between these valleys is fairly fluid, particularly in the upper Swansea valley. Feeding into the Swansea valley are three 'V' shaped valleys, formed by the Lower- and Upper-Clydach Rivers in the lower and middle of the valley, and by the Twrch River in the upper valley.

The main settlements in the Swansea valley are: Morriston, Clydach, Pontardawe, Ystalyfera, Ystradgynlais and Abercrave. The valley's settlements create an urban ribbon along the valley floor, rather than terraced into the valley sides as is common in the central and eastern valleys of south Wales. The valley's settlements were mainly constructs of the industrial revolution, either growing out of existing hamlets as industry developed, such as in the case of Clydach. New industrial towns were also built specifically to house industrial workers as was the case with Morriston, which was named after Sir John Morris, a local colliery owner whose coal supplied the local copper works.[1]

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[1] J. R. Samuel, *A Short History of Tin and the Tinplate Trade*, (Newport: The Williams Press, Ltd., 1924), pp.71-4. See map, p.i.

As industry developed the valley experienced a steady growth in population throughout the nineteenth century. The table below shows the valley's population growth between 1801 and 1921:[2]

Year	Valley Population
1801	2,825
1811	3,404
1821	4,185
1831	5,460
1841	7,317
1851	10,547
1861	15,394
1871	16,291
1881	18,693
1891	20,057
1901	25,086
1911*	53,003
1921*	57,510

*Inclusive of the population of Morriston.[3]

The fastest increases in population occurred between 1851 and 1861. This population growth could be attributed to the growth in the metallurgical industries in the valley, for example Pontardawe Iron and Tinplate Works opened in 1835 with one mill, but by 1861 it had expanded to include nine mills.[4] This population increase also coincided with a peak in the

[2] Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Communities: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llanysul: Gomer Press, 1987), p.198; Census Data Swansea Reference Library, B7.18, B7.19 and www.histpop.org, accessed 16/04/2009.
[3] Parishes of Llangiwg, Cilybebyll, Ystrad and Rhyndwyclydach. 1851-1861 saw a 45 per cent increase in population. Population of Morriston, 1911: 11,043; 1921: 11,830.
[4] Clive Reed, *Two Centuries of Pontardawe, 1794-1994* (No Publication Details), p.4 and p.23.

production of pig iron which occurred in 1856. The number of furnaces reached sixteen, with a peak total production of 58,720 tons.[5] There was also a significant increase in population from 1901 onwards. This can be attributed to the development and expansion of the anthracite coal industry in the upper valley and an improvement in the tinplate trade. These settlements grew around the industries that developed in the valley, initially the iron works, and later the tinplate, coal and nickel industries. Those who benefited most from the development of industry and growth of settlements were the local landowning families, such as the Gough, Aubrey and Mears families.

The Swansea valley contained within it all the necessary natural resources required for the development of industry, namely: coal, iron ore and limestone. It was not until the development and completion of the Swansea Canal that industry began to develop rapidly. The Swansea Canal Act (1794), made clear the potential for industrial development in the valley; it claimed that the canal:

> Will open a communication with several extensive mines, quarries, Iron Works, Collieries, Culm Works, limestone quarries and extensive tracts of land abounding with iron ore, coal, limestone and other materials.[6]

The canal was completed in 1798, and opened up the valley to more efficient transportation of raw materials. Before the canal was completed, the only way to move materials extracted from the valley was by pack horse.

The valley's industrial heritage had its origins around the iron industry, which later developed into a tinplate and steel industry by the mid to late nineteenth century. The location in the valley of coal, iron ore and limestone made the valley a prime location for the

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[5] W. S. Morgan, *Horses to Barges: An Account of Early Coal and Iron Industries in Ystalyfera and Ystradgynlais c.1650-1860* (No Publication Details), p.21.
[6] Extracts from the Swansea Canal Act (1794), cited in W. S. Morgan, *Horses to Barges: An Account of Early Coal and Iron Industries in Ystalyfera and Ystradgynlais c.1650-1860*, p.10.

manufacture of iron. The Ynyscedwyn Iron Works was the earliest works and started operating in the early eighteenth century; the estimated start date for iron production at the works is around 1711.[7] The Ystalyfera Works opened in 1835, the Pontardawe Iron and Tinplate Works in 1835 and there was also a smaller works in Abercrave.

The location of these iron works on the anthracite coalfield led to innovation by Swansea valley iron works. Initially the iron works used charcoal in iron production, but in the late 1830s successful experiments were carried out using locally sourced anthracite coal. This process was pioneered by George Crane and David Thomas at the Ynyscedwyn Iron Works, where a 'hot blast' process was developed and allowed the use of anthracite coal in iron production.[8]

However, it was the tinplate industry which emerged as the dominant metallurgical industry in the valley. The tinplate industry was closely linked to the iron industry – iron plates were initially coated with tin until steel became preferred for plates in the 1880s and 1890s. The earliest tinplate works in the valley was the Ynyspenllwch Works, located in Glais, near Clydach, which was erected around 1745. Throughout the following two centuries, a total of sixteen works were erected, and operated to varying degrees of success and periods of time. The majority of works in the valley were erected between 1869 and 1880 – nine in total.[9]

South west Wales became the centre of the Welsh tinplate industry, to the extent that the region gained the nickname *Alcania*.[10] In the 1880s Swansea replaced Liverpool as the

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[7] Bernant Hughes, *Stepping Stones in the History of Ystalyfera* (Ystalyfera: Published by Author, 1990), p.7.
[8] Len Ley, *The Iron Cradle: Ystradgynlais and the Upper Swansea Valley* (Neath: Glamorgan Press, 2005), pp.39-40; Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Communities*, p.194; *Cambrian*, 9 February 1839.
[9] Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen: A History of the South Wales Tinplate Industry, 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995), Appendix A, pp.243-5.
[10] *Alcania* is derived from the Welsh word for tin 'alcan' or 'alcam', J. R. Samuel claims that this nickname was coined by the early tinplate union leader Lewis Afan. J. R. Samuel, *A Short History of Tin and the Tinplate Trade*, p.7.

chief shipping port for the export of Welsh tinplates. The *Cambrian* in 1883 published an article from *The Colliery Guardian* which stated:

> The Swansea district is ... the chief seat for the manufacture of tinplates, the number of mills situated within a radius of three miles from the town being estimated at about forty, and being capable of turning out, in prosperous times, and when in full working operation about 20,000 boxes of finished plates weekly, or about 1,000,000 boxes per annum, about one third of the total exports of the whole kingdom...[11]

The vast majority of Welsh tinplate was destined for the United States, which remained by far the largest market, only being hampered by the implementation of the McKinley Tariff in 1891, which placed tariffs on imported tinplates in an attempt to protect the fledgling American tinplate industry. In 1884 the *Cambrian* highlighted the importance of the American market:

> ...The tinplate trade of south Wales, Swansea being the centre of it, is enormous. From four to five millions of boxes go to the United States every year, a quantity equal to from 200,000 and 250,000 tons...[12]

The tinplate industry included several grades of workers, from the highly skilled well paid jobs, to the lower skilled jobs, usually filled by women and children. Swansea valley tinplaters could certainly lay claim to being some of, if not, the most skilled tinplate workers in the world. In 1851 an American Iron Works exhibited an ironplate 1/1000th of an inch thick at the Great Exhibition. This was surpassed by Pontardawe Tinplate Works, where rollermen rolled ironplates so thin that to reach the thickness of one inch, 3,799 sheets were

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[11] *Cambrian*, 12 October 1883.
[12] *Cambrian*, 9 May 1884.

needed to be placed upon each other.[13] In 1871, tinworkers at the Upper Forest Tin Works went further when they rolled iron so thin that when layered on top of each other it required 4,000 to make one inch thickness![14] The tinplate industry remained a prominent industry in the Swansea valley until the last works closed in the 1950s.[15]

The nickel industry was the last of the three industries studied in this research to be established in Clydach in 1902. However, the lower Swansea valley did have a previous tradition of working nickel, but for different purposes and using a different process from those at the Mond Nickel Works, Clydach. The Vivian family, of Swansea, from the 1840s used nickel ore to extract cobalt for the use of colouring glass ware.[16] But it was the location of the Mond Nickel Works in Clydach that brought the working of nickel back to the Swansea valley. The works was built to house and carry out the new nickel ore refining process that had been developed by Dr Ludwig Mond and Dr Karl Langer – they developed the carbonyl process which removed impurities, leaving behind nickel. Nickel ore was shipped to Clydach from deposits in Canada.

Clydach was chosen as the location for the refinery for several reasons: it had excellent transport links with a railway network that had been established for the local collieries and the Swansea Canal, both of which transverse through Clydach. Swansea docks were also in easy reach, allowing nickel ore to be docked, and the refined ore to be exported. There was also a reliable supply of water from the River Tawe that could be used in the cooling process. The proximity of anthracite coal further up the valley was important as a means of producing energy and gases required for the refining process. As well as the transport and natural resources, there was the availability in Clydach, and in the wider

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[13] Clive Reed, *Two Centuries of Pontardawe*, p.23.
[14] *Cambrian*, 23 June 1871.
[15] Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, Appendix A, pp.243-5. The last works to close was the Upper Forest and Worcester Works, Morriston, in 1958.
[16] Interview with Leonard A. Toft, interviewed by B C. Fagg, 30/03/1977, Side A 1:44, WGAS: TH50. Cobalt was used to gain a blue colouring.

Swansea valley district, of a skilled metallurgical workforce, who had gained experience working in the local tinplate and steel industries.

The Mond Works would be largely worked during its first twenty five years by migrants from Ireland and London, as well as by some local Welsh labour. The works attracted a sizeable number of Irish migrants who came to the Swansea valley seeking work, including the Irish Gaelic poet Padraig O Mileadha. A Catholic Church still remains in Clydach today. The local Welsh population, on the whole and particularly before the First World War, chose to work in the local collieries, where conditions were perceived to be better than in the Mond Works.[17] The conditions at the Mond Works contributed to Clydach gaining the unenviable nickname of the 'white man's grave'. Arthur Thomas, an employee of the works, commented that there were more widows in Clydach than the rest of the Swansea valley because the men died young.[18] The nickel works became a prominent part of Clydach and its owners, particularly Alfred Mond, would play a prominent role in wider industrial and political life in south Wales and Britain. The Mond Nickel Works still remain operating in Clydach today, and is now part of INCO Europe Ltd.

The Swansea valley had an established coal industry during the nineteenth century, and commercial mining was operating in the valley by the mid eighteenth century, when a colliery was opened in the upper valley in 1758.[19] The coal that was mined was primarily used for the local copper, iron, steel and tinplate works in the valley and surrounding district. Coal sourced from the lower valley, from Birchgrove, was used by the East India Company and was included in the list of coals to be included in the Admiralty contracts.[20] The Swansea valley can be divided into two parts as regards coal, the lower valley being an area of semi-anthracite and dry steam coal, with the middle and upper valley, from Pontardawe upwards,

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[17] Interview with Arthur Thomas, interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 08/05/1977, Side A 19:17, WGAS:TH49A.
[18] Interview with Arthur Thomas, interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 08/05/1977, Side A 20:36, WGAS:TH49A.
[19] W. G. Thomas, 'Industrial Archaeology: A Study of Some Remains of Past Mining Activities in the Upper Tawe and Twrch Valleys', *Brycheiniog*, vol. XIV (1970), p.67.
[20] Swansea History Project, *Coal Mining in the Swansea Area: 2 East of the Tawe.*

being an area of anthracite coal. During a lecture at Pontardawe Secondary School in 1926, Mr John H. Davies M.E., F.G.S. declared that there was more coal in the Swansea valley than in the Rhondda.[21]

Initially, ownership of the collieries was on a small scale, based on one company owning just one or two collieries. Some of the iron companies owned more, for example the Ystalyfera Iron Company owned three collieries by 1860.[22] The size of the collieries varied widely, and it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the expansion of the anthracite coal industry in the valley that the number and size of collieries increased. By 1926, there were approximately forty collieries in the Swansea valley and district of varying sizes: the Maerdy Pit in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, one of the largest collieries, employed 791 workers, while Rhiw Colliery, near Ystradgynlais, employed only 21.[23]

The twentieth century also saw a change in the type of ownership in the anthracite coalfield, including the Swansea valley, with the development by the mid 1920s of anthracite coal combines. The main combine in the Swansea valley was the Amalgamated Anthracite Company under the chairmanship of Alfred Mond.

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This study on trade union activity in the Swansea valley, *c.*1870-1926, focuses on the area's three main industries: tinplate, nickel and coal. The research has made use of extensive contemporary sources of a diverse range. The majority of sources came from regional archives, including those located in West Glamorgan Archive Service, Powys County Archive, South Wales Coalfield Collection, South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea University Library, Swansea Reference Library and the Local Studies Library in Cardiff. National archives were also used, particularly for research into the tinplate industry, at the

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[21] *Cambrian*, 12 March 1926.
[22] W. S. Morgan, *Horses to Barges*, p.25. The three collieries were: Waunclawdd, Waunplemys and Ystalyfera Collieries.
[23] *Colliery Year Book and Coal Trade Directory 1926* (London: The Louis Cassier Company Ltd., 1926), p.200 and p.253.

Modern Records Centre, based at Warwick University. These archives and centres allowed access to a variety of sources, including local newspapers, oral histories, local government documentation and documents relating to local industry, collieries, trade unions and personal papers. By using these contemporary sources it was possible to identify different approaches to trade unionism in different industries.

The largest source of contemporary evidence available was local newspapers. These papers were used to build up a historical narrative of the main industrial disputes in the Swansea valley between 1870 and 1926. The newspapers researched came from three archival centres: firstly, Swansea Reference Library,[24] including titles such as: *Cambrian*, *Cambrian Daily Leader* and *South Wales Daily Post*. The second archive was at the Local Studies Library, in Cardiff, which holds *Llais Llafur*, later re-named *Labour Voice*, a weekly newspaper published in Ystalyfera, in the Swansea valley, and contains sections on events in the main urban centres of the Swansea valley, as well as references to national events, particularly events linked to the labour movement.[25] Thirdly, a more specific paper was *Industrial World*, which was published between 1892 and 1898 by The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union, a weekly paper held at Swansea University Library. It gave accounts of union activity and campaigns, industrial disputes and events in the labour movement.

Contemporary newspapers were used to build up a diachronic narrative framework, as well as providing an important source for contemporary views and opinions on events from various sections of society, for example from employers, political parties, politicians, government and workers' representatives; allowing different opinions to be taken into account in the research.

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[24] Swansea Reference Library has now been relocated to the Civic Centre in Swansea.
[25] Since the completion of research, *Llais Llafur/Labour Voice* has been made available at Ystradgynlais Library, Swansea valley, due to Lottery funding.

However, the length of the period of study, 1870-1926, and time limitations meant that greater emphasis was placed on weekly newspapers, and dailies were only used to look at certain events in more detail. The political leanings of publications were also taken into account. Swansea newspapers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did have a Liberal leaning, especially the *Cambrian*, though this was countered by the Conservative *Daily Post*. Likewise, *Llais Llafur/Labour Voice* was labour leaning. It was established in Ystalyfera in 1898 by Ebenezer Rees. Robert Pope has described *Llais Llafur* as 'an organ of the ILP and for socialist thought at this time.' Pope identifies the paper's most radical period as being between 1898 and 1914, after this period the paper's socialist approach became diluted.[26]

Once a narrative through newspapers had been established, more in-depth research was carried out into the three main industries: tinplate, nickel and coal. Documents held at the South Wales Miners' Library, South Wales Coalfield Collection, West Glamorgan Archive Service and the Modern Records Centre were used to study in more detail the role of trade unionism in each industry in the Swansea valley. Such documents that were used included: local trade directories, colliery year books and coal trade directories, letter books, trade union documents, working-class education documents and personal papers; which allowed the types and dynamics of each industry to be identified, for example the number of works and collieries, numbers employed, relations between workers, unions and employers, union organization: including number of lodges and some lodge minute books, and the existence of local customs and wage agreements.

These sources were useful in understanding the role of trade unionism, the approach to trade unionism and industrial relations, union activity, industrial disputes and the workings

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[26] Robert Pope, 'Facing the Dawn: Socialists, Non-conformists and *Llais Llafur*, 1906-1914', *Llafur*, volume 7, numbers 3 and 4 (1998-1999), pp. 77-88. *Llais* Llafur has also been appraised in Robert Smith's *'In Direct and Homely Speech of the Workers': Llais Llafur* 1898-1915 (Aberystwyth: University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 2000) Research Papers Number 16.

and structures of trade unionism in the Swansea valley. Documents relating to the coal industry were found at the South Wales Miners' Library and the South Wales Coalfield Collection; while tinplate documents were found at the Modern Records Centre; and some nickel documents at the West Glamorgan Archive Service.

However, these documents did have their limitations. Documents concerning early tinplate unionism in the Swansea valley are scarce, particularly union documents; this could be accounted for by the collapse of the first tinplate union, the Independent Association of Tinplate Makers, as early as the mid 1880s. This meant that for the study of early trade unionism in the tinplate industry it became necessary to rely on information provided in local newspapers, such as the *Cambrian*. In fact, there are no union lodge minute books that have been found for the tinplate and nickel industries relating to the Swansea valley. The numbers of South Wales Miners' Federation lodge minute books from lodges in the Swansea valley and covering the period of study are also limited. As such, these sources did not provide the most fruitful information. Further, during major disputes it was common for union lodge minutes not to be kept up to date, or not kept at all, this was true in the Swansea valley during the 1926 General Strike and Miners' Lock-out.

To try and comprehend further local context of Swansea valley communities and politics, other documents were used, relating to local government such as Pontardawe Rural District Council and Ystradgynlais Rural District Council, maps and census material. These documents were found at the West Glamorgan County Archive Service and its Pontardawe outreach branch, Swansea Reference Library, the South Wales Coalfield Collection and the South Wales Miners' Library. This allowed the assessment of the role of local authorities, political control of local government and thus political allegiances of the communities to be gauged. These sources were also used to identify the response of local government to industrial disputes, for example any measures which were introduced locally and attempts to

alleviate distress through the welfare measures of local boards of guardians. The statistical data from census material provided information on population size, the extent of population growth, the strength of the Welsh language and ratio of the local population as regards gender, age and employment levels (when compared with unemployment statistics published in the local press). Maps of the valley allowed geological and geographical factors to be taken into account, such as the shape of the valley, distribution of settlements and communication routes and the type of coal being mined.

Again, time limitations played a factor in the research of these sources. To take into account these time limitations sources were selected to reflect the role of local authorities during particular events, industrial disputes or issues affecting the Swansea valley, for example the 1926 General Strike and Miners' Lock-out. Further, the minutes of meetings of the Rural District Councils and Boards of Guardians usually contained very little relevant information, and a need to sift through the formalities of meetings and the day-to-day running of the local district was necessary. Census material is also protected for a hundred years, however, because of the period of research, this only applied to the 1911 and 1921 censuses, and the statistical data available regardless of this embargo was sufficient to provide useful information.

All these sources were enriched by the use of oral history, mainly in the form of previously recorded interviews and transcripts. Oral histories were an exceptionally valuable resource, as they helped to contribute to the historical narrative by giving a greater depth of knowledge and understanding. The interviews came from the South Wales Coalfield Social History Project and were carried out in the 1970s and are held at the South Wales Miners' Library. These recordings include many interviews conducted with residents who lived and worked in the Swansea valley during the first half of the twentieth century. As well as interviews from industrial workers, a large number of recordings of women's experiences

were also available. Other interviews were discovered at the West Glamorgan Archive Service, and again recorded in the 1970s, this time with a greater emphasis on tinplaters and a few in relation to the Mond Nickel Works.

Oral histories give a synchronic historical narrative which complements the diachronic narrative of newspapers. Oral histories provide information that is not provided by newspapers or other sources, for example there is a greater emphasis on a sense of the life, society and communities of the valley. The oral histories at the South Wales Miners' Library and the West Glamorgan Archive Service together have a disproportionate number of interviews that focus on the Swansea valley, and were thus a rich vein of research, with contributions in the recordings from: men, women, coal workers, metal workers, the working and middle classes, rank and file union members, and labour and union leaders. These interviews gave a wide view of working-class life and culture, and record individual experiences during major events linked to labour history.

However, the oral history interviews and recordings were conducted by previous professional and amateur historians, who had their own agendas in what they wanted to achieve and gain from these interviews. As such, some of the oral histories did not answer the questions which would have specifically aided this research, or did not go into enough detail to be of fuller use. With the interviews being conducted in the 1970s it was impossible to revisit these individuals to re-examine what was recorded, or clarify any points. It was also important to take into account the general drawbacks that exist in relation to oral histories, such as: problems with accuracy of the memory of those being interviewed and the influence of the interviewer affecting the nature of the testimony. All the oral histories that were used were already in existence, and no new interviews were carried out. This was mainly due again to time limitations and the taking into account of natural human life spans which would have severely limited the effectiveness of new interviews.

This study used a diverse range of contemporary sources, all with their own innate advantages and disadvantages. Contemporary sources were combined, and supplemented, with the existing historiography of the labour history of the South Wales Coalfield and relevant references to the Swansea valley.

The 1980s and 1990s saw labour history come under increasing scrutiny, not only in Britain, but also in other parts of the world, such as North America and Australia. Debate has developed in such a way that in the mid 1990s labour history was deemed to be in crisis. This 'crisis' occurred because of several factors acting upon labour history. The socialist model, within which many labour historians worked, has been questioned and to some extent dismissed as flawed, particularly since: the collapse of the Soviet Union; a move away from traditional labour politics and values by New Labour; and the decline of a traditional working class. Attacks upon the labour history model have led some historians to question the social relevance of labour history. Tony Adams, for example, commented that '... the link between labour history and the ongoing "labour movement" is increasingly problematic.'[27] Andy Croll highlights that the post-modern historian Patrick Joyce 'placed himself at the heart of a number of debates that called into question key aspects of the socio-economic paradigm.'[28] These criticisms were compounded further by the increasing influence of post-modernism within labour history. Historians who followed this line of thought questioned labour historians' use of linguistic turns. Further criticism was levelled against labour history for being too narrow in its focus, for example ignoring the roles of women and managers.[29]

However, in some respects, Welsh labour history has managed to avoid the more damaging and debilitating effects of the 'crisis' which have afflicted other countries. Andy

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[27] Tony Adams, 'Labour History: Broadening the Field?', *Labour History Review*, Volume 68, Number 3 (December 2003), p.292.

[28] Andy Croll, 'People's Remembrancers' in a Post-Modern Age: Contemplating the Non-Crisis of Welsh Labour History', *Llafur*, Volume 8, Number 1 (2000), p.11. Croll cites the example of Patrick Joyce, 'The End of Social History?', *Social History*, Volume 20, Number 1 (1995), pp.73-91.

[29] See Julie Light, 'Manufacturing the Past – The Representation of Mining Communities in History, Literature and Heritage: "... Fantasies of a World that Never Was?"', *Llafur*, Voliume 8, Number 1 (2000), pp.19-31.

Croll has concluded that there are some benefits of engaging with aspects of the debate, particularly the 'linguistic turn', which give an opportunity for research in areas which have previously been marginalized, or to 'ponder distinctive "Welshness"' of Welsh labour history.[30] Debate within Welsh labour history has concluded the need to look beyond traditional areas of research, Mike Lieven has commented:

> The debate on the 'crisis' in labour history in the early 1990s confronted a number of exclusions and set an agenda for the future which included women's history, comparative history, local studies and the incorporation of civil institutions into the study.[31]

Chris Williams has taken these opportunities of study further by offering an almost endless list of possible opportunities for broadening Welsh labour history, including: occupations such as school teachers and dressmakers; parliamentary and local government politics; other valleys of the South Wales Coalfield beyond the Rhondda; capitalists; gender relations, family and children; and race, ethnicity and identity.[32] The 'crisis' in labour history has, if anything, done more to invigorate the breadth of research in the Welsh sphere of the discipline, rather than hasten the subject's demise.

This research is very much an attempt to work towards these conclusions by moving beyond the traditional areas of research of Welsh labour history. However, this study will also try to fulfil one of the core traditions of Welsh labour history – history which is socially relevant. Recent years has seen the re-opening of small anthracite mines in the Neath valley; while in Clydach, Swansea valley, there is still today a thriving nickel industry at the INCO Ltd. Europe Works.

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[30] Andy Croll, 'People's Remembrancers', pp.16-17.
[31] Mike Lieven, 'A 'New History' of the South Wales Coalfield?', *Llafur*, Volume 8, Number 3 (2002), p.89.
[32] Chris Williams, 'Going Underground'? The Future of Coalfield History Revisited, *Morgannwg*, Volume XLII (1998), pp.41-58.

Although coal was the dominant industry, the Swansea valley was distinct in the fact that it also included other industries, such as tinplate and nickel. A study of the Swansea valley has allowed the opportunity to look at trade unionism in three different industries, but in the same valley.

The Swansea valley has received only a small proportion of attention from historians, the majority of which are either: local history studies, postgraduate theses or small references in wider studies. The history of the district of Swansea and the Swansea valley has benefited from a thriving local history. Early studies include Stan Awbery's *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea* and D. Trevor Williams' 'The Economic Development of Swansea and of the Swansea District to 1921'.[33] A later study by W. G. Thomas also gives information on certain parts of the Swansea valley.[34] These three studies provide an overview and lightly touch on some of the key issues affecting the Swansea valley in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Several local studies specific to the chronology and development of the Swansea valley's population and society, industry, communities, and local geology and geography have been conducted by local historians. Such examples include: W. S. Morgan, *Horses to Barges: An Account of Early Coal and Iron Industries in Ystalyfera and Ystradgynlais, c.1650-1860*; Clive Reed, *Two Centuries of Pontardawe, 1794-1994*; Bernant Hughes, *Stepping Stones in the History of Ystalyfera*; and Len Ley, *The Iron Cradle: Ystradgynlais and the Upper Swansea Valley*.[35] These local studies give a good deal of local detail and a chronological

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[33] Stan Awbery, *Labour's Early Struggles in Swansea* (Swansea: Swansea Printers Ltd., 1949); D. Trevor Williams, 'The Economic Development of Swansea and of the Swansea District to 1921' in *Social and Economic Survey of Swansea and District*, Pamphlet Number 4 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1940).

[34] W. G. Thomas, 'Industrial Archaeology: A Study of Some Remains of Past Mining Activities in the Upper Tawe and Twrch Valleys', *Brycheiniog*, Volume XVI (1970), pp.67-78.

[35] W. S. Morgan, *Horses to Barges: An Account of Early Coaland Iron Industries in Ystalyfera and Ystradgynlais, c.1650-1860* (No Publication Details); Clive Reed, *Two Centuries of Pontardawe, 1794-1994* (No Publication Details); Bernant Hughes, *Stepping Stones in the History of Ystalyfera* (Ystalyfera: Published by Author, 1990); Len Ley, *The Iron Cradle: Ystradgynlais and the Upper Swansea Valley* (Neath: Glamorgan Press, 2005).

overview of the key events and dates in the valley's history; however, they do lack any wider context or engagement with historiographical debate.

Postgraduate theses have allowed certain aspects of the Swansea valley to be focused on but are limited in the range of aspects considered and tend to have a greater emphasis on the nineteenth century rather than the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such theses include: J. D. H. Thomas, 'Social and Economic Developments in the Upper Swansea Valley (Llangiwg), 1770-1880'; W. A. Howard, 'Ynyspenllwch Hamlet and Tinplate Works'; and M. H. Jones 'Morriston'.[36] The valley is also considered in a chapter in Ieuan Gwynedd Jones' *Communities: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales*.[37] This chapter charts the valley's industrial and social development in the nineteenth century and does highlight the potential for further research into the valley's history, particularly the role of the ILP. But again, this chapter offers nothing on the twentieth century, and does not look beyond the histories of industry and population change.

References to the Swansea valley are made, in some detail, in Ioan Matthews' Ph.D 'The World of the Anthracite Miner'. More fleeting references are made in Hywel Francis and Dai Smith's *The Fed*; David Gilbert's *Class, Community and Collective Action*, and Robin Page Arnot's two volumes on the South Wales Miners' Federation.[38]

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[36] J. D. H. Thomas, 'Social and Economic Developments in the Upper Swansea Valley (Llangiwg), 1770-1880' (Swansea: University of Wales M.A., 1974); W. A. Howard, 'Ynyspenllwch Hamlet and Tinplate Works' (Swansea: University of Wales Diploma in Local History, 1995); and M. H. Jones, 'Morriston' (Swansea: University of Wales Diploma in Local History, 1995).

[37] Ieuan Gwynedd Jones, *Communities: Essays in the Social History of Victorian Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1987), pp.187-210.

[38] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Cardiff: University of Wales Ph.D, 1995); Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1980) and Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998); David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners = Glowyr De Cymru: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation: 1898-1914*, Volume 1 (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967) and *South Wales Miners = Glowyr De Cymru: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation: 1914-1926*, Volume 2 (Cardiff: Cymric Press, 1975). All of the above are considered in more detail in a discussion of the historiography of the coal industry.

Very little has been written about the history of the Mond Nickel Works in Clydach, and less still about the labour history of the works. What has been written are mainly 'official' histories commissioned by the works, for example: *The Mond Nickel Works Ltd.*, *100 Years of Producing Nickel*, and A. C. Sturney's *The Story of Mond Nickel.*[39] These histories are useful in setting out the general history, and creating a chronology, of the works. The welfare provisions of the works are well documented and give an insight into the philanthropic approach of the works. However, these histories give only a one sided view of the works. The views, lives and union activity of the workers employed at the works are largely overlooked.

A better picture of how certain ideas of philanthropy and industrial relations developed in the works can be found in the biographies of the Mond family, namely: Ludwig Mond and his son Alfred, both of whom were chairmen of the Mond Nickel Works. J. M. Cohen's *The Life of Ludwig Mond* and Hector Bolitho's *Alfred Mond First Lord Melchett* provide an insight into the political and personal ideas developed and held by father and son.[40] The development of ideas of philanthropy, industrial cooperation and politics can all be traced up to and beyond their application within the Mond Nickel Works. However, as biographies both are very sympathetic to their subjects, and again, the experiences and opinions of employees at the works are not considered in any real depth or relevance.

A greater detail of the ideas of industrial cooperation can be found in Alfred Mond's *Industry and Politics.*[41] Specific examples of the profit-share scheme at the Mond Nickel Works and Mond's anti-socialist stance are included in detail. These details are set in a much wider context of thought of Mond's attempts to convince industry and workers of the benefits

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[39] *The Mond Nickel Works Ltd.* (1918), WGAS:D247/1; Centennial Committee, Chairman Raymond Jones, *100 Years of Producing Nickel* (Clydach Nickel Refinery Commemorative Book, 2002); and A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel* (Plaistow: Curwen Press, 1951).

[40] J. M. Cohen, *The Life of Ludwig Mond* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1956); and Hector Bolitho, *Alfred Mond First Lord Melchett* (London: Martin Secker Ltd., 1939).

[41] Alfred Mond, *Industry and Politcs* (London: Macmillan, 1927).

of industrial cooperation. References to the Mond Works are only really used as an example to prove the success of such schemes and ideas. Ultimately, existing historiography on the Mond Nickel Works offers little in the way of any history, chronology or debate of the labour history of the works.

The history of the tinplate industry has been covered in more detail. The earliest histories of the industry were written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such histories include tinplate master Philip William Flower's *History of the Trade in Tin*; Wilkins' *The Iron, Steel, Tinplate and Other Trades of Wales*; and J. R. Samuel, *A Short History of Tin and the Tinplate Trade*. All give a contemporary insight into the tinplate industry, its recent history at the times of publication, and the main processes involved in the manufacturing process.[42] These are very much chronological histories of the industry considering the development of the tinplate trade from its origins up to the dates of publication. Wilkins does allow the Swansea valley tinplate trade to be placed into a wider context by allowing comparisons to be made with other metallurgical trades. Wilkins' individual chapters on works, regions and key figures (mainly masters) does allow some aspects of the trade to be considered in more detail. However, these studies have a main focus on the nineteenth century, and the early nature of these publications did not allow an appraisal of the twentieth century.

More comprehensive histories of the industry include Edward Henry Brooke's *Chronology of Tinplate Works of Great Britain* which provides detail on statistics, chronological information and the ownership of specific works; however, beyond this it is

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[42]Philip William Flower, *History of the Trade in Tin: A Short Description of Tin Mining and Metallurgy; A History of the Origin and Progress of the Tin-plate Trade, and A Description of the Ancient and Modern Processes of Manufacturing Tin-plates* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1880); Philip William Flower, *Origin and Progress of the Manufacture of Tin-plates* (Neath: Whittington, 1886); Wilkins, *The Iron, Steel, Tinplate and Other Trades of Wales* (Merthyr Tydfil: Joseph Williams, Printer and Publisher, "Tyst Office", 1903); J. R. Samuel, *A Short History of Tin and the Tinplate Trade* (Newport: The Williams Press, Ltd., 1924).

largely limited.[43] Of greater use are Walter E. Minchinton's *The British Tinplate Industry* and Paul Jenkins' *Twenty by Fourteen: A History of the South Wales Tinplate Industry, 1700-1961*.[44] These two later studies, have a greater degree of detachment than the earlier publications from the 1870-1926 period of this research. Both studies give a good understanding of the technical and manufacturing processes and terminology of the tinplate industry; and consider the main themes of the origins of the trade, competition, labour and labour relations, and the changes that occurred in the processes and manufacture throughout the industry's history. However, the labour history of the tinplate trade in these studies is considered in the context of the history of the tinplate industry as a whole, rather than as an issue on its own or in a wider labour history context. Due to the disproportionate location of tinplate works in south west Wales, this region, including the Swansea valley, has benefitted from a lot of attention from historians of the tinplate industry. Jenkins in particular considers this region in detail; and Minchinton, despite looking at a wider context of Great Britain, also pays favourable attention to south west Wales, including the tinplate centres of the Swansea valley, such as Morriston.

There has been extensive research into the South Wales Coalfield. Some early attempts to study its history were made before labour history's heyday of the 1960s and 1970s. Ness Edwards' *The History of the South Wales Miners* and *The History of the South Wales Miners' Federation* are examples of such early publications.[45] A substantial two volume institutional history of the South Wales Miners' Federation was produced by Robin Page Arnot. Although providing valuable insight into the workings of, and key issues

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[43] Edward Henry Brooke, *Chronology of Tinplate Works of Great Britain* (Cardiff: William Lewis (Printers) Ltd., 1944).

[44] Walter E. Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1957); and Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen: A History of the South Wales Tinplate Industry, 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995).

[45] Ness Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners* (London: The Labour Publishing Company Limited, 1926); and Ness Edwards, *The History of the South Wales Miners' Federation* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

affecting, the SWMF between 1898 and 1926; Page Arnot does, at times, overlook the experiences of the rank and file of the SWMF and their contribution to the 'Fed'. After Page Arnot's work, the history of the south Wales miners was picked up by Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, whose study of the south Wales miners started at the point where Page Arnot left off – 1926; and followed the miners' history through to the 1970s. Francis and Smith used innovative research techniques including the collecting of oral histories to build up a clearer study and understanding of rank and file miners, their communities, as well as their union. The oral histories were collected and the study was written in the context of two significant victories for British miners in the 1972 and 1974 miners' strikes. However, the date of publication means that the study does not take into account the devastating defeat of the 1984/85 miners' strike, and the resultant closure of collieries and the virtual shutting down of the South Wales Coalfield. The 1998 reissue also fails to fully engage with the events of the 1980s and 1990s. Despite the coalfield wide nature of these studies, there is still a greater focus placed on the central valleys of the coalfield.

Chris Williams' *Capitalism, Community and Collective Action: The South Wales Coalfield, 1898-1947*, part of the 'Past in Perspectives series, also considers a coalfield wide approach.[46] The study's thematic approach has allowed several factors to be considered in discussing the history of the South Wales Coalfield, for example its historiography, economics, trade unionism, politics and society; the study also includes illustrative documents. Williams' study does challenge some of the more stereotypical views of the coalfield, such as the notion that it was always 'natural' that coalfield communities voted Labour. There is also an attempt to look beyond the traditional areas of research by considering the roles in coalfield communities of women, migrants and ethnicity (with a specific consideration of English-born migrants).

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[46] Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield, 1898-1947* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

Comparative studies have also been made of the South Wales Coalfield, including David Gilbert's *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926.*[47] Gilbert takes a more sociological approach to his study of coalfield communities in south Wales and Nottingham, and considers how such communities influenced and contributed to the development of a miners' consciousness of class and the responses to industrial disputes. Gilbert helps to place miners' consciousness and responses to disputes into a wider context, for example moving beyond the notion of a consciousness developed purely through abstract influences such as politics and ideology. However, at times, Gilbert does fail to take into account that it was not only miners and their families who formed the working classes in coalfield communities. Other industrial workers inhabited coalfield communities, and were often, directly and indirectly, dragged into industrial conflicts involving miners, for example tinplate workers.

Although coalfield-wide studies and histories of the central valleys of the South Wales Coalfield are abundant, the anthracite region of the coalfield has received less attention. An early study was Ieuan Lloyd Griffiths' Ph.D 'The Anthracite Coalfield of South Wales'.[48] Griffiths takes more of a geographical and economic approach to his study, although a consideration of the historical development of the anthracite industry is taken into account. The most comprehensive work has been completed by Ioan Matthews in his Ph.D 'The World of the Anthracite Miner'. Matthews traces the early history of the anthracite mining industry and its development throughout the early twentieth century. His research is very much based on the miner and mining communities and takes into account different aspects of life for anthracite miners, such as customs, role of community, the Welsh language, independent working-class education, trade unionism, and industrial relations and

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[47] David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[48] Ieuan Lloyd Griffiths, 'The Anthracite Coalfield of South Wales' (London: University of London Ph.D, 1959).

disputes. Matthews' study is extremely valuable in its attempt to push Welsh labour history beyond its traditional base, and encompass areas and valleys of the South Wales Coalfield which have been previously overlooked, or received little attention.[49] A more local study of the anthracite district has been carried out by A. E. C. Hare's 'The Anthracite Coal industry of the Swansea District'.[50] However, this study takes more of a geological approach, and a history of the mining industry in the district rather than a study of miners and mining communities.

Some specific studies have also been carried out on industrial relations in the Anthracite District, particularly the 1925 Anthracite Strike. Such studies include R. P. Davies' M.A. 'Anthracite Coal Strike of 1925' and Hywel Francis' 'Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925'.[51] Francis' study in particular provides a valuable insight into the causes, events and outcomes of the Anthracite Strike, but at times Francis does, as it will be argued later, place too much emphasis on the significance of the strike.

The 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out has been considered in several general histories of the South Wales Coalfield, including Page Arnot's second volume on the South Wales Miners' Federation, Hywel Francis and Dai Smith's *The Fed* and David Gilbert's *Class, Community and Collective Action* all take into account the events of 1926, particularly the lock-out. Francis and Smith's study, and Gilbert's pay attention to some events in the Swansea valley. A further specific study of the lock-out in south Wales is McIlroy, Campbell and Gildart's, *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out: The Struggle for Dignity.*[52]Although detailed, this study does take, as its title suggests, a political and institutional historical approach, with an emphasis on the political developments between

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[49] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Cardiff: University of Wales Ph.D, 1995).
[50] A. E. C. Hare, 'The Anthracite Coal Industry of the Swansea District' in *Social and Economic Survey of Swansea and District*, Pamphlet Number 5 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1940).
[51] R. P. Davies, 'Anthracite Coal Strike of 1925' (M.A., 1972) available in SWML; and Hywel Francis, 'Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', *Llafur*, Volume 1, Number 2 (1973), pp.53-66.
[52] J. McIlroy, A. Campbell and K. Gildart (eds), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out: The Struggle for Dignity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004).

miners' leaders, owners and government. The effects of the lock-out on the rank and file and mining communities are given less importance. Specific studies on the General strike include Keith Laybourn's *The General Strike of 1926* and Jeffrey Skelley's edited collection *The General Strike, 1926.*[53] Laybourn takes a British approach when considering the events of the General Strike, but Skelley's collection of essays of particular aspects of, and events in particular regions during, the General Strike allows an element of detail of events, for example Hywel Francis' account of south Wales. However, at times, Francis does tend to place a greater significance on some aspects of the General Strike in south Wales, for example, as regards to the extent of the transfer of power from official institutions to workers' organizations.

General histories of trade unionism that can be applied to this area of research include some early studies, for example Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *The History of Trade Unionism.*[54] However, the conclusions made by the Webbs have been challenged in later studies, such as Clegg, Fox and Thompson's two work on the trade unions in Britain.[55] Clegg et al. take a chronological approach and allow trade unionism to be placed into both a diachronic context as well as a British context. Great emphasis is also placed on the significance Swansea played in the Dockers' Unionism of the 1890s and early twentieth century. Broad conclusions are also made about the influences which affected the development and evolution of trade unions, particularly as regards to 'New Unionism' which they conclude adapted to the needs of its members and the industries that they were employed in. British trade unionism in the mining industry is illustrated by Campbell, Fishman and Howell's collection of essays on *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-1940,*

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[53] Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); and Jeffrey Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike, 1926* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976).
[54] Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1920).
[55] H. A. Clegg, A. Fox and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, Volume 1: 1889-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) and Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, Volume 2, 1911-1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

which gives some key indications as to the main influences affecting unionism in the mining industry.[56] However, the scope of some of the essays included are, at times, narrow and do not always give a true picture of the whole coalfield under consideration. A local study of industrial relations in Swansea was conducted by P. S. Thomas.[57] Thomas pays attention to industrial relations in the Swansea district, with particular attention paid to the mining and tinplate industries and the key industrial disputes in these industries. As an overview it is useful in outlining key events and the main facts, but lacks any greater depth.

This study considers a valley on the South Wales Coalfield which has not received as much attention from historians as other valleys in south Wales. This study will add to the historiography and understanding of Welsh labour history, specifically trade unionism and industrial relations. Trade unionism in the tinplate, nickel and coal industries has been largely studied in isolation of each other, or not at all. By looking at these industries in one valley, it is possible to highlight the diversity in approaches to trade unionism and understand the characteristics which shaped the development of each industry's approach, thus adding to historical understanding of trade unionism in south Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole.

The variety of industry in the Swansea valley, namely tinplate, nickel and coal, has allowed an unique opportunity to study the development and approaches to trade unionism in three different industries, but within one valley where workers from each industry lived and shared the same valley communities. Despite this, three distinct approaches to trade unionism and industrial relations emerged in each industry.

The tinplate industry went through several incarnations of trade unionism as it developed in the industry, each period was linked with one or more union which represented

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[56] A. Campbell, N. Fishman and D. Howell (eds), *Miners Unions and Politics, 1910-1940* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

[57] P. S. Thomas, 'Industrial Relations' in *Social and Economic Survey of Swansea and District*, Pamphlet Number 3 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1940).

tinplate workers. These unions being: The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers ; The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union; and six different unions which represented the industry from 1899, the main three unions were the Dockers' Union, Steel Smelters' Union and The Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association. The nickel workers, at the Mond Nickel Works, struggles to establish a strong union movement, but the main unions that were present included the Dockers' Union and the Workers' Union. In the coal industry the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) was the dominant union after its inception in 1898. By 1926, the tinplate industry had an established approach of conciliation; the nickel industry had moved increasingly towards a system of industrial cooperation, with the result that a majority of workers at the works by the mid-1920s were non-unionized. The coal industry took a third direction and adopted a far more confrontational approach.

This study is necessary simply because of the lack of attention that the Swansea valley as a whole, and the three industries located in the valley, has received from historians. The tinplate industry has been the subject of research, but little has been produced in recent years and little has been produced focusing specifically on trade unionism. Additionally, the Swansea valley tinplate trade union branches played a prominent and pivotal role in the evolution and development of trade unionism in the south Wales tinplate industry. Understanding of trade unionism is further added to with a study of the Mond Nickel Works. Trade unionism at the Mond Works has received little, if any, attention from labour historians. This alone adds a new direction and dimension to Welsh labour history. A study of the Swansea valley would not be complete without taking into account the valley's coal industry, which was the largest industry in the valley. Part of the valley's coal industry lay in the anthracite coalfield; the unique characteristics of this area means different considerations are taken into account when discussing trade unionism in the south Wales coal industry.

Debate within labour history has concluded the need to look beyond the traditional areas of research, such as the coal industry of the central valleys of the South Wales Coalfield, which has received disproportionate attention from historians. This research is an attempt to meet some of the new demands placed on Welsh labour history that have emerged out of the debate surrounding the 'crisis' in labour history. By studying a valley on the western edge of the coalfield, which encompasses the anthracite coalfield and other industries beyond coal, it is hoped that this can be achieved.

The objectives of this research are to attempt to explain how and why trade unionism in the Swansea valley's tinplate, nickel and coal industries developed in the ways they did. By doing this it is hoped that the variety and diversity in approaches to trade unionism that existed in the Swansea valley can be highlighted. In turn, these findings can then be applied, where appropriate, to other industries and regions of the south Wales and the United Kingdom.

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This work aims to look at the key developments of, and influences on, trade unionism in the tinplate, nickel and coal industries in the Swansea valley. Chapter 1 looks at the early trade unions in the tinplate industry, and particularly the unions' aims and limitations. Chapter 2 follows these themes and also attempts to explain the collapse of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union. Chapter 3 looks at the consequences of the union's collapse and how this influenced and pushed forward the evolution of trade unionism towards the structure which would dominate the twentieth century. Chapter 4 considers trade unionism in the Mond Nickel Works, Clydach, and why, by the mid 1920s, the works had become largely non-unionized. The influences of philanthropy and industrial cooperation at the works are also considered. Chapter 5 covers the influences on trade unionism in the Swansea valley coal industry. Such influences taken into

account include: kinship, language, culture, independent working-class education, politics and religion. Chapter 6 highlights the impact of industrial disputes in the coal industry on mining communities in the Swansea valley; and how those communities and trade unionists reacted to the various disputes. Three disputes are considered in this chapter covering a local, regional and a national level. Chapter 7 traces the impact of the 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out in the Swansea valley and, again, how the industrial workers and their communities responded to the dispute. Finally, the conclusion draws together the way trade unionism in each industry developed and how and why trade unionism in each industry evolved in three different directions, as well as considering how trade unions from different industries cooperated.

PART I:

TINPLATE

Chapter 1:

Early Tinplate Trade Unions in the 1870s and 1880s

The tinplate industry in the Swansea valley grew out of the iron industry in the area. Iron plates were coated with tin to produce tinplates and many, if not all, of the early tinworks were attached to, or located near, an ironworks.[1] Throughout the nineteenth century the tinplate industry in south Wales experienced quite extreme economic cycles with periods of high production, high prices, high wages and expansion contrasting with prolonged troughs of limited output, with falls in prices and wages, and an increase in unemployment. The intense competition caused by the location of so many tinplate works in close proximity to each other in south west Wales, and the inability of the tinplate masters to cooperate effectively, led to constant undercutting of prices and over-production which exacerbated the situation during periods of depression.

The conditions in the tinplate industry were particularly difficult. Workplaces were hot which meant workmen (particularly millmen) consumed a large amount of alcohol to quench their thirst, leading to problems such as cirrhosis of the liver. The tinning process involved the use of acid; the acid vapour would attack the enamel on workers' teeth causing discolouration and decay. Eye complaints were a further problem suffered by workers; collections were regularly made by tinplaters and donated towards the local infirmaries, particularly for eye treatment.[2] Such conditions led to calls from tinplaters and their union for greater ventilation in the works of south Wales.[3] As a result

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[1] Iron plates were increasingly replaced by steel plates from the 1880s onwards.
[2] *Cambrian*, 27 January 1888 and 17 August 1888.
[3] *Cambrian*, 11 May 1888: delegates at a union meeting brought forward complaints about the fumes arising from the flux used in the finishing departments.

of these conditions, tinplate workers had one of the lowest life expectancy rates amongst industrial workers. In a comparison of average ages at death of different workers published in a Factory Inspectors' Report of 1912, the average age at death in selected occupations were as follows: Gardeners – 68; Farmers – 67; Shoemakers – 64; Tailors – 62; Carpenters – 59; Blacksmiths – 57; Cutters – 53; Bricklayers and Masons – 53; File Makers – 53; Coal Miners – 51; Furnacemen – 49; Tinplate Workers – 45.[4] Although Paul Jenkins highlights that these results were taken from a small sample, they are still quite stark when used for comparison.[5]

Despite the difficult working conditions and a lower life expectancy, tinplaters were amongst the highest paid industrial workers, particularly skilled workers during periods of growth. The wage list of 1874 (known as the List of 1874 or 1874 List) gave tinplaters a standardized wage, intended by the union to be based on the principle of 36 boxes per shift.[6] A letter to the *Cambrian* in May 1874 listed weekly wages of some tinplate workers as follows: millroller - £2, mill doubler - £1. 15 shillings, furnacemen - £1. 10 shillings, behinders – 15 shillings, shearers - £2, picklers - £2 or £2. 5 shillings, annealers - £1. 15 shillings to £2, washmen - £1. 15 shillings to £2, tinmen - £1.15 shillings to £2, greaseboy – 12 shillings, females – 10 shillings to 12 shillings, sorters - £1.15 shillings to £2, and boxers - £1. 15 shillings to £2.[7] Paul Jenkins states that the

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[4] *Llais Llafur*, 28 September 1912.
[5] Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen: A History of the South Wales Tinplate Industry, 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995), p.157.
[6] Tom Griffiths, 'Lewis Afan and Tom Phil's Union and Formation of the Conciliation Board', MRC: MSS.36/T13/29, p.3.
[7] *Cambrian*, 1 May 1874.

average wage for an adult male at this time in the United Kingdom was 19 shillings per week.[8]

Although wages fluctuated around the standard of the List of 1874 – dropping during periods of depression and rising again during periods of growth – wages remained relatively high. The level of income is highlighted by the fact that some tinplaters were in a position to purchase their own houses. Home ownership was encouraged by the masters who saw the purchase of property as a way of limiting or preventing industrial action by tinplaters.[9] A further demonstration of the high wages tinplaters were considered to be receiving is the fact that masters complained of the fact that few tinplaters had savings accounts when times were good and wages were high, an indication that when the industry was going through a period of growth, tinplaters had a disposable income.[10]

Until the 1870s unionism did not take hold within the tinplate industry, Minchinton concludes that this was due to 'the smallness of firms, the differences in skill and payment between workers and the scattered nature of the industry.'[11] However, from the 1870s onwards small unions did emerge and develop, this can be linked to the rapid increase in tinplate works, and consequently, tinplate workers in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. The tables below show the number of tinplate works in south Wales being erected each decade, the number of works being erected in the Swansea Valley each decade and the total number of tinplate workers during different periods of the nineteenth century:

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[8] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.184. Jenkins states the average wage at the time in the United Kingdom as £0.95p. For the purposes of this thesis this average has been converted back to £.s.d.
[9] *Cambrian*, 13 April, 1888.
[10] *Cambrian*, 12 February 1886.
[11] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1957), p.108.

Table 1: Number of tinplate works being erected between 1800s and 1880s in south Wales.[12]

Decade	Number of Works Being Erected in South Wales
1800s and before	14
1810s	2
1820s	3
1830s	2
1840s	4
1850s	5
1860s	12
1870s	21
1880s	22

[12] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, Appendix A, pp.243-5.

Table 2: Number of tinplate works being erected in the Swansea and district (Swansea, Swansea Valley including: Morriston, Llansamlet and Landore) between the 1800s and before and the 1890s and beyond.[13]

Decade	Number of Works Being Erected
1800s and before	1
1810s	0
1820s	0
1830s	1
1840s	2
1850s	2
1860s	3
1870s	6
1880s	3
1890s and after	3

[13] Ibid, p.247.

Table 3: Total number of workers employed in tinplate industry in south Wales.[14]

Year	Total Employed
1800	1,000
1834	4,000
1851	5,200
1871	9,200
1880	15,500
1891	25,000
1898	16,000

The three tables above show a rapid increase in number of tinplate works and number employed in the industry in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s. It was during the 1870s that trade unionism in the tinplate industry, not only emerged but became established; clearly the increase in workers had some influence over this. The Swansea valley tinplaters would play a leading role in the several incarnations of a tinplaters' union which existed from the 1870s and throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. The first organized union was formed in Ystalyfera, in the Swansea valley, in 1868. However, this union failed to expand beyond the workers of the Ystalyfera area, and remained very much a localised affair. Its establishment, however limited, was a huge leap forward in the creation of a wider tinplaters' union. Paul Jenkins described the Ystalyfera union as a '...rather informal organization'; but it was the

[14] Ibid.

predecessor of a more organized regional union – The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers.[15]

The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers was established in 1871, and was based primarily on tinplate works in south west Wales – Swansea and district, Swansea valley, Llanelli and Neath and district; a reference to the Swansea valley district is made in the *Cambrian* during the 1874 lockout.[16] The leading figure of this union was William Lewis or Lewis (Lewys) A fan, a well educated man and a believer in the economics and policy of John Stuart Mill.[17] It was through the belief in supply and demand that led to the establishment of two policies that would become the two pillars of trade unionism in the tinplate industry. Lewis Afan firstly led a campaign to limit the output of each shift to try and stabilize the tinplate market to prevent slumps caused by over-supply and a reduction in wages; this became known as the '36 box rule', as output would be restricted to 36 boxes in a twelve-hour shift. This was an attempt by the new union to gain some control over output and give the trade stability, thus protecting jobs and wages.

The second pillar of trade unionism in the tinplate industry was the list of 1874. This was the result of a campaign for a standardized wage in west Wales, which brought workers' wage rates in line with those in east Wales and the Midlands. Owing to the high concentration of tinplate works in south west Wales and the working of different lighter plates, the wages in west Wales were lower than in east Wales and the Midlands. The demands for a standardized wage was initially rejected by the owners as they argued that

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[15] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.177.
[16] *Cambrian*, 24 April 1874.
[17] Tom Griffiths, 'Lewis Afan and Tom Phil's Unions and Formation of Conciliation Board', MRC: MSS.36/T13/29, p.2.

they could not pay the rates paid in other regions as the conditions were not comparable.[18] The refusal by the owners to enter into arbitration which was the preferred option of the union, led to a lock-out in the west Wales tinplate trade. The lock-out involved works in the Swansea valley as it gradually spread throughout the region.[19] The lock-out eventually ended in defeat for the union, the Llanelli workmen returned to work on their old rates in May 1874, although the Swansea workmen did stay out longer.[20] The tinplaters of the Swansea district also gained support from other trade unionists during the lock-out, particularly the miners. In April 1874 the *Cambrian* reported a 'mass meeting was held and addressed by Mr. Halliday (AAM), the chair was Mr. Abrahams (miners' agent)...'[21] After the dispute had ended, negotiations took place between representatives of workmen and masters which resulted in the union's greatest achievement: the list of 1874, which standardized wages in west Wales. This wage list would become the gold standard for wages in the tinplate industry well into the twentieth century, and became known as 'the good old list of '74'.

The establishment of the 36 box rule and the List of 1874 would be the peak of the Independent Association of Tinplate Makers. These two pillars of trade unionism would become undermined by the economic cycle fluctuations of the following decades, where the 36 box rule would be consistently broken during times of economic growth, and the List of 1874 would come under attack from masters during periods of economic depression when wages were cut. The organization of the union also suffered; it became heavily reliant upon Lewis Afan, who was central to the union's response to a dispute.

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[18] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.116.
[19] *Cambrian*, 24 April 1874 – Lock-out in the Swansea valley.
[20] *Cambrian,* 15 May 1874.
[21] *Cambrian*, 10 April 1874. Should be Abraham.

The union also lacked a coordinated strategy and organization after the success of the establishment of the List of 1874. A. Pugh commented: 'Lewys Afan was only called in when a dispute arose. Collections were then made to defray his expenses. The union had no regular income.'[22] The union became a rather loose organization, called upon when needed but otherwise neglected, although meetings were held during periods of depression in the 1870s and early 1880s.

However, 1886-7 saw resurgence in trade unionism that grew out of a dispute in Monmouthshire where workmen were resisting a 10 per cent reduction in wages, which resulted in the men being locked out. The Monmouthshire tinplaters received financial support from west Wales's tinplaters, including from the Swansea valley. In January 1887 the *Cambrian* reported how the men in the Morriston district had arranged to contribute regularly to support the locked out men in Monmouthshire.[23] The result of the cooperation and support given by west Wales's tinplaters to Monmouthshire tinplaters resulted in the founding of a new union: The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union which was founded in 1887, and as stated in its title, covered the whole of south Wales and Gloucestershire.

Swansea soon became the centre for the union, with its annual meeting being held in Swansea as early as 1888.[24] The new union would have some success in re-establishing the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule as the economic prospects of the industry improved. The Swansea valley tinplate works would come to play an important role in the union merely because of the large size of the works in the valley, for example: the Worcester and Upper Forests tinplate works, Morriston, in 1886 employed between

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[22] A. Pugh, *Men of Steel*, p.121; referenced in Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.118.
[23] *Cambrian*, 7 January 1887.
[24] *Cambrian*, 17 August 1888.

1,400 and 1,500 workers.[25] It was this works that led the resistance against further wage reductions in 1889, and eventually led to the re-establishment of the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule. A manifesto, submitted by the Worcester and Upper Forest men, and printed in the *Cambrian* in February 1889 set out seven demands, of which the fourth was: 'That the List of 1874 be paid.'[26] The manifesto was supported by a demonstration through Morriston later in February 1889 by tinplate workers from Landore, Monmouthshire, Abercarn, Pontymister, Abertillery, Blaina, Pontymoile, Aberavon, Neath, Ystalyfera, Pontardulais, Gorseinon, Gowerton, Llanelli, Clydach, Morriston, Cwmfelin and Cwmbwrla.[27] The importance of the Worcester and Upper Forest workmen's manifesto is demonstrated by the procession through Morriston, as is the union's influence over its members, to the extent that workmen from a wide region covered by the union attended the procession. The result of this dispute, which centred on the works in Morriston, was the returning of the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule at the Worcester and Upper Forest works, and its eventual re-introduction to the whole of the tinplate industry in south Wales. This dispute is a clear indication as to why Minchinton described Morriston as a 'stronghold of the union'.[28]

A further achievement of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union was the establishment of a trade paper titled *The Industrial World* which was launched in 1892 and ended publication in 1898 owing to financial problems within the union. *The Industrial World* allowed tinplaters to remain informed of the main developments of the industry and the policies of the union. Tom Griffiths

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[25] *Cambrian*, 8 October 1886.
[26] *Cambrian*, 8 February 1889.
[27] *Cambrian*, 1 March 1889.
[28] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.120.

referred to *The Industrial World* as: '...a great force in keeping the men together and giving information about the state of the market in Swansea, and the reductions granted to masters all over the trade.'[29] The dominance of the Morriston district in the union is again highlighted by the fact that the editor of *The Industrial World*, John Hopkin John, came from the Morriston district.

The emergence of trade unionism in the late 1860s and its acceptance and establishment by both masters and men by the 1870s allowed the union, in several incarnations, to gain some successes in improvements for tinplaters, in particular, the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule. However, the early unions within the tinplate industry faced, at times, severe limitations that resulted in the union becoming ineffective, a loss of membership and continual difficulties in maintaining its two great pillars of success: restriction on output and the standardization of wages. There were several factors that led to these limitations being placed on the unions in the 1870s and 1880s, including: fluctuating economic conditions, apathy, the influence of masters and parochialism.

After the Independent Association of Tinplate Makers had gained the 36 box rule and the List of 1874, the years after 1874/5 were a period of depression in the tinplate trade. The economic depression had initially influenced masters to prolong the lock-out of 1874, as they were in no hurry to restart their works owing to the poor trading conditions.[30] The ending of the dispute and the establishment of standardized wages coincided with a further economic downturn with the result that the standardized wages came under attack from owners who were keen to reduce their costs in an attempt to keep their works open. By the autumn of 1876 several tinplate works in Morriston were

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[29] Tom Griffiths, 'Lewis Afan and Tom Phil's Unions and Formation of Conciliation Board', MRC: MSS.36/T13/29, p.5.
[30] *Cambrian*, 22 May 1874.

working at a 7½ per cent reduction in wages.[31] However, initiatives were taken by the men to try to curtail wage reductions by working three weeks a month instead of four weeks.[32]

By the summer of 1878 the tinplate trade was working at a third of what it had been in 1872.[33] The chief cause of the depression was over-production, depressing the price of tinplate and flooding the market. Masters made their own attempts to limit output; it was these attempts that led to the start of a combination movement amongst owners. Makers in the Swansea district joined representatives from Staffordshire, Monmouthshire, Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire.[34] Over-production was a direct consequence of the breaking of the 36 box rule by both masters and men.

The biggest challenge to the List of 1874, again a consequence of the economic depression, came from the Tinplate Traders of Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire, which was chaired by Arthur Gilbertson (Pontardawe), and proposed the introduction of a new standardized wage, dated July 1879, which was a standardized wage reduction for the mills that were part of the association, a total of 88.[35] However, the masters' standardized wage was not adopted by the men. The declining economic conditions gave greater power and initiative to the owners who were now the ones who were combining and proposing their own standard wages, rather than the tinplate workers through their union. The economic depression severely undermined the union's two greatest achievements: the 36 box rule and the List of 1874.

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[31] *Cambrian*, 2 February 1877.
[32] Ibid.
[33] *Cambrian*, 26 July 1878.
[34] *Cambrian*, 27 September 1878.
[35] *Cambrian*, 1 August 1879.

The depression also affected the stability of the union's membership; the economic downturn continued into the early 1880s, the long-term nature of the depression in the trade eventually led to the temporary and permanent closure of works, reducing the union's membership, income and its capacity to resist the masters' attempts to reduce wages. For example, the closure of the Worcester and Upper Forest tinplate works alone in October 1886 made between 1,400 and 1,500 tinplate workers idle.[36] Likewise, the closure of the Ystalyfera works in December 1885 caused great distress in the upper Swansea valley. The depression more or less ended the desire for the List of 1874 during the period of depression. The tinplate workers came to accept reduced wages while the industry was in such a poor state. A threatened strike connected to the tinplate forge men in the Swansea valley district was averted after the men accepted reduced terms agreed by a board of conciliation composed of equal numbers of representatives of masters and men in April 1886.[37]

The deep depression from the mid 1870s to the late 1880s, did much to undermine the achievements of the 36 box rule and the List of 1874, and made it increasingly difficult for the two incarnations of the tinplate union – The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers and the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union – to maintain the standardization of wages and restrict the output of tinplates to prevent over production. This situation ultimately contributed to the decline of the Independent Association of Tinplate Makers, and made things difficult for its successor.

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[36] *Cambrian*, 8 October 1886.
[37] *Cambrian*, 9 April 1886.

Both incarnations of tinplate unions were also dogged by apathy towards them by the tinplaters, J. H. Jones commented: 'when trouble threatened workmen flocked like sheep into the fold and for a period paid their contribution regularly. But when the dispute had been settled – adversely or in their favour – they left the union ...'[38] The union for their part tried to excuse any apathy to the movement by blaming masters' opposition to the union.[39] There is some evidence to suggest that this was the case in at least a few works: at the Ystalyfera works, the rules of the works were printed on the back of the workmen's pay packets, rule number nine stated:

> Any workman combining with others to stop the works, or attempting to interfere with the management of any department, or threatening to do so in order to obtain dismissal of any person employed therein, or in order to compel any such person to join any union or society; and any workman who shall threaten or molest any person employed in the works for the purpose of compelling such person to join such union or society shall be dismissed, without notice.[40]

Certainly from the Ystalyfera example some owners were keen to block or severely limit any union activity within their works.

During disputes, some tinplate workers, rather than remaining locally for the duration of the dispute, would leave the district to find work elsewhere. During the 1874 lockout the *Cambrian* reported:

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[38] J. H. Jones, referenced in Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.118.
[39] *Cambrian*, 7 January 1876.
[40] John Henry Davies, *History of Pontardawe and District* (Llandybie: Christopher Davies (publishers) Ltd., 1967), p.110.

> ...men [who] have been locked out in the tinplate dispute do not remain in the locality looking for work, but instead go to England to work in tinplate works, where it is believed that they will be engaged at more advantageous terms.[41]

Although exact numbers are not reported, the fact that men left the locality during a dispute meant that an opportunity was lost to build up a consciousness amongst tinplate workers during the dispute, also to kindle an affinity with the union and other union members during the lock-out, and to gain a shared and common experience to cultivate an element of solidarity amongst tinplate workers.

The tinplate unions of the nineteenth century also had to compete with the tinplate masters for the loyalty of the tinplate workers. An element of loyalty had built up between master and workers. There was a tradition of whole families working for one works, Paul Jenkins points out: 'apart from ambitious personnel, tinplate workers usually were loath to move from their traditional home districts to obtain alternative employment within the trade. In a number of cases entire families – father, mother, children, even grandchildren – had secured employment in one works ...'[42] The tinplate works offered set career paths, particularly for boys and young men, who could progress up through the skilled ranks of the tinplate trade in one works. At times there was also a great affinity between a master and his employees. The *Cambrian* in April 1888 reported an interesting presentation at Morriston:

> On Saturday night, Morriston was the scene of a most interesting ceremonial, the occasion being the presentation to Mr. Daniel

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[41] *Cambrian*, 3 April 1874.
[42] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.174.

> Edwards [tinplate proprietor in Morriston], and Mrs Edwards, of their portraits in oil, together with a handsome wagonette, by their various workmen, as a tribute to commercial enterprise, and as a testimonial of the high esteem in which they were held by their employees ...such gatherings as that could not fail to have most beneficial results, for they tended to cement and strengthen the bonds of sympathy which he [the chairman of the meeting] was only too proud to know already existed between employer and employed in the neighbourhood ... in his [chairman's] opinion the interest workingmen felt in their employers should likewise be only second to that they felt in their families (cheers) ...[43]

Minchinton comments on how the relationship that existed between the master and men 'was generally personal and paternal'.[44] The most tangible examples of paternalism that existed were the establishment of schools that were attached to the iron and tinplate works to educate the children of the employees. For example: a school was established in Glais in 1860, for the children of the workers of the Ynyspenllwch tinplate works.[45] William Williams, proprietor of the Worcester and Upper Forest works, had the tradition of, according to the *Cambrian*: 'The giving of a bright new penny to the children of Morriston, two to the boys and three to the girls in his employ, ... has taken place now for so many years that the children ... now look forward to it ...'.[46] A further example of paternalism is that of John Jones Jenkins, who, while manager at the Upper Forest works,

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[43] *Cambrian*, 13 April 1888.
[44] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.108.
[45] David Harris (Glais), Exercise book containing bi-lingual manuscripts, local history notes. SWCC: MNA/PP/41/1.
[46] *Cambrian*, 8 January 1886.

acquired books for a library and introduced reading and music lessons for employees of the works.[47]

The paternalism of the tinplate masters helped to contribute to the development of a close relationship between master and men. This relationship was strengthened further as the tinplate masters tended to live in the same locality and community as their employees, for example: the Players in Clydach, the Gilbertsons in Pontardawe and William Williams in Morriston. In some cases the master had, through luck and fate, worked his way up from apprenticed boy to owner. This was not as uncommon as may be assumed, as there are two examples in the Swansea valley: William Williams, proprietor of the Worcester and Upper Forest tinplate works, Morriston, started his working life at nine years old opening tinplate boxes at one half penny per box at the Worcester tinplate works. After an accident, which resulted in the amputation of one of his legs, the then owner of the Worcester works gave him an education with the intention to have him work as a clerk outside the works. He eventually returned to the Worcester works and, along with other investors bought the works; followed by the purchase of the Upper Forest works a few years later. By 1885 he was a councillor and mayor of Swansea.[48] A similar story can be told of John Jones Jenkins, who was born in Clydach, and started work in the tinplate industry in 1850 at the age of fourteen at the Upper Forest works. He later became manager of the Upper Forest works, before gaining a significant share in companies that operated the Beaufort (Morriston), Cwmfelin (Swansea) and Yspitty (Loughor) works.[49] These men were local, had worked in the tinplate industry as employees, understood the workings and processes of the industry and remained in the

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[47] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.155.
[48] *Cambrian*, 20 February 1885.
[49] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.155.

locality, as such these proprietors had a greater understanding of their workforce. William Williams declared that when he became an employer of labour there were three things he was determined to do: 'first, he would produce the best article he possibly could; second, he would erect well ventilated and spacious workshops, and the best and most improved machinery; and thirdly, he would always pay his workmen in the current coin of the realm ...'[50] a bold declaration, which at the very least highlights William Williams' awareness of the concerns and demands held by tinplate workers of the period.

As well as masters living locally, the tinplate works in the Swansea valley tended to have masters who owned individual works, rather than the works being part of a bigger company running several works, with a distant and detached ownership. Some works were owned by the same family for several generations, such as the Gilbertsons in Pontardawe, who came to dominate the local community of Pontardawe, as well as the tinplate works.

Despite the paternalism of the masters, conditions in the tinplate industry remained poor and dangerous, as highlighted by campaigns by the union to improve conditions, such as those for better ventilation in works.[51] Despite these conditions, the union was not guaranteed loyalty from its members. Paul Jenkins notes that the establishment of trade unionism in the second half of the nineteenth century, workers were forced to choose between loyalty to the union and their continued loyalty to their master.[52] Certainly tinplate workers were torn between their traditional loyalty to their master, and the relatively new demands placed upon them by the union. For example: during a dispute connected to the forge men in the Swansea valley tinplate works in 1886,

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[50] *Cambrian*, 20 February 1885.
[51] *Cambrian*, 11 May 1888.
[52] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, pp.174-5.

some workers had given concessions to the masters before the dispute had been resolved, and before a board of conciliation was even established to try and solve the dispute.[53] For the remaining years of the nineteenth century, tinplate workers were caught in the middle of these competing loyalties, Paul Jenkins concludes that 'this dichotomy of the tinplate workers' loyalty continued until the early part of the twentieth century when improvements in employment conditions secured by the unions, especially over sensitive matters such as rates of pay and the frequency of payments, convinced the vast majority or workers that more was to be gained from fraternalism than paternalism.'[54] Certainly in the late nineteenth century tinplate workers still needed some convincing of where their loyalties should lie.

The loyalty of tinplate masters to each other was also questionable at times. Manufacturers' associations were established during periods of economic depression within the tinplate industry. The masters' association developed in tandem with the workers' union, the *Cambrian* during the 1874 lock-out commented:

> The formidable unity of the workmen, and the great power wielded by them when their undivided strength was brought into a focus like that of The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers, is now met, and as strenuously, if not more strenuously, opposed by the association of the masters ...[55]

However, the manufacturers' associations did not always command the loyalty of its members, a glaring example is a proposition put forward in September 1879, which demanded the dissolution of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Tinplate Association

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[53] *Cambrian*, 2 April 1886.
[54] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.175.
[55] *Cambrian*, 27 March 1874.

because of several reasons, including the fact that many members had not abided by the rules or implemented the propositions that had been carried. The *Cambrian* highlights, amongst others, the following offending firms from Morriston – Duffryn, Morriston and Upper Forest tinplate works.[56] Such problems of firms not toeing the line plagued the manufacturers' associations throughout the nineteenth century. The fact that the manufacturers' association experienced such problems of inconsistency amongst its members weakened the association. Thus in some circumstances this meant that the tinplate union did not need to be as strong, or as well organized, as might have been desired, as they faced a masters' association that was undisciplined and split, and therefore did not pose as big a challenge to the authority of the union. As a result, it could be argued, the workers' union also became undisciplined: a combination of apathy, divided loyalties on the part of the tinplaters and the indifference of the manufacturers' association, allowed workers and masters to break ranks and come to their own individual agreements, if and when it suited. For example: a meeting of Swansea valley tinplate workers comprising those from Ty Canol, Worcester, Dyffryn, Beaufort, Landore, Cwmfelin and Cwmbwrla works passed a unanimous resolution: 'that instead of accepting the proposition made by the Masters' Association of a reduction of seven and a half per cent, that the hours of labour be reduced by working three weeks instead of four monthly until trade revives, and that this proposition be published in the local papers to elicit the response of all tinplate workers in south Wales and Monmouthshire.'[57]

Parochialism was a problem faced by unionism in the tinplate industry in the 1870s. The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers was particularly hindered by

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[56] *Cambrian*, 12 September 1879.
[57] *Cambrian*, 2 February 1877.

parochialism, which had its stronghold in south west and west Wales. Tinplaters in east Wales pretty much stayed out of the west Wales union, and instead preferred to affiliate to the English iron union: the National Amalgamated Association of Ironworkers. This had the impact of dividing the workers in the tinplate trade along geographical lines, and thus limiting numbers and allowing variations in wages and other conditions to exist in south Wales as a whole.

However, the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union was built upon far wider foundations, covering not only the whole of geographical south Wales but also Gloucestershire. The demise in regionalism can be found at the conception of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union, which arose out of a dispute in Monmouthshire where masters were demanding a 10 per cent reduction in wage rates, and resulted in a lock-out. Jenkins highlights, that during the lock-out, attempts were made to give the Monmouthshire tinplaters some financial assistance and links were made between east and west Walian tinplaters, as those in the west levied their wages to contribute money to those locked out.[58]

Efforts were made by The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers to engage with other areas of the United Kingdom, and resolutions were agreed upon and passed which affected tinplate workers from outside the immediate region of the union. In August 1879, the *Cambrian* reported: 'A meeting of delegates from south Wales, Monmouthshire, Gloucester, Worcester and Staffordshire tinplate workers was held at Swansea ... when it was resolved to resist the reduction of wages determined upon by the masters ... it was also agreed to restrict the make so that each mill working 12 hour shall

[58] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.185.

only do 36 boxes per turn, and 30 boxes for eight hours.'[59] However, these interactions were not permanent and did not develop into a wider union. Other efforts were made to affiliate to wider trade union organizations, in October 1875 the *Cambrian* stated The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers agreed to join '... the federation of all organized trades (National Federation of Trades Unions).'[60]

In the late 1860s and early 1870s tinplaters made a concerted effort to establish unionism in the industry, and managed to establish important principles that would become the benchmark for all future unions covering the tinplate industry throughout the remaining decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century – the 36 box rule and the List of 1874. Despite this initial success, The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers and its successor, The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union, faced many problems which severely limited the effectiveness of the union and hampered a well constituted tinplaters' union from being created.

The tinplate industry was susceptible to fluctuating economic cycles, with periods of growth and expansion characterised by high wages and high prices, but overproduction; and economic slumps characterised by falling prices, wages and rising levels of unemployment leading to distress in communities reliant on tinplate. It was these economic cycles which, more than any other factor, undermined the 36 box rule and the List of 1874. During the years of growth, the 36 box rule was abandoned, leading to overproduction as a means of keeping up with demand. However, when the economy faced a downturn, the overproduction led to decreasing prices for tinplates, which had a

[59] *Cambrian*, 15 August 1879.
[60] *Cambrian*, 8 October 1875.

knock-on effect on wages. Masters, in an attempt to protect profits or to even keep their works open, cut wages below the 1874 standard. The economic cycles meant that the immediate successes of trade unionism came under attack, and the following decades of the nineteenth century would be dominated by battles to maintain the 36 box rule and the List of 1874.

As well as battles to maintain tinplate trade unionism's greatest successes in the nineteenth century, tinplate unions also had to battle against apathy from their own members. Tinplaters would leave the locality during periods of industrial dispute to find work elsewhere, for example during the 1874 lockout. This limited the sense of solidarity and comradeship that could be built up amongst union members during a dispute. The tinplaters also had a fickle relationship with their union; this was a particular problem for The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers, as members would engage with the union when they needed to. This fickleness meant that unions in the 1870s and early 1880s found it difficult to build a coherent organization with a stable membership.

A possible reason for the lack of commitment to unionism can be found in the divided loyalties of the workers – loyalty towards their master as well as loyalty towards their union. Unions had to compete actively with the masters for their members' loyalty, who traditionally had a close affinity to their master. The way the industry developed in south Wales saw a paternalistic attitude being adopted by the masters towards their employees.

Greater bonds between master and men were also made by the fact that some of the masters had a real and tangible empathy with their men, as the masters themselves had started off working in tinplate works as a boy, for example: William Williams and

John Jones Jenkins, who both worked their way up to become owners of tinplate works. Masters also had a habit of not following the proposals of their own masters' association, in favour of coming to individual deals. Such actions led to a divided masters' association and as a result did not require as strong a workers' union. This was a very real threat to the establishment of fraternalism through the tinplate union, and attempts to build a strong union movement in the industry.

Unity amongst tinplaters was also tested by parochialism which particularly dogged The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers. It was not until the formation of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union did the whole geographical region of south Wales come under the influence of one union.

Early unionism in the tinplate industry in the 1870s and 1880s faced many limitations which meant the unions – The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers and the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union – found it difficult fully to establish themselves and their authority over the tinplaters of south Wales. The result was a union movement which, at times, lacked coherence, strength and organization. These factors limited the development of unionism in the tinplate industry in the nineteenth century, and some of these problems would become accentuated, along with other factors, in the 1890s which would result in a great schism in tinplate trade unionism.

Chapter 2:

The Collapse of The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union

From its foundation in 1887, the purpose of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers Union (Tinplate Workers' Union) was to defend and represent all workers employed in the tinplate industry and to represent solely tinplate workers. Men from other industries, such as the iron industry, were forced to join other unions; most notably iron workers joined the Steel Smelters' Union. However, by the end of the nineteenth century the Tinplate Workers' Union had experienced a great division and by 1900 the Tinplate Workers' Union had ceased to exist, and the tinplate workers had splintered into as many as six different unions. The 1890s was a decade of deep depression as the south Wales tinplate industry struggled to recover from the imposition of the McKinley Tariff in America which significantly increased the price of Welsh tinplate for the American consumer, thus depressing demand.

The collapse of the Tinplate Workers' Union can be attributed to a range of factors. Historians, such as Minchinton and Jenkins,[1] have placed an emphasis on different reasons as to why the union collapsed in the way it did. Minchinton concludes that the failure of the Tinplate Workers Union was due to both internal and external factors. Such factors include the inability of the union to gain support of all the workers, fluctuating membership, financial weaknesses and the policy of localism. However, Minchinton argues that '...most of all, the Union came to an end because it was required

[1] W. E. Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957); and Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen: A History of the South Wales Tinplate Industry 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995).

to operate in unfavourable economic conditions.'[2] On the other hand, Jenkins highlights the divisions between the two main sections of the tinplate industry: those employed in the mill and those employed in the tin house.[3] However, Jenkins does acknowledge that the difficult economic conditions after the introduction of the McKinley Tariff exacerbated the animosity between the two sections of workers. The economic depression that afflicted the tinplate industry during the 1890s highlighted existing problems with the union, and exaggerated these problems to an extent that bred discontent amongst the union's membership.

The Tinplate Workers' Union in the Swansea valley faced the same fate as that in the rest of the region. Some of the most significant events that contributed to the collapse of the union originated from branches and tinplate works in the Swansea valley. The factors put forward by Minchinton and Jenkins were operating in the valley, along with other factors, such as: localism, the failure of union campaigns and tensions surrounding the attempts to put forward a labour representation candidate from tinplate ranks during the Swansea by-election of 1893.

The economic crisis that developed in the 1890s as a result of the introduction of the McKinley Tariff by the American Government in July 1891 was the leading factor that contributed to the collapse of the Tinplate Workers' Union, and from which a number of other related factors stemmed. The American market was the life-blood of the south Wales tinplate industry, and it was the American market that had allowed the tinplate industry to develop so rapidly. America was also a factor that allowed south Wales, and in particular Swansea, to become the centre of the industry in Britain. In

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[2] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.125.
[3] Jenkins, *Twenty By Fourteen*, p.190.

Swansea's case it was the fact that it was an Atlantic port located near the industry. This made the export of tinplate from Swansea to America a thriving trade. Even by 1894, three years after the introduction of the tariff, three-quarters of Welsh tinplate went to America.[4]

The McKinley Tariff was implemented to allow the development of a tinplate industry in the USA, by removing or hindering competition from Britain. The tariff imposed 2.2 cents per pound weight, which raised the price of a box of tinplates from Britain by 10 shillings and 4d., increasing the overall price by 70 per cent on the then selling price of 14 shillings and 4d. per box.[5] The impact on the export of British tinplate to America is stark: in 1890 Britain exported 318,108 tons of tinplate to America; in 1897 this figure had dropped to 85,475 tons; a decline of 73 per cent in seven years. However, despite such a dramatic decline, the United States remained Britain's largest export market for tinplate in 1897; Russia was second largest with 30,924 tons exported from Britain.[6] South Wales' heavy reliance on the American market proved almost fatal for the tinplate industry when the McKinley Tariff came into effect.

The direct result of the tariff was to drive the south Wales industry into almost a decade of depression and a significant rise in unemployment. The Swansea valley included several towns which were heavily reliant on the tinplate industry for the prosperity of its local economy, for example Morriston, which contained seven tinplate works alone, had a soup kitchen operating in the town in 1895.[7] Pontardawe was another town that relied on the local tinplate works; Arthur Gilbertson highlighted what impact

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[4] *Industrial World*, 17 August 1894.
[5] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.40.
[6] *Cambrian*, 6 May 1898.
[7] *Industrial World,* 8 February 1895. The seven tinplate works at Morriston included: Morriston, Beaufort, Duffryn, Tyr Canol, Midland, Upper Forest and Worcester Works.

the closure of his works would have had on the local economy when threatened with the closure of his works by industrial action '... these works, in which some 900 persons are employed, which with wives and families mount up to over 2000 persons, dependent upon these works. In fact the village of Pontardawe with its shops, public houses &c. is mainly supported by our work people.' The impact of economic depression in the trade would have had a similar, if not greater, effect as an industrial dispute.[8]

The depression and resultant unemployment undermined the membership of the union and opened up the tinplaters to demands from the masters for reductions in wages. The effects of the tariff had been made worse by the actions of masters, men and the union in the months before the introduction of the tariff. Tinplate works worked at full speed to reap the benefits before the tariff was implemented, allowing the masters to make large profits. The union was unable to put in place any limits on output because, according to the *Cambrian*, of internal union disagreements.[9] The result was a flooded tinplate market, even by November 1891 the *Cambrian* was reporting that: 'The stocks of tinplates which were sent out to the United States eight or twelve months ago with such wonderful rapidity have not yet, it appears, been anything like exhausted ...'[10]

The result was a closure of works. By September 1892 the *Cambrian* listed the Midland works (Morriston) and the Ynyscedwyn works (Ystradgynlais) as being closed as a result of the depression, while the workers at the Worcester works and Upper Forest

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[8] Letter from Arthur Gilbertson to Thomas Phillips, 26 April 1893 [1:235-8] in P. W. Jackson, *The Letter-Books of W. Gilbertson and Co. Ltd., Pontardawe, 1890-1929* (Swansea/Cardiff: West Glamorgan Archive Service/South Wales Record Society, 2001), p.282.
[9] *Cambrian*, 22 April 1892.
[10] *Cambrian*, 27 November 1891.

works were under notice. By February 1894, all the works at Morriston were reported to be idle.[11]

The consequent unemployment caused by the closure of works had a dramatic effect on the tinplaters as well as their union. The industry as a whole experienced a severe decline in those employed in tinplate manufacture. In 1891 about 25,000 were employed in tinplate, by 1898 the number had fallen to only 16,000.[12] For tinplaters the biggest concern was money. Tinplaters were relatively well paid; the *Cambrian* highlighted how tinplaters when in employment were receiving wages of £2.10s., £3, £4 a week; but out of work, they were only receiving five shillings at the most.[13] The closure of works, or the works only operating intermittently, created a very unstable membership for the union, and consequently affected the union's finances, as members were not able to make regular contributions. In January 1894, it was estimated that more than 5,000 tinplaters in south Wales had been thrown out of work; while some of the works in the Swansea valley, for example the works in Morriston, were employing men on day-to-day contracts.[14] Such was the distress that the Midland works had been nicknamed the 'Jam Works' after one tinplater at the works claimed that the workmen there 'could not earn jam, leave alone bread and cheese ...'[15]

To remain competitive, and to keep their works open, masters began to demand reductions in wages below the standard wage set out by the list of 1874. This ultimately undermined the union, as one of the Tinplate Workers' Union's main purposes was to try to maintain a standard wage which provided a 'living wage' for tinplaters. The tinplate

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[11] *Cambrian*, 23 September 1892 and 9 February 1894.
[12] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, pp.108-9.
[13] *Cambrian*, 21 October 1892.
[14] *Cambrian*, 19 January 1894 and 18 January 1895.
[15] *Industrial World*, 6 January 1893.

depression had made the maintenance of the standard wage difficult, resulting in significant wage reductions for tinplaters. The Worcester and Upper Forest works, for example, was partially restarted in February 1895 after the men had accepted a 12½ per cent pay cut.[16] Wage reductions became the norm during 1895, but were not uniform across the region, or in the same valley. In the Swansea valley alone wage reductions varied from works to works, for example the men at the Duffryn works accepted a reduction of 22½ per cent, mainly due to the fact that the men had been out of work some time.[17] Likewise, the Ynysmeudwy works also experienced a cut of 22½ per cent;[18] while on the other hand, the Beaufort millmen (Morriston) accepted a reduction of 10 per cent.[19] The contrast in wage reductions in the Swansea valley alone, and even within one tinplate town such as Morriston, is stark. This created two problems for the union: firstly, its members were now working for different rates of pay, and on different contracts making attempts to regain any semblance of a standardized wage difficult. Secondly, the reductions in wages were difficult to combat as, for example, once one works had reduced wages this made it more competitive, resulting in other works following suit and reducing their wages. This led to a downward spiral of wages. Due to the depression, the union was not best placed to fight reductions, as in many cases, reductions in wages was a way of re-opening works that had been idle for some time, as was the case at the Duffryn works when it re-opened in June 1895. A further example of the competition caused by wage reductions was at Arthur Gilbertson's works in Pontardawe. In a letter to John Hopkin John (editor of *Industrial World*), Arthur Gilbertson stated: 'I did not avail

[16] *Industrial World*, 25 January 1895.
[17] *Cambrian*, 14 June 1895.
[18] *Industrial World*, 21 June 1895.
[19] *Industrial World*, 25 January 1895.

myself of the reduction in wages, when others did, but the terrible competition just now compels me to reduce my costs ...'.[20]

A further consequence of the depression was emigration from the region. The most popular destination for those hit by the depression was America. The young American tinplate industry offered tinplaters of south Wales the prospect of employment. Although it was mainly the unemployed who emigrated, there is also evidence of tinplaters leaving from works that were in production. The *Industrial World* was concerned enough to dedicate an article to the situation in May 1895, claiming '...last week Rollermen left Morriston and Swansea, ... they were from the Cwmbwrla, Worcester and Forest Works, neither of which could be said to be hopelessly idle ...'[21] Again, the loss of tinplaters to America meant fewer members for the union. Emigration had, by 1895, appeared to have become a regular occurrence; in the same article, *Industrial World* claimed 'scarcely a week passes without a group of friends being seen at various stations bidding good-bye to men who leave Wales to seek a better home in America ...'.[22] The migration to America also affected union officials, in April 1895 the ex-President of the Cwmtawe District, Mr. William John, left for America.[23] There are no statistics which provide the exact number of Welsh tinplaters who emigrated during the post-McKinley depression, but what can be argued is that the union lost many skilled members and officials. Minchinton comments that unlike previous depressions when

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[20] Letter from Arthur Gilbertson to John Hopkin John 29 February 1892 [1:178] in Jackson, *The Letter-Books of W. Gilbertson and Co. Ltd.*, p.281.
[21] *Industrial World*, 10 May 1895.
[22] Ibid.
[23] *Industrial World*, 5 April 1895.

tinplaters left only to return when the trade improved, during the 1890s many left south Wales for good.[24]

The owners were, to a lesser extent, affected by the McKinley Tariff. The biggest loss was the demise of the Tinplate Makers' Association in 1896. The masters' main concern was to continue to make money. However, not all of the masters felt as threatened by the emerging American market, mainly due to the fact that some of the masters had invested in the American tinplate industry. Examples from the Swansea valley include W. H. Edwards, of the Duffryn works Morriston, who had returned to Wales in 1892 after constructing a tinhouse in Pennsylvania.[25]

The union and the masters, together and separately, made attempts either to ease the distress in the tinplate industry, or to try and drag it out of the depression by seeking new markets and uses for Welsh tinplate. The masters' immediate response to the McKinley Tariff was to impose a stop month in July 1891. This was opposed by the union, on the grounds that the stoppage was for a whole month, placing tinplaters in a situation where they would not receive wages for several weeks. It was estimated that the stoppage affected up to 25,000 tinplaters, plus colliers and steelworkers reliant on tinplate. The centre of the opposition by the union was at Morriston, where a demonstration and public meeting was organised. The public meeting was addressed by the President of the Tinplate Workers' Union, William Abraham MP ('Mabon') and David Randell MP amongst others, representing the variety of workers affected by the stoppage, and showing a level of cooperation between trade unionists.

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[24] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.109.
[25] *Industrial World*, 8 July 1892.

However, the *Cambrian's* report of the procession through Morriston failed to show the union in a good light, only helping to highlight the existence of apathy towards the union, and at times the procession appeared to decline into farce. Despite the organisers expecting 15,000 men to take part in the procession, the *Cambrian* reported that no more than 2,000 turned up. It was claimed, again by the *Cambrian*, that tinplaters had taken the offer of cheap trains that were provided for transport to the procession, but instead of going to Morriston, tinplaters had used the opportunity to take a cheap trip to Swansea instead! An element of farce also developed as those who did attend the demonstration were falling out of the ranks of the procession and into the public houses along the route.[26] If true this event highlights the, at times, indifferent nature of attitudes that tinplaters had to their union, their union's campaigns and lack of discipline amongst the union's rank and file. But it should be noted that there is no corroborating evidence to suggest such a level of disorganization during the procession, and the *Cambrian* was not a very sympathetic source.

Despite the tinplaters' protest against the stoppage, the stop month went ahead in July. However, not all of the works were closed completely for the full month. Some of the masters decided either to keep their works open to some extent or to employ their workers in other means. John Player kept his works at Clydach going as much as possible during the stoppage and looked for other work to prevent his employees from being idle.[27] The Cwmbwrla works employed labourers to repair and clean the machinery, and girls were given sewing work.[28] These two examples show the unilateralism amongst some tinplate masters a nd also show the continuation of a level of paternalism and

[26] *Cambrian*, 12 June 1891.
[27] *Cambrian*, 16 October 1891.
[28] *Cambrian*, 26 June 1891.

philanthropy during difficult periods for the industry. A further example of philanthropy can be found by Arthur Gilbertson, who gave £25 to the Landore Distress Fund.[29]

The most concerted attempts by both the union and the masters to resolve the depressed state of the tinplate industry came in the mid-1890s when several suggestions and schemes were proposed. These proposals and schemes led to a degree of cooperation between the union and masters. The establishment of a Tinplate Manufacturing Board of Control, which met for the first time in February 1895, can be viewed as an early attempt at industrial cooperation and conciliation, and came into existence at the request of the men. The key element of the board was that it contained representatives from both the masters and workers: the chairman was the tinplate master, and mayor of Swansea, W. H. Edwards and the vice-chairman was Lewis Richards, President of the Tinplate Workers' Union. The first meeting passed two resolutions: the first – that production of plates in the tinplate trade be matched to the demand; and second – that each individual works reduce production by one-third.[30] The aim of the board was to reduce output, thus preventing over-production, and allowing the price of Welsh tinplate to increase.

The union saw this as an opportunity to steady the industry and placed much faith in the board, declaring:

> That this council [special Council of the members of the Tinplate Workers' Union] expresses the opinion that, in the loyal adherence of the tinplate works to the Board of Control proposals, lies the welfare of the tinplate trade and the future salvation of

[29] *Industrial World*, 2 September 1892.
[30] *Cambrian*, 1 March 1895.

> wage rates. The council therefore pledges itself to strictly adhere to and promote the proposals of the Board of Control.[31]

The Board of Control was popular amongst tinplate workers; men at the Worcester and Forest works in April 1895 declared in favour of the Board of Control, and held several meetings and made a number of deputations to William Williams (Master of the Works) who agreed to adopt the Board's proposals.[32]

However, the Board of Control was not universally adopted, let alone agreed upon, by the masters. Minchinton draws attention to the fact that some of the masters put forward the case that to compete with the Americans, manufacturers had to produce tinplates as cheaply as they could, in order to undersell American tinplate. This, it was argued, would result in the closure of works that could not compete, leading to a 'natural' decline in output. An advocate of this 'jungle law' economic policy in the Swansea valley was John Player, Clydach.[33] The fact that the proposals of the Board were not universally accepted throughout the region meant that the Board of Control ultimately failed, and again undermined the Union which had placed so much faith in the scheme as a way of possibly saving the industry from depression.

Other attempts involving both masters and men were made to solve the economic crisis by trying to find new markets and uses for Welsh tinplate. New uses that were proposed for Welsh tinplate included the suggestion of packing tea in tin chests.[34] Possible markets included China, India, Ceylon, Africa and Australasia. The main impetus for this scheme came from the Tinplate Makers' Association, but when the

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[31] *Cambrian*, 26 April 1895.
[32] *Industrial World*, 12 April 1895.
[33] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, pp.74-5.
[34] *Cambrian*, 20 December 1895.

Association dissolved in 1896, it was decided to also abandon the scheme for opening up new markets.[35]

One of the biggest Achilles' heels of the structure of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union was its insistence to be based solely upon the tinplate industry. This stance resulted in a weakening of the union and its finances, as the majority, if not all, of the union's membership were, at one time, unemployed or working on reduced wages. The union did make several attempts to try to place itself on a better financial footing. Some changes were made to the level of contribution made by members to the union. In May 1892 the level of contribution was stated at 6d. a week for a full member and 3d. a week for boys.[36] However, by August 1895, a new rate of contributions was introduced at a special council of the union held in Llanelli as follows:[37]

[35] *Industrial World*, 6 March 1896.
[36] *Industrial World*, 31 May 1892.
[37] *Industrial World*, 16 August 1895.

Member	Contribution
Rollerman	2 shillings per week
Doubler	1 shilling 6d. per week
Heater	1 shilling 4d. per week
Behinder	6d. per week
Shearer	2 shillings per week
Pickler	1 shilling 6d. per week
Annealer	2 shillings per mill per week
Tinman	1 shilling 9d. per week
Washman	1 shilling 9d. per week
Dipper (2d. per box)	1 shilling per week
Dipper (1½d. per box)	8d. per week
Catchers	4d. per week
Assorters	1 shilling 9d. per week
Boxers	10d. per mill per week

This was a huge increase in contributions for some workers. But the new levels of contributions appear to have been based on the notion that the more skilled, and thus higher paid, workers made a larger contribution than the semi- and unskilled workers. This can be seen as a way by the union to increase its funds that were derived from members. However, even with increased contributions, the level of money received by the union from its membership was still dependant on those who were in employment.

The union continued to face financial difficulties throughout the 1890s. In 1893, the Tinplate Workers Union's newspaper *Industrial World* commented on the heavy demands placed on union funds, and the large number of union members who were unemployed.[38] *Industrial World* itself made a loss in the three years preceding 1895 to the amount of £364. The loss was explained as a fall in the receipts from advertisements; it was assumed that the depression had discouraged businessmen from advertising in the tinplate union's paper while so many tinplaters were unemployed or had little money to spend.[39] The *Industrial World* was eventually wound up in 1898 in an attempt to cut back on expenditure.

The union's financial situation meant it was keen to avoid industrial disputes and the expenses incurred during disputes, such as the payment of strike pay. *Industrial World* during the early 1890s was even promoting arbitration above industrial action.[40] The union's caution regarding industrial action was well founded. Where disputes did occur the union incurred considerable expense, particularly through strike pay. In fact, the union took measures to ensure that the money paid out was used properly and went to those who deserved it. A delegate from the Beaufort branch, Morriston, proposed the following motion, which was agreed to:

> That all members before receiving strike pay shall be compelled to sign a printed form, in which they shall agree that unless they comply with the demands of the union upon resuming work, they

[38] *Industrial World*, 20 October 1893.
[39] *Industrial World*, 11 October 1895.
[40] *Industrial World*, 8 July 1893.

> will be sued in the County Court for the full amount of strike pay received by them from the union funds.[41]

An even bigger drain on the union's funds was the union's policy of supporting tinplaters financially during an industrial dispute, even if they were non-contributors to the union. *Industrial World* explained the union's predicament: '...due to the necessity of maintaining a uniform rate of wages ... it has often become necessary to bring out whole bodies of men who have done nothing for the union ... Upon these men thousands of pounds were spent ... to prevent them giving way at a critical moment money was paid in preference to the faithful tinhouseman ...'.[42] This policy demonstrates the apathy within the tinplate industry towards the union, but it also highlights the fact that tinplaters who were not unionised had very little incentive to join the union and make regular contributions to the union; as during industrial disputes they were in receipt of union money anyway.

The union's management also came under attack from the rank and file over financial issues, in particular the cost of maintaining the union's management during a period of grave depression. Such complaints arose in the Cwmtawe District, the chairman in opening a meeting in July 1892, commented that: 'he [had] deeply explored the complaints prevalent at the excessive amounts paid out in the management of the union ...'. But he came to the conclusion that such costs were essential in times of close competition and general depression which was being experienced at the time.[43] The rank and file were certainly aware of the costs of the union and union management during a period when the tinplaters themselves were struggling to maintain regular work.

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[41] *Industrial World*, 21 April 1893.
[42] *Industrial World,* 6 September 1895.
[43] *Industrial World*, 29 July 1892.

A major flaw of the Tinplater Workers' Union was the level of independence that the branches enjoyed at times from the central executive. This independence allowed localism and indiscipline to fester amongst the branches. This posed problems for the union executive, who increasingly found it difficult to control and organise the branches in an effective and efficient way. Swansea valley branches in particular acted, at times, in their own local interests, regardless of central union policy. This is best highlighted by the union's policy to raise funds for the unemployed in the industry by imposing a 5 per cent levy on those still in work. This was met by an element of apathy from an early stage. The number of branches throughout the region that did not send money to the union in May 1892 was 60, while 40 branches did contribute; in the Swansea valley 13 branches contributed, while 9 branches did not.[44] The biggest challenge to the union's authority over the levy came from Morriston. Tinplaters here refused to send money to the central funds, instead preferring to keep the money raised by their branch members and using it to assist directly those in the local area who were out of work. The Morriston branches showed their dissatisfaction further by threatening to secede from the Tinplate Workers' Union, and instead form their own local association.[45] A resolution was passed by the Beaufort branch, which demanded that the union should be reconstructed on Friendly Society lines, each branch to manage and invest its own money; that each district should support its own strikes and disputes, and that the present paid officials of the union be '...CHANGED WITHOUT EXCEPTION!'[46] There was, in the end, no mass secession from the union, but a clear feeling of discontent with the central union

[44] *Industrial World*, 3 June 1892.
[45] *Cambrian*, 8 September 1893.
[46] *Cambrian*, 22 September 1893.

management had been expressed, and the union's authority was severely tested by the branches.

Localism amongst branches also had a further consequence for the central executive. The accepting of concessions and wage reductions by tinplaters on a works by works basis meant that, after a while, tinplaters at different works were employed at various rates of pay and on various contracts either daily, weekly or monthly. This caused severe problems for the union in the organisation of strikes throughout the region. There was a custom for workers on monthly contracts to issue notices of industrial action to be tendered on the first Monday of the month. This presented a situation where tinplaters on monthly contracts would have possibly to wait up to two months to join a dispute. Those on daily and weekly contracts could join a dispute much more quickly. As a result, the union became very disjointed and found it difficult to maintain momentum in the build up to, or during, a dispute.

The independent nature of the tinplate branches came to a head in 1896 and 1897. 1896 saw a proposal by the union executive to wind up the union. The union demanded reform on the part of the branches in faithfulness and contributions to the union funds.[47] Although the branches refused to accept the proposal to wind up the union, the situation that arose in 1896 shows a clear division between the branches and the central union executive. It was not until 1897 that some reform of the central union was attempted. The suggested alterations were as follows:

I. That the office of 'Organising Agent' be abolished.

II. That the services of the 'Executive Committee' as a permanent body be dispensed with.

[47] *Cambrian*, 22 May 1896.

III. That the *Industrial World* as a trade paper is unnecessary, and that in consequence, we do away with same, together with the services of the editor.

IV. That we retain the services of the General Secretary and fully paid clerk; the secretary to do work of organising.

V. That in place of *Industrial World*, a printed *Monthly Report* be issued to each branch of the trade, showing the position of affairs at each works...

VI. That the trade be divided into 12 districts, each district to appoint one or more delegates to meet the secretary and clerk twice annually in the conference...

VII. That each district bank its own money, and the expenses of the secretary and clerk, along with the salary, be covered by levying each district proportionately.[48]

These proposals can be seen as an attempt by the union executive to try to solve some of the problems that had plagued the union in the 1890s, and thus preserve the union. This proposal can also be seen as a way of pacifying the branches; some of the points can be traced back to discontent raised by the branches, for example points I and II can be seen as a way of cutting the costs of the union's management as raised by the Cwmtawe District in 1892, and point VII is almost identical to a proposal by the Beaufort branch in 1893. However, these proposed changes were too late; in just over twelve months after these proposals in 1897 the Tinplate Workers' Union ceased to exist.

Some of the works in the Swansea valley also experienced apathy and sustained blacklegging. Blacklegging was a particular problem at the Gilbertson works, Pontardawe, which suffered from it for over a year between 1892 and 1893. The problem centred on a dispute by the assorters at the works, the result being that the work of the

[48] *Cambrian*, 31 December 1897.

assorters was done by the tinhouse superintendents.[49] The union also complained of apathy in works where the union was once strong, for example the Clydach branch at the Player's works. *Industrial World* commented that: 'This was at one time the best of the branches of the Tinplaters' Union in Cwmtawe valley, but through indifference much of its glory has departed ...'.[50] By the mid 1890s, the *Industrial World*, the organ of the Tinplate Workers' Union admitted disorganisation amongst the union's ranks: 'The best of armies becomes disorganised after a battle; to expect that the Tinplaters' Union would have carried on an unceasing war for three years without becoming more or less disorganised was not to be expected ...'.[51] The existence of blacklegging and apathy within the union's ranks contributed to a feeling of the union, as a central organisation, being undermined, disorganised and lacking authority and discipline.

A further consequence that originated out of the union's determination to represent all tinplate workers in one union, and made worse by the economic conditions of the time, was a division in the labour of the tinplate industry – between those employed in the mill and those employed in the tinhouse.

The animosity between millmen and tinhousemen comes down mainly to the production of black plate (untinned sheets). Jenkins traces the origin of this animosity to the 1880s, when a fledgling American tinplate industry used imported black plates from Britain to be coated with tin in America. This affected tinhouse workers who coated plates with tin, but not those in the mill who produced the black plates.[52] Early divisions can also be found in industrial disputes. A dispute originated in the tinhouse at the Upper

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[49] *Industrial World*, 5 August 1892.
[50] *Industrial World*, 11 September 1896.
[51] *Industrial World*, 24 August 1894.
[52] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.190.

Forest works in 1889, and which escalated to the extent that the owner, William Williams, threatened to close the works if notices were not withdrawn. This situation led to the steel and millmen at the works to make efforts to induce the tinhousemen to withdraw their notices. The steel and millmen passed the following resolution, which was published in the *Cambrian*:

> To the tinhousemen of the Upper Forest works. We earnestly impress upon you to reconsider the course you have adopted, and sincerely hope that you will forthwith make arrangements to withdraw the notices which you handed to our respective employer last Monday week ... we deeply regret having cause to interfere between you and our master, but feel it our burden duty in the present juncture to make this request.[53]

Despite being in the same union, the millmen showed little official solidarity with their fellow workers and union members in the tinhouse during this dispute. The Tinplate Workers' Union had to represent several, and at times conflicting, viewpoints and accommodate the needs as best as possible of the two departments within the industry.

The McKinley Tariff and the resulting economic depression intensified the animosity and the differing effects of the tariff on the two sections of the industry helped to polarise the two sets of workers. Again, the division within the industry centred on the production of black plates which was not affected as much by the depression. As a result, this allowed the employment of millmen to produce black plates, while those employed in the tinhouse remained unemployed. This created a situation where tinplate workers, usually employed at the same works and represented by the same union, found themselves

[53] *Cambrian*, 15 February 1889.

unemployed, when others remained in work. The division started murmurings of a split between the two sections. Writing in the 'Morriston Notes' section of the *Industrial World*, it was reported: 'I can not fully endorse the opinion which has become so rife among a great many tinhousemen at Morriston – that millmen have of late shown a desire for separation, and form a distinct body of their own.'[54] The division resurfaced during the economic depression, and at times as above, seemed to foster feelings of suspicion between the two sets of workers and their intentions towards the union; thus raising questions over the wisdom of having one union to represent both sections. These opinions were not short-lived: three years after the disquiet of the Morriston tinhousemen, a further article appeared in the *Industrial World* stating: 'it is known that some millmen selfishly think that they would be better off without the tinhousemen ... it is well for both mill and tinhousemen to remember that "united we stand, divided we fall."'[55] This conclusion by the *Industrial World* was very apt as the death knell of the Tinplate Workers' Union came with the splitting of most millmen and tinhousemen into different unions.

The divisions between mill and tinhouse were apparent in the early years of the Tinplate Workers' Union, and were partly caused by the union's desire to represent all workers within the industry. But it was the 'McKinley depression' that accentuated these divisions, as the economic crisis presented the union with the challenge of representing members who, at times, had very conflicting needs.

The union also became associated with failure after several of its campaigns did not gain any long term successes, and again highlighted the union's lack of authority over the branches. Such campaigns included the union's attempts to regain the 1874 List and the

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[54] *Industrial World*, 10 June 1892.
[55] *Industrial World*, 29 November 1895.

re-establishment of the 36 box rule. The union also failed to support fully some works on individual disputes, for example, some works opposition to the introduction of new patent tinning machines and the flux that these machines used.

The most publicised dispute over the new patent tinning machines and flux originated at the Duffryn works in Morriston. The dispute started at the end of 1890 and the beginning of 1891, when the tinhousemen went on strike in an attempt to remove the new machinery that had replaced the old method of working. The men claimed that the flux, which was used in the new process and replaced the use of palm oil, was damaging their health by causing blotches and 'bladders' (possible blisters) on their skin. However, a more plausible cause of the dispute was the fact that the machinery would mean fewer men were needed to be employed, to the extent that one man out of every three employed in the tinning process was now surplus to requirements. It is also important to note that one of the patentees of the new machinery was Daniel Edwards, the owner of the Duffryn works. The union did not give their support to the Duffryn men, as their action was considered in breach of union rules.

Samples of the flux had been sent for testing to chemists by both the union and Daniel Edwards, and both results claimed that the flux was safe.[56] Despite the lack of support from the union and the findings of the chemists' reports, the Duffryn men continued to act unilaterally. Initially, the tinhousemen vowed to fight on with their own strength, but they changed their stance, by instead agreeing with the union executive. However, the men did press the union to look at matters 'from the various standpoints of workmen and not masters.'[57]

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[56] *Cambrian*, 2 January and 16 January 1891.
[57] *Cambrian*, 23 January 1891.

Although a relatively minor dispute, that only focused on one works, it is a good example of the men's willingness not only to break union rules, but to act unilaterally from the union. The unilateralism of the branches can also be seen in the union's attempts to prevent wage reductions and regain and maintain the 1874 List and the 36 box rule.

The List of 1874 and the 36 box rule were very tangible statements of what the union stood for; and the benefits of the existence of the union to its members in the protection of wages and industrial output. The introduction of the McKinley Tariff in 1891 was a serious threat to both the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule. Throughout the 1890s, the union would make several attempts to regain and maintain both these symbols of tinplate unionism. The union faced a similar challenge to that of the Independent Association of Tinplate Workers – trying to preserve such symbols during a period of economic difficulty.

The masters, in an attempt to reduce costs and maintain profitability, saw a solution in the reduction of wages and increasing output. As mentioned earlier, reductions in wages became common-place in an attempt to keep works open. However, in 1895 the union did launch a campaign to try to re-establish the 1874 List. Despite the economic conditions, the significance of the standard wage was still recognised by tinplaters. A meeting of works in the upper Swansea valley – Gilwen, Gurnos, Ynyscedwyn, Ystalyfera and Ynysmeudwy works – carried the following resolution in January 1895: 'That we abide to the standard rate of wages, seeing that concessions mean destroying instead of mending.'[58] Yet, despite this resolution there does appear to be, in the early part of the year, mixed signals over the standard wage. Although the 1874 List was the ultimate aim of the union, a week after the resolution by the upper Swansea valley works

[58] *Industrial World*, 11 January 1895.

another resolution was carried by the Cwmtawe District, declaring: 'That this district ... strongly urge upon every branch on no account to agree to a greater reduction than ten per cent ...'.[59]

By February 1895, the union did appear to have a clearer strategy towards wages, and a campaign was started to regain a uniform wage. In May 1895 a manifesto was published which came to the following conclusions:

1. That the best interests of Employer and Employees in the Tinplate trade, demands that an end be brought to the gambling in wages now going on.
2. That a uniform wage rate be re-established.
3. That the 1874 List gives tinplate workers only a living wage.
4. That a special council of the whole trade be held on the 1 June, to decide whether Tinplaters will, at the beginning of July, agree to work at anything under the 1874 List ... [60]

As a result of this manifesto tinplaters were instructed by the union to refuse working after June 30 until they were offered the rates of the 1874 List. This was supported by tinplaters in the Swansea valley, a mass meeting at Morriston resolved '...everyman pledges himself to do what he can to restore the list [of 1874], and that they shall cease work on Saturday, unless paid according to the List of 1874 ...'.[61] The campaign to regain the 1874 List was initially successful in the Swansea valley, by the end of August

[59] *Industrial World*, 18 January 1895.
[60] *Industrial World*, 17 May 1895.
[61] *Industrial World*, 28 June 1895.

the *Industrial World* declared that apart from four works going on starvation agreements, all the workmen in the valley were being paid according to the 1874 List.[62]

Jenkins has argued that the List was partially regained thanks to economic circumstances, that the depression had caused works to close, either temporarily or completely, thus reducing competition and increasing the profitability of the works still open, allowing the masters to pay the 1874 List.[63] This, to some extent, was true in the Swansea valley where a number of works were closed temporarily in 1894 and early 1895, including Tyr Canol, Upper Forest and Worcester works.[64]

The success of the re-establishment of the 1874 List did not last long. Seven months after the *Industrial World* had declared that all but four works had regained the list in the Swansea valley, works in the valley were conceding to reductions, for example at the Forest works all departments except the behinders had accepted a 15 per cent reduction on the 1874 List.[65] It was the behinders of Morriston who made an attempt to prevent reductions. The behinders at the Beaufort, Worcester and Forest works all gave notice, but eventually returned to work at reduced rates.[66]

A further attempt was made to re-establish the List again in the summer of 1896. Round robin forms were circulated by the union to secure signatures of tinplaters from each branch in support of the 1874 List. The union's method of signing round robins as a means of showing members' popular support for a union campaign can be questioned. In a letter in June 1893 with reference to a dispute at his works, Arthur Gilbertson commented '...we are told men are induced to sign notices or a "round Robin" ... when

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[62] *Industrial World*, 23 August 1895.
[63] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.190.
[64] See *Cambrian* 1894 and 1895.
[65] *Cambrian*, 13 March 1896.
[66] *Cambrian*, 20 March 1896.

under influence of drink.'[67] Although at first this may appear to be an attempt to smear the validity of the union's round robins signed by the men, there is some evidence to suggest the consumption of alcohol at union meetings. *Industrial World* lamented the level of drunkenness and customs surrounding payment of rooms for union meetings: '...this very custom of paying for the use of the room by the purchase of so much beer, is still in existence among tinplate unionists. Surely it is time to do away with this means of encouraging drunkenness...'.[68] Certainly, both the union and masters were aware of the role played by alcohol amongst tinplaters during union meetings. The List of 1874 was regained again at the end of 1896, the Morriston and Midland works regained the List in November.[69] However, not all Swansea valley branches contributed to this success; the Pontardawe Works, for example, did not tender notices. Where the List was regained it was maintained only up until the autumn of 1897, when a downturn in trade saw the masters again request reductions on the List. The men at the Duffryn works for example were requested to take a reduction of 15 per cent of the 1874 List.[70]

The union's campaign ultimately floundered due to the difficult economic circumstances, but also because of the men's willingness to accept reductions. These reductions were accepted as a means of keeping works open. The List of 1874 was not always a feasible aspiration during the economic climate of the 1890s.

The men's willingness to disregard union policy is further reinforced by the 36 box rule. The rule was designed to control the output of each works to prevent over supplying the market, so to maintain prices. However, despite the union's calls to limit output to 36

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[67] Letter from Arthur Gilbertson to Messrs Morgan and David, Solicitors, Neath 6 June 1893 [1:244] in Jackson, *The Letter-Books of W. Gilbertson and Co. Ltd.*, p.284.
[68] *Industrial World*, 19 June 1896.
[69] *Cambrian*, 6 November 1896.
[70] *Cambrian*, 24 September 1897.

boxes per shift, this rule was flouted by both masters and men. The masters disliked the rule simply because it limited the number of tinplates that could be produced, and consequently restricted their profits. It was also argued that no such rule existed in the American tinplate industry, and therefore placed the Welsh tinplate industry at a disadvantage. Increases in production were usually attached to reductions in wages. Attempts were made by the men to protect the rule, for example in 1895 Morriston tinplaters were locked out after accepting reductions on wages, but refused to accept changes to increase the production. It was reported in the *Cambrian* that one unnamed manufacturer suggested to a workman, that the men accept wage reductions and changes to the make, and then when the orders came in March, to strike for an increase in wages.[71] The distress in Morriston meant that the tinplaters could not afford to remain locked out. The result was that men began to accept increases in make as well as reductions in wages in an attempt to remain in work. In January 1895 both the Glanyrafon works and the Clydach works accepted wage reductions and agreed to increase the make to 40 boxes per shift.[72] Although such increases at Glanyrafon and Clydach were relatively small, the *Industrial World* brought to light works in the Swansea valley as early as 1892, showing what could only be described as a level of contempt for the 36 box rule. These works were turning out 50, 55 and 62 boxes per eight hours' shift, the works were named as: Forest, Gilwen and Ynysmeudw.[73]

The Union had inherited and maintained a strict adherence to the principles of a uniform standard wage and restriction on output. But the unkind economic conditions of the 1890s had made these principles unfeasible to maintain or even enforce. Tinplaters at

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[71] *Cambrian*, 1 February 1895.
[72] *Industrial World*, 11 January 1895.
[73] *Industrial World*, 2 December 1892.

individual works took it upon themselves to act outside the union's principles and come to their own arrangements with their relevant masters as regards to wages and output. This unilateralism allowed branches to try and keep their works open and reduce the effects of the depression. The union became associated with failure, as these campaigns were unable to deliver long-term benefits, or to prevent men and branches acting on their own at the expense of central union policy.

Although fairly minor, a further factor that contributed to discontent and disillusionment by the men towards their union in the Swansea area was an attempt to select a labour parliamentary candidate from within the tinplaters' ranks. However, this attempt would end in the union making what could be described as a rather deferential act towards the Liberal movement and the masters.

From the early years of its inception, the union's council adopted a resolution to promote the candidature of as many direct labour representatives as possible for the County Councils in south Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire.[74] T his policy would by the early 1890s manifest itself in an endeavour to put forward a candidate for Parliament. It centred on the by-election in Swansea in 1893 after Sir Henry Hussey Vivian was elevated to the peerage. The tinplaters nominated Thomas Phillips (General Secretary of the Tinplate Workers' Union) as a labour candidate. The tinplaters took a leading role in the organisation of a labour candidacy, and worked with representatives from the Dockers' Union, steel workers, copper workers, gas stokers, miners, labourers and Welsh Artizans. A resolution was passed at the meeting declaring: 'That this meeting

[74] *Cambrian*, 17 August 1888.

expresses the opinion that the time has come when the working men in the Swansea district should use every effort to triumphantly return a labour candidate'.[75]

A labour candidate was supported by Morriston delegates almost unanimously. The only branch not to give their support was from the Worcester and Forest works. This branch explained their actions in a resolution disapproving of the fact that they had had a labour candidate 'forced' upon the constituency by the Executive of the Tinplate Workers Union.[76] However, the branch's stance may have more to do with the fact that the Liberal Association of Swansea nominated William Williams (owner of the Worcester and Forest works) as their candidate.

Despite the support for a labour candidate from tinplaters, William Williams was elected Member of Parliament *unopposed* at the election. This situation unfolded as a result of Thomas Phillips, the labour candidate, standing aside after coming to an agreement with the Liberal association. This caused much disbelief and discontent amongst tinplaters and those in the wider labour movement. The explanation given by the union was passed in a resolution which stated that a labour candidate would endanger the safety of the Swansea district seat, presumably there was a fear of the Tories gaining the seat; a copy of the full resolution was sent to Gladstone.[77] This explanation was not deemed acceptable to the Swansea Trades and Labour Council who disapproved of the action of the labour candidate in withdrawing from the election. The council also expressed disgust at the '...servile praise of Mr. Williams by the so-called labour leaders after his return [as MP].'[78]

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[75] *Industrial World*, 9 June 1893.
[76] *Industrial World*, 16 June 1893.
[77] *Industrial World*, 23 June 1893.
[78] *Cambrian*, 28 July 1893.

This affair highlighted the union's willingness to further the cause of the working classes, but it also showed the union's ability to shoot itself in the foot by appearing to pander to the wishes of the owning classes. The election can be viewed as a symbolic microcosm of the wider confrontation between master and men, the union came off a very distant second in this contest. The union came out of the election in a very bad light, and disappointed those who sought leadership from their union and for a labour candidate in the district.

There were several factors operating in the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union which ultimately contributed to the eventual collapse of the union in early 1899. The factors that operated in the Swansea valley, as at regional level, were as Minchinton argued: 'both internal and external causes.'[79] Such factors included: the impact of the economic depression caused by the McKinley Tariff, the consequent effects on the union's finances, the organisation of the union on one industry, localism and independence amongst the branches, division of labour between mill and tinhouse, failure of union campaigns and political differences – highlighted by the 1893 Swansea election.

In many cases, the turning points and key events for the union as a whole originated from a works or union branch in the Swansea valley district, particularly Morriston. However, there were other factors that were local for tinplaters in the Swansea valley, such as the heavy reliance of the district on tinplate, apathy and blacklegging, and the Swansea election.

It is therefore not surprising that the eventual collapse of the union was signalled when Morriston tinhousemen left the Tinplate Workers' Union and joined the Dockers'

[79] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.125.

Union at the end of 1898 and start of 1899. An insight into the state of the Tinplate Workers' Union in 1898 is given in the description of it in a letter by Arthur Gilbertson, who stated: '...our works, which is not controlled by the miserable and discredited so called "union" of Tinplaters in south Wales. This "union" is virtually bankrupt and powerless.'[80]

The catalyst of the union's collapse in the Swansea valley, as in the rest of the region, was clearly a result of the McKinley Tariff in July 1891. The tariff and the resultant economic depression accentuated the flaws that already existed in the union, or developed during the 1890s. Despite attempts by the union to save the organisation, it ultimately failed to regain the respect from, and authority over, the branches. Throughout the 1890s the union became increasingly fractured as an organisation on many levels between the central executive and branches as a result of increasing dissatisfaction; between branches at different works due to the acceptance of different contracts and wage rates; and within individual works, between millmen and tinhousemen, and those who remained employed and those unemployed. In an Annual Report of the Dockers' Union in 1899, an assessment of the Tinplate Workers' Union was made: 'For some years these men were unorganised and the trade was in a bad state, the men demoralised ...'[81] As Minchinton has concluded: '...the union came to an end because it was required to operate in unfavourable economic conditions.'[82] This conclusion can be applied to the Swansea valley; the economic depression started a snowball effect which highlighted other problems within the union, increasing dissatisfaction and discontent with the union.

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[80] Letter from Arthur Gilbertson to H. Llewellyn Smith 5 September 1898 [1:697-8] in Jackson, *The Letter-Books of W. Gilbertson and Co. Ltd.*, p.289.
[81] Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland, *Tenth Annual Report, 1899*, 'The Tinplate Section', MRC: MSS.126/DWR/4/1/1.
[82] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.125.

This situation continued until the union had lost credibility, not only with its members but also with the masters. As a result tinplaters looked elsewhere for representation and the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union collapsed. By 1900 the Tinplate Workers' Union had ceased to exist and tinplaters were represented by six different unions.

Chapter 3:

Peace in the Tinplate Industry in the Twentieth Century – Conciliation or Division?

The collapse of the South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union was signalled when 400 Morriston tinplaters left the Tinplate Workers' Union and joined the Dockers' Union at the end of 1898. The Tinplate Workers' Union no longer existed after 14 January 1899. By the end of January 1899, the *Cambrian* was reporting that the Workers' Union, the Gas Workers' Union and the Dockers' Union were recruiting tinplaters.[1] Recruitment was quite active, for example Ben Tillett, General Secretary of the Dockers' Union, addressed a meeting of tinplaters in January 1899.[2] Instead of being represented by just one union, workers in the tinplate industry became splintered amongst the following unions: Dockers' Union, British Steel Smelters, Mill, Iron and Tinplate Workers, National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, The Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, Welsh Artisans Union, The Amalgamated Society of Engineers and in 1900 a managers' union was formed called the Mill Managers and Tinhouse and Cold Rolls Superintendents' Association.[3]

The dominant unions that emerged were the Dockers' Union and the Steel Smelters'. Agreements were made between these unions as to which union represented which set of workers. A third union, the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, which emerged out of the Tinplate Workers' Union, competed with the Steel Smelters' to represent millmen. The recruitment of tinplate workers into the various new unions open

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[1] *Cambrian*, 20 January 1899.
[2] Ibid.
[3] The Mill Managers and Tinhouse and Cold Rolls Superintendents' Association was organised by J. H. John, previously editor of *Industrial World.*

to them was rapid, Paul Jenkins notes that in February 1899 it was estimated that the Dockers' Union had 2,500 tinplate members and the Steel Smelters' almost 2,000.[4] The Dockers' Union Annual Report of 1899 listed the following tinplate branches in the Swansea valley and district: Swansea number 1, Swansea number 2, Swansea number 14, Clydach, Morriston, Morriston number 2, Pontardawe and Ystalyfera.[5]

It was also at the end of the 1890s that the masters re-organised themselves and formed The Welsh Plate and Sheet Manufacturers' Association. The Swansea valley masters were well represented in the association; in 1911 thirteen works from the valley were in the organisation.[6] By the turn of the century a whole new structure had been established and put in place by both the workers and the masters.

There were initial advantages to the new union structure. The division of tinplate workers into different unions meant that there was less of a chance of a conflict of interest arising in a union between different tinplate sections, in particular between tinhousemen and millmen. The new unions also helped to increase membership amongst tinplate workers. Minchinton points out that in 1899 85 per cent of workers in the industry were unionised and, by 1914, he claims '...there were few who did not belong to a trade union ...'[7] A particular increase in membership came from female members of the workforce, in March 1899, the *Cambrian* commented 'Even the women workers in some of the works are becoming fired up with union spirit ...'[8] There is evidence that women employed in the tinplate industry in the Swansea valley remained unionised into the

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[4] Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen: A History of the South Wales Tinplate Industry, 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995), p.191.
[5] Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland, *Tenth Annual Report*, 1899 MRC: MSS.126/DWR/4/1/1.
[6] Welsh Plate and Sheet Manufacturers' Association, List of Members, 1911 MRC:MSS.36.W44/1.
[7] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p.126.
[8] *Cambrian*, 17 March 1899.

twentieth century. Mrs Lucy James, from Ystradgynlais, recalled being a union member at the Ynyscedwyn works, as well as other women at the works during the 1920s.[9] However, at the Gurnos works, near Ystradgynlais, Mrs Nellie Jones, Mrs Kitty Williams and Mrs Agnes Owen, again referring to the 1920s, mentioned that not everyone was a union member at the works.[10] Women certainly did join the union in the tinplate works, but it appears that the numbers varied from works to works.

The Dockers' Union as an organisation also benefited greatly from the membership of tinplate workers which bolstered its general membership considerably and helped to compensate for a decline in members who worked in the docks industry in the 1890s. Clegg, Fox and Thompson commented '...Tillett's Dockers ... after they failed to regain a foot-hold in London by a strike in 1900, ... were forced back on their stronghold of Swansea ...'[11] Swansea was a stronghold for the Dockers' Union due to the presence of tinplaters in the union. Swansea's importance was recognised by contemporaries; in the General Secretary's Report for 1901, it was stated: 'The Newport and Swansea districts hold a premier place for work done, as well as demonstrating our ability to cater for a multiplicity of industries'.[12] Thus the Swansea valley's prominent position in the Tinplate Workers' Union continued under the new union structure in the Dockers' Union.

A further benefit that came from the new union structure was the formation of the Conciliation Board, which had representatives of both workers and masters. The Board gave stability to the industry and was instrumental in helping to prevent a serious dispute

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[9] Interview with Mrs Lucy James, Ystradgynlais, interviewed by Hywel Francis, 1974, Transcript p.10, SWCC:AUD/216.
[10] Interview with Mrs Nellie Jones, Mrs Kitty Williams and Mrs Agnes Owen, Lower Cwmtwrch, interviewed by Philippa Dolan, 23/04/1975, Tape 1, Side A – 7.50-8.39, SWCC:AUD/480.
[11] H. A. Clegg, A. Fox and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889, Vol. 1, 1889-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) p.331.
[12] D, W, R and GWU of GB and Ire, *Annual Report*, 1901, General Secretary's Report for year ending 1901 MRC:MSS.126/DWR/4/1/2.

in the twentieth century. Both Jenkins and Minchinton have emphasised the importance of the Conciliation Board. Jenkins states that: 'Without doubt, the importance of the Joint Conciliation Board in preserving, throughout its lifetime, a high degree of industrial harmony within the trade cannot be overstated'.[13] Minchinton agrees with the importance of the Board, by arguing that the conciliation process '...brought to an end the guerrilla warfare of the nineties [1890s] and led to a long period of industrial peace'.[14] However, there were other factors that contributed to industrial peace in the twentieth century, such as the division of the workforce into several different unions, an improved economic situation, increased discipline amongst the branches and the curtailment of the unilateralism that had plagued the Tinplate Workers' Union.

The Conciliation Board's development after the establishment of the new union system was not that surprising. Both John Hodge, General Secretary of the Steel Smelters' Union, and Ben Tillett, General Secretary of the Dockers' Union, were advocates of conciliation. As early as 1891 the British Steel Smelters' Amalgamated Association was keen to establish Conciliation and Arbitration Boards, but negotiations broke down due to disagreements over who would pay for the Boards' expenses.[15] Likewise, at the beginning of the 1890s, Ben Tillett, along with Tom Mann, stated: 'Respecting strikes, we are fully aware that they should be avoided wherever possible and only entered into after other efforts at a settlement have failed. The "new" unionists carry this out to the letter, and never sanctioned a strike until every reasonable effort has been

[13] Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, p.200.
[14] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.125.
[15] *Cambrian*, 24 July 1891.

made to settle the difficulty be negotiation ...'[16] Even in the early 1890s, conciliation and negotiation was a process to which both leaders of the two main unions which went on to represent the tinplate industry at the end of the 1890s aspired. Before the establishment of the Conciliation Board, the Dockers' Union in the Swansea valley was demonstrating its willingness to negotiate. An example of negotiation was reported by the *Cambrian* in February 1899, that: 'The friction which existed between Mr. Morris and his workmen at the Midland and Morriston works has been healed up. Negotiations and a favourable issue were rendered possible by both parties ... The officials of the Dockers' Union have fully maintained their reputation for quickly and effectively disposing of disputes.'[17]

The initiative for cooperation between men and masters came from the Dockers' Union which organised a conference in March 1899 and invited employers to attend. Several employers from the Swansea valley attended the conference, including representatives from the Upper Forest, Beaufort and Duffryn works.[18] The initial proposal was to form a Conciliation Board based on a similar process to the Birmingham Alliances.[19] A conference of unions, again initiated by the Dockers' Union, in April 1899 passed the following resolution setting out principles for conciliation, and was unanimously agreed:

> That a request be made to each employer as to his willingness to join an association of employers and that the foregoing masters also use all their energy to organise the workmen, with a view to

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[16] Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, *The "New" Trades Unionism A Reply to Mr. George Shipton* (London: Green and McAllen, 1890) p.6 MRC:MSS.74/4/1/2.
[17] *Cambrian*, 24 February 1899.
[18] *Cambrian*, 24 March 1899.
[19] The Birmingham Alliances were based on collaboration between manufacturers and unions to fix prices and ensure good wages. The first industry to set up an alliance in Birmingham was for brass bedstead workers in 1891. Information from www.madeinbirmingham.org/pin.htm , 16/04/2008.

> an alliance for the control of the trade, both as regards selling price and uniformity of wage rates and conditions, the unions ... pledging themselves to withdraw labour from those employers who do not join the employers' section of the association, the associated employers on their part aiding the workmen by either finding work for such displacement of labour or aiding with a fund for their support during such enforced idleness, and, further, that this conference urges the immediate formation of a Joint Conciliation and Wages Board, and that all matters in dispute be submitted to such before any action be taken on either side.[20]

Although a scheme based on the Birmingham Alliances was not accepted, a Conciliation Board for the tinplate trade was established in June 1899.

The establishment of the Conciliation Board had several early successes and advantages for the tinplaters. At a meeting of the Conciliation Board in June 1899, it was agreed for a 10 per cent reduction in August and September, and then the payment of the 1874 List from the first Monday of October 1899.[21] Minchinton argues that most of the improvements in the industry between 1899 and 1914 came about because of the Conciliation Board, for example: '... an eight days annual holiday, improved rates of pay for extra or more arduous work and some protection against arbitrary dismissal.'[22]

However, there was some criticism of the Conciliation Board, particularly from the labour paper *Llais Llafur*, which commented in 1900:

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[20] *Cambrian*, 28 April 1899.
[21] *Cambrian*, 30 June 1899.
[22] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.135.

> If the Conciliation Board in the Tinplate Trade is to continue, thorough re-organisation is absolutely necessary, and something like an intelligent and practical method of working must be approached ... Besides what are miscalled "decisions" of the Board, are merely offers made by the employers and are practically arrived at when the workmen's representatives have withdrawn. At present, there is no attempt made to procure equal representation of the employers and workmen, and until that is done the workings of the Board will always be of a tedious and procrastinating character ...[23]

Yet despite this criticism, the Board was providing benefits for the workmen and the new union structure became identified with success, something that the previous tinplate unions had failed to sustain.

The Board's greatest achievement must be in contributing to the preservation of general industrial peace in the industry. Ivor H. Gwynne, General Secretary of the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, described in a correspondence in 1916 the success of the Conciliation Board as regards to industrial disputes: '... for the last eighteen years the Tinplate Trade ... has been immune from any serious strike due solely to the influence and effect of the Conciliation Board on both Employers and Employees, and only on very rare occasions has any question of dispute been submitted to arbitration ...'[24] An obvious example of the Conciliation Board in action and preventing an industrial dispute was a demand by the millmen of the industry for a 5 per cent wage advance instead of

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[23] *Llais Llafur*, 20 January 1900.
[24] Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, Correspondence from Ivor H. Gwynne, 23 October 1916 MRC:MSS.36/T12/4a.

the 2½ per cent offered by the employers. The millmen were balloted, but it did not escalate into strike action, in fact, notices were withdrawn after the intervention of the Conciliation Board.[25]

Also notable, after the creation of the Conciliation Board, was increased discipline amongst tinplaters. In particular, individual branches appeared to take less unilateral action in going against the wishes of their respective central unions. This benefited the central executives of the unions as it allowed them to maintain an element of authority over their branches and members; it also prevented the union from becoming disorganised or undermined from below. The union leadership took firm action to maintain discipline amongst the branches. An example of the unions' increased authority over the branches was a dispute amongst galvanizers at Gilberton's works, Pontardawe, in February 1914. The galvanizers at the works gave notice without the permission of their union and, while in the middle of working their notices, they walked out in an unofficial dispute. John Hodge, of the Steel Smelters' Union, went to Pontardawe to address the workers in two meetings. At the meetings Hodge promoted the Conciliation Board and commented on the unofficial action: '... if we are going to make any progress in the Trade Union movement, it can only be done by taking a legal method of striking. I do not believe that the workers should give up the weapon of the strike ... but it ought to be the last thing we use ...'[26] The conclusion of the meeting was the adoption of a proposition put forward by John Hodge by a ballot, with 63 in favour and 55 against.[27] The unofficial action was stopped and solved, and was not allowed to spread to any other

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[25] *Llais Llafur*, 14 April 1900 and *Cambrian*, 29 June 1900.
[26] Transcript of notes taken at the meeting between Mr. John Hodge MP, and Pontardawe workmen, March 1914 MRC:MSS.36.P24a, p.5.
[27] Transcript of notes taken at the meeting between Mr. John Hodge MP, and Pontardawe workmen, March 1914 MRC:MSS.36.P24a, p.29.

works. This was a clear example of the authority that the union leadership was able to exert over their branches to maintain discipline.

However, there were still times when branches did act unilaterally; Frank Gilbertson in a correspondence to Messrs R. and C. B. Jenkins, solicitors, commented about those who were employed as annealers in his works:

> ... we are parties to an annual agreement made by the masters and the men in the Tinplate Trade, under which conditions are settled every summer for the ensuing 12 months and that the unions agree never to stop work and never to hand in notices even till the matter has been before the Conciliation Board ... we have had a great deal of trouble ... owing to the men throwing down tools without legal notice, and in defiance of the undertakings given by the union leaders at the Annual Conciliation Board meeting ...[28]

But these occasions did not escalate and there was no direct challenge to the central union by the branches.

A consequence of the Conciliation Board was that, when compared with previous trade union movements in the tinplate trade, a shift within unionism can be identified. There was a shift from powerful branches that allowed workers to interact with unionism and their masters at a grassroots level, to a system of unionism where workers' interests were shifted up a level, to a sphere that only involved members' representatives at Conciliation Board meetings. *Llais Llafur* summed up this shift by commenting '...after the formation of the Conciliation Board they [the employers] obtained their desires with

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[28] Letter from Frank Gilbertson to Messrs R. C. & B. Jenkins, solicitors, 13 November 1911 [7:713] in P. W. Jackson, *The Letter-Books of W. Gilbertson & Co. Ltd.* (Swansea/Cardiff: West Glamorgan Archive Service/South Wales Record Society, 2001), p.302.

little trouble, for here they had to deal with the men's leaders and not the workers themselves.'[29]

A further factor that can be put forward to explain such a sustained period of industrial peace in the twentieth century was the division of the workforce. From being represented by just one union for over 25 years, tinplaters in the late 1890s and early twentieth century were divided into six different unions. The division of the workforce into so many unions was a definite weakness, particularly from the workers' bargaining point of view. The mobilisation of tinplaters for an industrial dispute meant the cooperation of the different unions was necessary. Minchinton highlights that as late as 1914, J. H. Jones believed that 'the main difficulties [in collective bargaining] at present are created by the existence of more than one union in the trade.'[30] Having six unions meant that the organisation of workers to resist any attacks or to make a concerted effort to make gains was made incredibly difficult.

Despite such a range of unions to choose from, the two dominant unions – the Dockers' Union and the Steel Smelters' Union – made agreements with regards to representation. The Dockers' Union came to represent tinhouse, assorting and warehouse men; while the Steel Smelters' Union represented millmen, openers, picklers and annealers. This agreement thus formalised a split between those working in the mill and those working in the tinhouse. Although such a division was not always clear-cut, there were initially some millmen from the Swansea valley who were members of the Dockers' Union.[31]

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[29] *Llais Llafur*, 19 June 1909.
[30] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.128.
[31] D, W, R and GWU of GB and Ire, *Tenth Annual Report* 1899, 'The Tinplate Section' MRC:MSS.126/DWR/4/1/1.

Although formal agreements existed, there was a keen rivalry and suspicion between the unions. Minchinton commented that 'while the old generation of the trade union officials lasted, the unions continued to view each other with suspicion.'[32] This again weakened the tinplaters' cause as time and energy was spent on distractions of inter-union rivalry. This rivalry took several forms: from competing for members, verbal arguments and even open industrial conflict.

When the new union structure was established, one of the biggest changes in the running of the unions was the introduction of friendly society benefits. Each union had different levels of benefits and contributions appealing to tinplaters in different ways. The tables below show how benefits varied between the Steel Smelters' Union (for 1921), The Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association (for 1921),[33] and the Dockers' Union (for 1922).[34]

[32] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.128.
[33] Tin and Sheet Millmen and Confederation MRC:MSS.36.T12/19.
[34] Dockers' Union – D,W,R and GWU MRC:MSS.D22/13.

Benefit	Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association (1921)	Confederation[35] (1921)
Strike and Lockout Pay	17 shillings per week	24 shillings per week
Victim Benefit	30 shillings per week	40 shillings to 70 shillings per week
Sickness Benefit	Nil for 6 months	12 shillings 6d. per week
Accident Benefit	£50	£125
Superannuation Benefit	Nil	From 6 shillings to 10 shillings per week
Funeral Benefit	Member - £10; Wife - £5	Member - £26; Wife - £6; and children of married member up to 2 children - £5

Benefit	Dockers' Union (1922)
Dispute Pay	Full Member – 7 shillings 6d. per week; Half Member – 3 shillings 9d. per week
Out of Work Pay	Full Member – 5 Shillings per week for 8 weeks, total: £8 Half Member – 2 shillings 6d. per week for 8 weeks, total: £1
Permanent Disablement	Full Member – 350 Half Member - £25
Funeral Benefit	Full Member - £8; Full Members' Wife - £4 Half Member - £6; Half Members' Wife - £2

The keenest competition was between the Steel Smelters' Union and the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, who both represented millmen as their core tinplate members. Contributions and benefits were used as a means of attracting members. Minchinton notes that millmen who fell behind with their contributions left that union (most probably the Steel Smelters' Union) and joined the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association instead which had a lower level of contributions.[36] Such movements did occur in the Swansea valley, *Llais Llafur* reported in 1915 that members of the Steel

[35] Confederation – By this time the Steel Smelters' Union was part of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation.
[36] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.127.

Smelters' Union at the Glantawe branch were looking into transferring to the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association because of its lower rates of contributions.[37]

The Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association was smaller when compared with the Steel Smelters' Union and The Dockers' Union, and came in for many verbal attacks from the two main unions. Ben Tillett, in a dig at the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association at a meeting of the Conciliation Board in June 1899, commented that the men's representatives at the meeting should '...show that they were genuine representatives of the tinplate workmen.'[38]

This rivalry, at times, spilled over into open conflict between the unions. One of the most overt inter-union rivalries was in the Swansea valley at the Glanrhyd works, Pontardawe, in 1911. The inter-union dispute arose between the Steel Smelters' Union and the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, after members of the Steel Smelters' Union gave notice and refused to work unless twelve members of the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association enrolled in the Steel Smelters' Union. During the dispute John Hodge admitted 'that it was an unfortunate fact that there were so many unions in the trade that everyone was guilty of seeking to get members.'[39] The dispute between the two unions led to the Glanrhyd works being idle for over a fortnight.

The dispute was settled after it was considered by a committee appointed to the Trades Union Congress, the Labour Party and Federation of Trades Unions. The following was agreed at the meeting which settled the dispute:

1. That in any works ... neither society shall ... accept a member or members of the other society unless by mutual agreement.

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[37] *Llais Llafur*, 13 March 1915.
[38] *Cambrian*, 30 June 1899.
[39] *Llais Llafur*, 2 December 1911.

2. ... the society having not less than three-fourths majority at the date of this agreement shall be the controlling society and workmen starting in such works belonging to neither society shall join the controlling society.
3. The controlling society shall cooperate with the non-controlling society in protecting the interests of the members of both societies in respect of matters arising out of such members' employment ...[40]

The dispute at the Glanrhyd works was the last major inter-union dispute that erupted into open conflict. The Glanrhyd dispute was also a watershed for the unions and led to agreements between them to prevent such disputes occurring in the future. There is a history of attempts of amalgamation of the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association and the Steel Smelters' Union. John Hodge had suggested amalgamation of the two unions as early as 1901, but any moves towards amalgamation met with failure. A further attempt was made after the Glanrhyd dispute, but the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association voted against it. Opposition to amalgamation existed at rank and file level as well as at leadership level, for example 500 men at Pontardawe walked out of an amalgamation meeting in 1911.[41]

The Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association eventually amalgamated with, what was by then, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, in 1922. However, rivalry and suspicion did not end with the amalgamation, there were claims by the Confederation that the TGWU had been encouraging opposition to an amalgamation between the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association and the Confederation; and of also 'taking into

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[40] Memorandum of arrangement between the British Steel Smelters', Mill, Iron and Tinplate Workers' Association and The Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association made at a Joint meeting of representatives held at Ormond Mansions, Great Ormond Street, London on November 29, 1911 MRC:MSS.36.T12/1.
[41] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 2 October 1911; News Clipping from: Correspondence with and Material RE: W. Evans, E. C. Member MRC:MSS.36.EV.1.

membership recalcitrant members of the late Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association.'[42] Despite attempts to heal divisions between the unions, a sense of rivalry continued to exist.

Division amongst unions and workers also manifested themselves on the Conciliation Board. The divisions focused on splits between the tinhousemen and the millmen. Minchinton highlights that for a time, virtually two conciliation boards existed to deal with the mill and tinhouse respectively, but by 1905 one Conciliation Board dealt with all concerns. Minchinton also notes that there was no common policy between the unions and that, at times, the unions did not support each others' claims.[43]

The new union structure that appeared in 1899, at times, saw conflict and tension switch from between employee and employer to between unions. The suspicion and rivalry weakened the unions and widened the divisions of the workforce, as their respective unions became embroiled in competing with each other for members, and also lacked solidarity on the Conciliation Board. It was probably only the existence of the Conciliation Board which prevented the unions from even greater levels of rivalry, as the Board gave all of the unions a common focus and interest.

The tinplate industry, in the first decade of the twentieth century, was fortunate to experience an upturn in its economic situation. The industry came out of almost a decade of depression and happened to coincide with the new union structure and the Conciliation Board. The improving economic situation was a major boost to the union,

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[42] BISAKTA Papers (1) 1920-1930, 12 February 1923 MRC:MSS.36:B80/1-27; and Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association, 14 October 1922 MRC:MSS.36.T12/18; The Dockers' Union became part of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in 1922.
[43] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.135.

workers, masters and the Conciliation Board. The table below shows how the British tinplate trade steadily improved between 1898 and 1912:[44]

Year	Total Annual Exports of Tinplates: Value (£)
1898	2,744,077
1899	3,168,614
1900	3,967,796
1901	3,704,088
1902	4,333,166
1903	3,958,643
1904	4,595,568
1905	4,566,948
1906	4,936,868
1907	5,915,104
1908	5,480,075
1909	5,767,951
1910	6,545,024
1911	6,848,351
1912	6,833,292

From its lowest ebb in 1898, the value of British tinplate exports had doubled by 1908. The improved economic conditions meant that the masters were able to maintain profits and relieved of any pressures to cut back on production and wages. Employment in the industry rose from 16,000 in 1898 to between 28,000 and 29,000 in 1913.[45] In fact, the improving Welsh tinplate trade coincided with a decline in the American tinplate trade, and the tide of migration in the 1890s was reversed as tinplaters returned to Britain and South Wales.[46] Improvements in the economy also meant that the two pillars of the tinplate union movement, the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule, became feasible for

[44] J. R. Samuel, *A Short History of Tin and the Tinplate Trade* (Newport: The William Press Ltd., 1924), pp.59-60.
[45] Minchinton, *The British Tinplate Industry*, p.125.
[46] *Llais Llafur*, 17 February 1900.

workers and their unions to claim again. As mentioned earlier the List of 1874 was re-established in 1899. The unions were also able to remain on a stable economic footing during the pre-war period, as heavy financial burdens such as unemployment benefit and strike pay were reduced to a minimum as both unemployment and industrial disputes in the tinplate trade were reduced. The improved economic situation provided the tinplate trade with a level of stability which it was denied in the 1890s.

1899 marked a dramatic shift in industrial relations in the tinplate trade. The trade changed from workers being represented by one union, poor economic conditions, high unemployment and a perceived failure of the existing union structure to an industry with six different unions which had discipline and authority over their branches, improved economic conditions, the establishment of a Conciliation Board, and a period of industrial peace. Both Minchinton and Jenkins put forward the case that it was the Conciliation Board which was most important in maintaining industrial peace, and gaining improvements for tinplate workers. The Conciliation Board did help to maintain industrial peace in the twentieth century: it allowed industrial disputes to be solved through the board or arbitration before it escalated into a strike or lockout. Conciliation also allowed cooperation between master and union representatives to work together for the 'greater good'. A paradigm shift had occurred in the tinplate industry, as the trade moved away from industrial conflict towards industrial conciliation. The Conciliation Board also gave the numerous new unions a common focus to cooperate with each other, which acted as a counter-balance to the rivalry and suspicion between the unions.

However, the Conciliation Board cannot be viewed as operating in isolation as the guardian of industrial peace. The Conciliation Board only came into existence as a

result of the collapse of the Tinplate Workers' Union, which allowed union leaders such as Ben Tillett and John Hodge, both of whom had a belief in conciliation, to gain an influence over the tinplate industry and attempt to put their principles into action. The new unions also brought increased discipline to unionism in the industry, in particular, over the branches. Power had shifted from the branches to the union leaders and executives, who, in many ways, had a vested interest in the success of the conciliation programme as they were the instigators of, and driving force behind, the establishment of a Conciliation Board. The Board also gave the union leaders unprecedented power and influence over their members and the trade in general. It was therefore in the union leaderships' interests that the Conciliation Board was successful to prevent the unions becoming associated with failure and the loss of power and influence for the leaders. The union executives' authority over their respective branches meant that disputes were filtered away from confrontation and the workers towards conciliation and the union leadership. As such the unions became the main agents behind the Conciliation Board and thus industrial peace.

The unions, masters and Conciliation Board were also fortuitous with the improved economic conditions. The improving tinplate industry allowed the unions and the Conciliation Board to be associated with the success of re-establishing the List of 1874 for the long term.

By the cusp of the First World War, industrial relations and unionism in the tinplate industry were in stark contrast to 20 years previously. In a correspondence to the *Cambrian Daily Leader*, W. Evans of the Steel Smelters' Union commented: 'In your columns dated March 31st Mr. Gilbertson, of Pontardawe, is regarded to have said in

effect that "Tinplaters are conservatives in trade union policy, but progressive in their politics."'[47] Gilbertson's analysis of tinplate trade unionism is probably a good conclusion of the change in situation after 1899 which allowed industrial peace to reign.

[47] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, April 1915, News Clipping, Correspondence with and Material RE: W. Evans, E. C. Member MRC:MSS.36.EV1.

PART II:

NICKEL

Chapter 4:

Trade Unionism in the Mond Nickel Works, 1902-1926.

The Mond works in Clydach by the mid 1920s had become a bit of an anomaly in the Swansea valley, as the majority of workers were non-unionised.[1] This anomaly can be explained by considering several factors that set the Mond nickel workers on a different course of industrial relations from both the tinplate workers and the coal miners. The Mond workers did have a tradition of trade unionism, and Clydach as a whole was not unacquainted with radical ideas and individuals; Henry John commented: '... Clydach ... had a nucleus of a revolutionary type of person ... students of Marx ...'[2] But defeat in industrial disputes weakened the unions at the works while at the same time a paternalistic approach established by Ludwig Mond and continued by Sir Alfred Mond, provided the Mond workers with quality housing and social activities. Under the influence of both Ludwig and Alfred Mond, an approach based upon industrial cooperation between workers and managers developed. This created a situation where Mond workers would gain a voice in negotiations with management, as well as a form of profit sharing, which blurred the lines between the owners and producers of wealth. The nickel markets, despite a slump after the First World War, remained fairly stable; this allowed the Clydach refinery to expand steadily up to the First World War, and again from the mid 1920s onwards as new markets and uses for nickel were successfully sought. All of these factors combined to create a unique situation: where traditional

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[1] Interview with James Griffiths, Interviewed by Richard Lewis and Hywel Francis, 20/11/1972. SWML/SWCC: AUD/90, transcript p.12; and Ioan Matthews, 'World of the Anthracite Miner', (Cardiff: University of Wales Ph.D, 1995), p.347.

[2] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Interviewed by David Egan 1/12/1972, SWML/SWCC: AUD/220, Transcript p.15.

confrontational industrial relations roles were blurred and distorted, and resulted in a non-unionised workforce.

Despite non-unionism at the Mond works by the mid 1920s, this had not always been the case. At the earliest days of the start of production at the works, the Dockers' Union was present. A bitter industrial dispute at the works in the summer and autumn of 1902 saw the Mond workers represented by the Dockers' Union and the visitation of Ben Tillett to Clydach,[3] the first of several confrontations between Ben Tillett and the Mond family.[4] The presence of the Dockers' Union is not surprising. The collapse of the Tinplate Workers' Union of South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire in 1899 saw many tin workers (particularly those employed in the tin house) join the Dockers' Union. The Mond workers' location in a metallurgical industrial area where the Dockers' Union was strong, and the employment of experienced metal workers at the Mond works, made the Dockers' Union a natural and obvious choice for Mond workers who were seeking representation. There were other unions present at the works; the most prominent was the Workers' Union, which organized some of the workers in a dispute in the spring and early summer of 1922.

The opening months of the Mond works were dogged by delays, tragedy and industrial strife. The processes employed at the works and the equipment used were new and this caused delays in construction; in October and November 1902 there were several deaths of workmen from poisonous gases (carbonyl and carbon monoxide) that were used

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[3] *Cambrian*, 29 August 1902: the *Cambrian* reported the start of the dispute: 'About 75 men employed at the Mond Nickel Works Clydach ... have given seven days' notice ... They are all members of the Dockers' Union ...'

[4] Ben Tillett would be involved in a vicious electoral battle for the Swansea constituency in 1910 against Sir Alfred Mond.

in the refining processes at the works.[5] Further still, an industrial dispute erupted at the works in August 1902, after four workmen had been stopped from working at the refinery.[6] According to J. M. Cohen, a strike had never occurred at Brunner, Mond and Co. (another company involving Mond), the dispute at Clydach would present Mond with a situation that he had no previous experience dealing with.[7]

The dispute escalated rapidly: by the second week of September 1902, the men, under the representation of the Dockers' Union, were out on strike and extra police had been imported to Clydach, a move which caused bitter resentment and accusations from Mond workers and union officials of '... servile behaviour of the police in accepting the patronage and 'treating' of the Mond Nickel Co.'[8] S uch accusations only helped to intensify the dispute. Despite the union's attempts to engage in negotiations with the works' manager, Mr. F. J. Bloomer, Ludwig Mond and Carl Langer initially stayed aloof, preventing any agreements being made. The imposition of imported police and the initial detachment of Mond and Langer intensified the dispute making it far more confrontational.

Mond's conservative views and stubborn desire to maintain control over the works prevented the dispute from being resolved. Although he offered those on strike their places back, he refused to re-employ the men that the company had dismissed – which was the original cause of the dispute.[9] Mond's stance was made a clear in a letter to the *Cambrian* which read: '... we are responsible to our shareholders for the successful conduct of our works and the law of the land fastens upon us the responsibilities we

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[5] To prevent further accidents safeguards were implemented by Sir Alfred Mond.
[6] *Cambrian,* 29 August 1902.
[7] J. M. Cohen, *The Life of Ludwig Mond* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1956), p.230.
[8] *Cambrian*, 12 September 1902.
[9] *Cambrian*, 19 September 1902.

cannot devolve upon your union or any committee of our workmen ...'; Tillett replied that the men had been victimised because of their association with the Dockers' Union.[10]

The strikers did have support from other trade unionists in the area, a demonstration and mass meeting of the men on strike at Clydach saw representatives of colliers and tin workers present; although crucially the engineers at the works did not join the strike.[11] During the strike, Mond was keen to keep the works open, dealing another blow to the strikers and the effectiveness of the strike. Failing to recruit men locally, Mond brought in thirty-eight non-unionists from Manchester at the end of September. The non-unionists were brought in on a special and secret train direct to the works' siding; even the local railway authorities in Clydach were unaware of the train until its arrival.[12] The introduction of strike breakers from Manchester (many of whom were thought to be returning soldiers from South Africa), and the use of imported police, showed Mond's intention that he wanted either to break the strike or keep the works going with or without the union men.

The men on strike were confronted with a deadlock between the company directors and the union leaders who both refused to give way on the issue of the re-instatement of the discharged men. The arrival of strike breakers saw the union men take a more direct approach to fighting the dispute; the *Cambrian* reported a serious assault on three of the strike breakers not long after their arrival in Clydach.[13] These attacks on the strike breakers demonstrated a real desperation that was setting in amongst the strikers in an attempt to try and win the dispute. These attacks came to a head at the end of October

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[10] *Cambrian*, 26 September 1902.
[11] *Cambrian*, 26 September 1902.
[12] *Cambrian*, 3 October 1902.
[13] *Cambrian*, 3 October 1902.

when a crowd assembled to await the arrival of a train carrying non-unionist passengers at Glais station. While waiting for the train, the crowd began throwing stones at the police, who were waiting to escort the non-unionists to their home in Ynyspenllwch, near Clydach. This resulted in the police baton charging the crowd and injuring a number of protestors. Not long after, innocent people returning from Clydach to Glais were mistaken by the police as more protestors and were baton charged as well.[14] The action of the police was denounced by local councillors and arrangements were made to defend those who had been summoned to the Pontardawe Police Court for their part in the initial stone throwing.[15]

The culmination of the police baton charge on innocent people is a clear demonstration of the intensity that the dispute had locally. The strikers faced a company and management willing to go to considerable lengths to ensure a victory in favour of the company. Success for the strikers seemed very unlikely; as a result the union men turned their attention to a more tangible enemy and, working outside union parameters, attacked the non-union labourers.

The strikers of the Mond works had gambled on launching an industrial dispute in support of discharged men, and found themselves entangled in a bitter dispute and under siege from the company's management and directors, imported police and non-union labour. The locality certainly felt besieged: a resolution was moved locally '... against the action of the authorities who had brought imported police to the neighbourhood, an action wholly uncalled for and one which only tended to irritate and incite bitterness'.[16] Despite the escalation and bitterness of the strike, the company was left in a strong

[14] See *Cambrian,* 31 October 1902 for full report.
[15] *Cambrian,* 7 November 1902.
[16] *Cambrian,* 7 November 1902.

position. In November the strikers returned to work defeated, the men who had been discharged by the company – and sparked the dispute – did not return. The strikers who did return had to work alongside the non-union men. The company gained a huge psychological victory in its defeat of the union men in the works' first industrial dispute.

The defeat in the 1902 dispute was a big blow to unionism at the Mond works, particularly as the Dockers' Union at the time was one of the strongest unions in the locality, to the extent that Swansea and its surrounding district was considered a stronghold for the union. The owners and management made it clear that they were willing to go to considerable ends to maintain production and defeat any militant union or worker activity. The use of police, non-union labour and the failure to gain the support of the works' engineers placed the union men in a very weak position. Further, the fact that this defeat happened within a few months of the opening of the refinery set the tone for future industrial relations: when confronted with a strike, the Mond's owners and managers would adopt a confrontational approach and use all means available to them in order to defeat the militancy; J. M. Cohen commented of Ludwig Mond: 'At the end of his life he spoke of himself as a conservative... with political and economic agitation he had no sympathy.'[17]

The next significant dispute occurred at the refinery two decades later, in the spring of 1922. This was, however, a different kind of dispute. It did not originate at the Mond works; the dispute started amongst chemical workers in the region after employers demanded a reduction of three pence on top of reductions the previous year, amounting to a total of 20 shillings per week.[18] The chemical workers in the region were represented by

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[17] J. M. Cohen, *The Life of Ludwig Mond*, p.168.
[18] *Cambrian*, 24 February 1922.

the Dockers' Union and the General Workers' Union; however, members of the Workers' Union at the Mond refinery became involved in the dispute.

The strike at the Mond in 1922 was led by the Irish radical and poet Padraig O Mileadha,[19] he was a founder member of the Workers' Union, a member of the parish council and in 1922 he was on the strike committee.[20] The dispute's origins in the chemical industry in the region, rather than the workers at the Mond, has meant that very little information relating to the events of the dispute at the Mond exist, the newspaper reports do not mention the dispute at the Mond, instead they focus on the chemical workers. Some evidence can be found in the poetry of Padraig O Mileadha.[21] The use of poetry as a historical source in this context is problematic, but some details in the poetry can be corroborated through oral history. The dispute arose according to O Mileadha's poems *Three Irish Generations: The Third Generation: The Story Teller Abroad ... The Strike* after the workers asked for a change in rates of pay, which was refused by the management.[22] Although Roger Price, who compiled the history, claims the Mond works closed for three months because of the strike, there is little evidence of this; in fact, the *Cambrian* reports a fatality of a worker at the Mond works during the period of the strike.[23] It can thus be assumed that not all of the workers came out in support of this strike. Arthur Thomas, who worked at the Mond during the dispute, commented that less

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[19] Padraig O Mileadha was born in Ireland in 1877, but came to south Wales at the turn of the twentieth century and found work at the Mond works, Clydach.
[20] *South Wales Evening Post*, 26 July 2007.
[21] Padraig O Mileadha, *Tri Gluine Gaedheal* (*Three Irish Generations*) (Dublin, 1953), 'The Green Dragon', Number 4, Autumn 1997. Information provided by Cllr Ioan Richards and Gareth Davies (*South Wales Evening Post*), History compiled by Roger Price (Llanelli): Translations of poems by Wales Famine Forum.
[22] Padraig O Mileadha, *Three Irish Generations: The Third Generation: The Story Teller abroad ... The Strike*, information provided by Cllr Ioan Richards and Gareth Davies (*South Wales Evening Post*).
[23] *Cambrian*, 21 April 1922.

than half the men were in the union.[24] O Mileadha's poetry also claims that outside labour was used to try and break the strike, a repeat of the tactic used during the 1902 dispute:

> Anger reddened to the depths in the office of the bosses and they quickly thought of ways to break the workers. Their leaders assembled a wretched slovenly rabble who would get the machines working for profit again.[25]

As with the 1902 dispute, the 1922 strike ended in defeat for the Mond workers, a line from O Mileadha's poetry sums up the despondency: 'It failed ... when it comes to rich and poor it is the purse that wins the day.'[26] The end of the dispute saw the men return to work, but strike leaders such as Padraig O Mileadha and Padraig Suilleabhain, amongst others, were blacklisted and not permitted to return to work by the management of the works.[27] O Mileadha returned to Ireland in the summer of 1922. The low union membership, and defeat of the strike can be attributed to the high numbers of migrants from Ireland and London at the works. These migrants had few, if any, family roots or bonds with the community, and what links were made within the community were weak. These workers thus lacked the communal support during the dispute that can be found in mining communities during disputes for example.

Although a slightly less significant dispute than in 1902, that of 1922 does show the continuity in the dealing with industrial disputes at the works under the control of Ludwig Mond and Sir Alfred Mond, for example the use of outside labour and

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[24] Interview with Arthur Thomas, Interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 08/05/1977, Side A 32:08, WGAS:TH49A.
[25] Padraig O Mileadha, *The Strike.*
[26] Padraig O Mileadha, *The Strike.*
[27] Interview with Arthur Thomas, Interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 08/05/1977, Side A 32:08, WGAS:TH49A.

determination to win the dispute. Further, this dispute was the last gasp of trades unionism at the works for many years; the victimisation of strike leaders in the wake of another industrial defeat meant that the more militant workers' leaders were removed, which not only stood as an example to others, but put the final nail in the coffin of militant unionism at the works. 1922 was the last major industrial dispute at the works until the 1970s.[28]

Despite the owners' and management's stubbornness to defeat any strike at the Mond works, when industrial peace did prevail there was a very paternalistic approach from the works towards their employees. Leonard A. Toft, an employee at the works from the 1950s, described the treatment of staff as autocratic but very benevolent.[29] J. M. Cohen points out that Ludwig Mond's '...experiences as an employer had left him a passionate believer in reforms, but in reforms conferred from above, rather than seized from below ...'[30] This top-down approach does go some way to explain Ludwig Mond's reaction to strikes on the one hand and his paternalistic approach on the other.

An explanation for Ludwig Mond's paternalistic approach can be found in his upbringing. His mother in particular had a liberal outlook inspired by the values of the French Revolution which, through Napoleon's invasion and occupation of Europe, emancipated the Jewish communities, of which Mond's grandparents were a part. J. M. Cohen comments that when he was in university his mother encouraged him 'to find acquaintances with whom he could read and discuss Goethe, Lessing and even Friederich Engels ...' However, Cohen does go on to give another reason for Mond's paternalism:

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[28] David Harris (Glais) Collection of Memories, SWCC: MNA/PP/41/1.
[29] Interview with Leonard A. Toft, interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 30/03/1977, Side A 15:34, WGAS:TH50.
[30] J. M. Cohen, *The Life of Ludwig Mond*, p.162.

'...in a time when strikes were bitterly contested and often cruelly broken, he [Ludwig Mond] carefully cultivated goodwill and cooperation between master and man.'.[31]

The paternalism of the owners was evident not only at the works but in Clydach as a whole. A. C. Sturney saw Ludwig Mond as '... a pioneer in many steps which he took to ensure the well-being and contentment of his employees. At Clydach he instituted an eight hour day ... and within a year or two he began building of a model village ...'[32] Ludwig Mond bought fifty acres of land for the purpose of building housing for all the employees of the company.[33] The area of Clydach built by Mond became the 'suburb' of Sunnybank, the housing was of such quality that they are all still standing and inhabited to this day. In some ways Ludwig Mond a pioneer in his paternalism, A. C. Sturney claims that 'The Company was the first in Great Britain to introduce holidays with pay for weekly paid workers.'[34] Although there was a catch: Arthur Thomas commented that the workers had to work a fortnight of twelve hour shifts to get that one week.[35] Wages were relatively high: Henry John stated that during the First World War he earned 30 shillings a week at the Mond; another employee of the works.[36] By using A.L. Bowley's *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom Since 1860*, it is possible to place Henry John's weekly wages in some kind of context. Bowley has compiled a table showing 'Estimated Adult Men's wages for a full normal week, United Kingdom', as follows for

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[31] Ibid., p.20 and p.159.
[32] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel* (Plaistow: Curwen Press, 1951), p.28.
[33] *The Mond Nickel Works Ltd.*, (1918) WGAS, D247/1, p.72.
[34] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel*, p.28.
[35] Interview with Arthur Thomas, Side A 10:23, WGAS:TH49A.
[36] Interview with Henry John , Abercrave, Interviewed by David Egan, 1/12/1972, Transcript p.6, SWML/SWCC: AUD/220.

1914:[37]

	1914
Lower decile	21s. 0d.
Lower quartile	25s. 2d.
Median	31s. 6d.
Upper quartile	39s. 4d.
Highest decile	47s. 0d.

However, Henry John does not state what skill level his weekly wages were based on or when, during the First World War, he received these wages. Bowley states that average weekly earnings for men together increased by 90.6 per cent between 1914 and 1924.[38] As such, more detail of Henry John's work and a specific date would give a clearer indication of wage levels in comparison to national averages. Arthur Thomas commented that in 1921, day workers were earning £2. 9s. 6d. and shift workers £3 weekly. He also notes that the works had a pension scheme.[39]

However, Ludwig Mond's paternalism went beyond the immediate needs and conditions in the workplace, also to encompass social and leisure activities as well. The *Labour Voice* highlighted some of the welfare opportunities for Mond employees, which included: a fully equipped recreation hall, billiards, library and reading room, photography society, a military band, orchestra, male voice choral society, football club,

[37] A.L. Bowley, *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom Since 1860* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1937), p.46. Bowley 'gives an indication of the type of man who represented the median and quartile families of the United Kingdom' for 1914 as: Lower decile – bottom of unskilled, Lower quartile – top of unskilled, Median – Top of semi-skilled, and Upper quartile – skilled.
[38] A. L. Bowley, *Wages and Income in the United Kingdom Since 1860*, p.17.
[39] Interview with Arthur Thomas, Interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 08/05/1977, Side A, 17:20 and 18:11, WGAS:TH49A.

ambulance brigade and an office concert party. All of these activities were attended by both the workers and the management.[40] Other provisions for welfare and leisure included a recreation ground, hockey, gardening and hurling (a possible link to the Irish amongst the workforce).[41]

The forward thinking employment conditions at the Mond, such as paid holidays and an eight hour day, certainly removed many of the grievances that workers in other industries were fighting for. The social and leisure activities also allowed workplace barriers, such as those that existed between worker and manager, to be broken down, as both management and workers interacted and mixed with each other at the many activities provided by the works. Further, the fact that these activities and conditions of work were provided by a top-down approach – by the owners and managers – rather than being achieved and won through a bottom-up approach organized by the workers through strike committees and the unions meant that, firstly the owners and management were able to keep a degree of control over their workforce; and secondly the workers identified with the Mond works as more than a place of work, but as a place for opportunities for leisure and social activities during their spare time. Comparisons can be made with the Newport confectioners Lovells.[42] This top-down approach limited the opportunities of developing independent working-class social, leisure and educational activities, as can be found amongst other workers, for example in the mining industry.

Sir Alfred Mond took over the chairmanship of the Mond works before Ludwig Mond's death in December 1909. Sir Alfred Mond's approach was very much built upon

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[40] *Labour Voice*, 7 February 1925.
[41] *The Mond Nickel Works Ltd.*, p.74.
[42] See Ian Pincombe, 'Out of Rexville: G. F. Lovell and the South Wales Confectionery Industry, *c.*1830-c.1940' (Cardiff: University of Wales Ph.D, 1999).

the foundations laid down by his father's ideas of paternalism and industrial cooperation. However, in many respects Sir Alfred Mond and his liberal outlook took the progressive nature of the works several leaps further during the First World War and during the 1920s. Sir Alfred Mond viewed the working classes as very much like children; who are impressed by someone who is decisive and forceful.[43] This view can help to explain the continued emphasis on a top-down approach.

The leisure and social institutions set up by Ludwig Mond for the employees of the Mond were maintained by Sir Alfred Mond, and there was also a modification of the philanthropic approach of the works, which saw the paternalistic nature of the works develop to a more industrial cooperation-based approach. Between 1914 and 1918 the workforce at the works trebled, yet the works managed to avoid any serious industrial dispute; A. C. Sturney very favourably explained this by '... the exercise of generosity, patience and understanding on the part of the board; and by the utmost wisdom and unselfish devotion to duty on the part of those concerned with the day-to-day managements.'[44] This 'wisdom' and 'generosity' culminated during the First World War in the setting up of a works council.[45] This allowed any grievances between the workers and management to be discussed, preventing any resentment or problems that could spark a dispute, to be allowed to grow and fester. This was a huge leap in the ethos of industrial cooperation at the works. In some respects, the works council was a social and industrial experiment; A. C. Sturney comments: '... there were very few, if any, organizations of

[43] Letter to David Lloyd George, 15 September 1915, referenced in Hector Bolitho, *Alfred Mond First Lord Melchett* (London: Martin Secker Ltd., 1939), p.315.
[44] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel*, p.33.
[45] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel*, p.33.

this kind [works councils] in existence at that time.'[46] This was a significant development in industrial relations at the Mond works; it effectively removed the need for an outside agency, such as a trade union or an arbitration board, to operate within the works. The ability of the workers' representatives to discuss problems directly with members of the board undermined the role of trade unions at the works. The unions were effectively by-passed.

A further development in the application of the theory of industrial cooperation which came very much from the philosophy of Sir Alfred Mond, was the introduction of a co-partnership, profit sharing and bonus on reduction of costs scheme at the Mond Works, which was first implemented in 1925 (see Appendix E). Sir Alfred Mond was so confident about the potential and success of the scheme that he included it as an example in his book which promoted industrial cooperation: *Industry and Politics.*[47] The aim of the scheme was to help reduce costs below a set standard rate, with the savings invested in a general account. The scheme benefited both ends of the industrial spectrum: the workers would have a share in the wealth that they had created, while the management and directors hoped for a reduction in industrial tension and disputes, and lowering of costs. Sir Alfred Mond himself commented: 'There can be no doubt then, given a financial incentive, the workers will co-operate with the management in securing appreciable reductions in working costs.'[48] The ultimate aim of the scheme was to implement Sir Alfred Mond's vision of ideology of industrial cooperation, and to expand the welfare provisions for the works' employees, to include an economic provision.

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[46] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel*, p.33.
[47] Alfred Mond, *Industry and Politics* (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1927), p.116.
[48] Alfred Mond, *Industry and Politics*, p.123.

This scheme, along with the works council, was indicative of an extremely progressive approach taken by the directors and management. Although these schemes were implemented from the top down, they were extremely effective in pacifying the employees, by simply giving the employees a financial incentive and a share of the wealth that they had created. It is important to point out that all employees (including management and office staff) were eligible for the financial incentives. The works council and the financial incentive scheme did allow the workers to gain some emancipation from the capitalist system that existed outside the works, and led to a blurring of the lines between the producers and owners of wealth, as the workers now had an interest in both camps. Alfred Mond himself enthused: 'The scheme has been very successful ... These workers are in effect in the position of cumulative participating preference shareholders ...'[49] The incentive scheme also helped to create a more equitable system, as everyone, including management, had a common interest in the scheme.

The Mond Refinery in Clydach enjoyed relative economic stability, this helped to prevent common grievances amongst the workers, for example disputes caused by resistance to wage and job cuts. In 1902 annual production was at 0.9m lbs, the years leading up to the First World War were years of growth and prosperity for the Mond, by 1914 the annual capacity was slightly less than 7m lbs of primary nickel.[50] The prosperity of the refinery was built upon the increasing popularity of nickel-bearing pellets, which were produced at the works and used in the steel and non-ferrous alloy industries.[51] The expansion in production meant an expansion in the workforce; the most rapid growth

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[49] Alfred Mond, *Industry and Politics*, p.120.
[50] Centennial Committee, Chairman Raymond Jones, *100 Years of Producing Nickel* (Clydach Nickel Refinery Commemorative Book, 2002), pp.8-9.
[51] Ibid, p.8.

came during the First World War, when the workforce of 850 in 1914 was trebled. The rapid growth during the war was due to the requirement of nickel for the war effort and armaments.

The stable expansion of the nickel industry in Clydach developed in tandem with the expanding welfare provisions that were provided by the works before and during the First World War helped to shelter the nickel workers from any economic downturn. Simply providing the employees with a stable job, regular income, and a welfare programme that included housing and social activities, gave the Mond workers few areas in which they would have grievance. However, the hard and dangerous working conditions at the works must be taken into account here to prevent a 'rose tinted' view of the Mond works.

The initial years after the war, however, were in stark contrast to the expansion in the pre-war years. The heavy reliance of the works on the armaments market (a market that had been a large customer before, as well as during the war) made the works vulnerable once the peace had been made. The collapse of the armaments market with the end of the war and the de-armament of the great powers in the initial years after the war resulted in the Mond losing its largest market. This was compounded by the fact that so much expansion had been built upon this market during the war. The immediate response of the company was to reduce output in both Britain and Canada,[52] with the result that workers were forced to find alternative employment.

The economic impact that this had on the works, and Clydach, was disastrous. The early 1920s was a period of high unemployment in the village, which was made worse by the cut backs at the Mond. In March 1922, Clydach had an unemployment level

[52] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel*, p.36.

of one thousand: this was due in part to the idleness of the Graigola Merthyr Colliery, Clydach; the Graig Colliery, Trebanos; the expected closure of Players and Sons' Tinplate Works and the reduced numbers working at the Mond, some men had been unemployed for up to eighteen months.[53]

The high level of unemployment and distress in Clydach in the early 1920s, and in particular in 1922 can be put forward as a reason for the failure of the 1922 strike at the Mond Works. With the village heavily in depression the high level of unemployment this would have been a strong disincentive to other Mond workers from joining the strike. Arthur Thomas commented that in the early 1920s, there used to be at least fifty unemployed men outside the works waiting for the manager asking for jobs.[54] Secondly, a large number of men would have been available as non-union labour for the works. The use of strike breakers was referred to by Padraig O Mileadha in his poetry of the dispute.[55] No evidence can be found to clarify whether the blacklegs used during the 1922 dispute were from within the locality or from further afield.

The economic fortunes of Clydach and the Mond works started to change by the mid 1920s. This change in fortune was due to the role of the directors and management at the works who put a great deal of effort into seeking out new markets and uses for Mond Nickel. This was firstly achieved from the gradual increase in demand from steel makers when the motorcar and other industries started to recover. Secondly, the management encouraged the replacement of nickel coinage that had been used for munitions during the war. This policy was extremely successful with nine different countries issuing new

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[53] *Cambrian*, 20 March 1922, and 1 May 1922. The population for the parish of Rhyndwyclydach in the 1921 Census was as follows: males – 4027 and females – 4160. Extracts from the 1921 Census , Swansea Reference Library, B7.19.
[54] Interview with Arthur Thomas, Interviewed by B. C. Fagg, 08/05/1977, Side A 16:40, WGAS:TH49A.
[55] Padraig O Mileadha, *The Strike.*

nickel coins with five years of the end of the war.[56] These efforts dragged the Mond out of the post-war depression.

The relative long-term security of the nickel industry in Clydach created an environment that allowed workers to be able to rely on regular wages, the flourishing of welfare and leisure activities and the implementation of industrial cooperation. In the years between the 1902 dispute and the First World War, the economic expansion of the Mond helped to remove any confrontation that would have arisen out of any insecurity surrounding wages and jobs. The union thus had its role limited: it was not required to step in to oppose wage cuts on a regular basis, and the relatively good wages of the Mond meant that wage demands were kept to a minimum. The expansion in the welfare provisions provided by the works coincided with the economic expansion in the years leading up to 1914, for example, the completion of the concert hall and club in January 1909 at a cost of £4000.[57] The successful and buoyant economic position of the industry thus produced some tangible benefits for the workers of the Mond.

By contrast, the difficult conditions faced by the Mond works in the early 1920s coincided with wider economic depression in Clydach within the local coal and tin industries. This had the effect of nullifying the union's strength at the works, in this case the Workers' Union in 1922. The fear of unemployment during a period of unemployment and depression helped limit the impact of the strike.

The creation of new markets by the mid 1920s and the emergence of the Mond works from its economic depression and allowed the works to implement a profit share incentive scheme. The relative stability of the nickel trade is best highlighted when

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[56] A. C. Sturney, *The Story of Mond Nickel*, p.36.
[57] Centennial Committee, Chairman Raymond Jones, *100 Years of Producing Nickel*, p.8.

compared to the tinplate and coal industries, particularly during the 1926 miners' lock-out. By the autumn of that year the tinplate industry had been laid idle by the coal dispute, while the colliers were facing poverty, distress and defeat in the lockout. However, the Mond works was able to remain open until October 1926, at which point the works closed owing to the lack of good quality coal and the nickel workers received ten shillings a week each from the company, and if they wished, could also draw their accumulated profits in connection with the works' profit sharing scheme.[58] While the coal and tinplate industries and workers were suffering from the effects of industrial confrontation, the non-unionised nickel workers were able to reap some of the fruits of their profit share scheme. In the Swansea Valley in 1926, it certainly appeared, on the surface anyway, to be beneficial to take part in industrial cooperation rather than confrontation.

The union movement, within the nickel industry in the Swansea valley, operated in many ways in what can be described as a different and unique paradigm from the other industries, not only in the locality, but also the wider region and south Wales. The union movement came up against a combination of circumstances that did not exist in other industries – brutal defeats in industrial disputes, a paternalistic management, directors and owners who in many ways turned the works into a social experiment by implementing a philosophy of industrial co-operation at various levels; for example, housing, social, leisure and welfare activities, good working conditions, the sharing of wealth and a favourable economic environment that allowed expansion and stability.

The industrial defeat, just weeks after the opening of the works, set the tone for how industrial disputes and conflict would be managed by the owners of the works. The

[58] *Labour Voice*, 23 October 1926.

escalation of the dispute, and the willingness of the directors to pay for imported blackleg labour from outside the locality at the expense of the company, put the men's union – the Dockers' Union – in an almost untenable position to sustain the strike. Previous disputes in the metal industries in the Swansea valley area, in industries such as tinplate, had not prepared the union for the response to the dispute that the management and owners at the Mond gave it. It was a huge psychological defeat for the workers, as a chance to assert the union's power in the early days of the nickel industry in the valley had failed in a bitter, and at times, violent dispute.

Likewise, the failure of the Workers' Union at the works to succeed in a dispute in 1922 again re-iterated the point that in industrial disputes the management was willing to go to extreme lengths to achieve a defeat upon the unions, by turning to blackleg labour. The main gains that the workers had while employed at the Mond: paid holidays, a living wage, eight hour shifts, affordable good quality housing and social and welfare provisions, such as a social club, sports teams and library, were all implemented from above by the management and directors of the company for the workers. It can be argued that the union was identified with failure and defeat during industrial disputes, while the company provided a progressive approach to its employees during industrial peace.

The role of the unions within the works was made even more difficult by the industrial cooperation philosophy adopted by the directors and owners, in particular Sir Alfred Mond. The works committee established during the First World War allowed the workers to by-pass the union, and discuss grievances directly with the management and directors. This removed one of the fundamental roles of a trade union – to act as the representative of the workers and engage with management on the workers' behalf to

discuss any unrest and grievance. While the union's role was under attack by the industrial cooperation philosophy of the works, the union's ideological role also came under attack. Sir Alfred Mond was an ardent opponent of socialism, in his book *Industry and Politics* he dedicated two chapters to the subject: 'Socialism: What It Really Is' and 'Why Socialism Must Fail',[59] where he attacked socialism in favour of industrial co-operation. The implementation of the profit share scheme and cost reduction scheme at the works further distorted the philosophy of the union as it blurred the socialist outlook of many union leaders and rank and file members in South Wales – the battle between the producers and owners of wealth. The profit share scheme allowed the proletarian workers to have a share in the wealth that they had created and thus a vested interest in the ownership of wealth. This nullified, and to some extent, removed any agitation arising from socialist ideology and theory.

The philanthropic approach of the management was built upon what was a relatively stable economic position. From its opening in 1902 throughout the following years to 1918 was a period of stability and expansion. The economic growth allowed welfare provisions to be provided by the works. The welfare provisions, such as sports teams, hobby and social clubs, and a library and institute which were provided by the works, allowed social mixing between managers and workers. This was only possible as the welfare provisions were provided for by the works and not the union, as was the case in the coal industry. The workers therefore looked to the company for recreation and not the union or independent working-class institutions.

The workers at the Mond were class conscious and they were unionised for a period. But the almost unique circumstances that existed at the Mond works helped to

[59] See Alfred Mond, *Industry and Politics*, Chapters 20 and 21.

remove the main grievances that dogged other industries – wages, hours of work, conditions of work and class confrontation. The Mond works was also relatively small; it was not part of a wider nickel industry in south Wales, and it was rarely dragged into any regional or national dispute – although this was the case with the 1922 dispute. The workers at the Mond cannot be branded as unconscious workers or not politically aware. The underlying factor is that these workers were working in a unique and at times an experimental, forward-thinking and progressive environment, with circumstances that were not encountered widely outside the Mond works.

PART III:

COAL

Chapter 5:

Influences on Trade Unionism in the Swansea Valley Coal Industry

Swansea valley colliers were involved in early trade unionism in the nineteenth century. In 1873, there was a Swansea valley district of the Amalgamated Association of Miners, with an estimated membership of 2,150.[1] The two organisations that covered the Swansea valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth century were the Neath, Swansea and Llanelly Miners' Association, and the Anthracite Miners' Defence Society. The Neath, Swansea and Llanelly Miners' Association, which reached a peak membership of 4,700 in 1891,[2] was led by Isaac Evans, who disliked the sliding scale and refused to sign the agreement of 1893. Members of the Association stopped paying the levy that financed the Sliding Scale Committee.[3] The Anthracite Miners' Defence Society was established in 1889-90, and by 1893 had a membership of 3,000.[4]

However, there is evidence to suggest that the Swansea valley miners were reluctant to be drawn into, or support miners, in disputes in other areas of the South Wales Coalfield. For example, when 1,500 Rhondda and Neath district colliers marched to the Swansea valley in August 1893 to gain support and 'induce working colliers to come out', collieries in Birchgrove and Clydach continued to work despite the use of threats from the marchers. When the march continued to Morriston a 'scuffle' was reported to have broken out.[5]

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[1] P. S. Thomas, 'Industrial Relations' in *Social and Economic Survey of Swansea and District,* Pamphlet Number 3 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1940), p.39.
[2] E. W. Evans, *The Miners of South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961), p.134.
[3] Evans, *The Miners of South Wales*, p.155.
[4] Evans, *The Miners of South Wales*, p.136.
[5] *Cambrian*, 25 August 1893.

It was not until the founding of the SWMF in 1898 that the Swansea valley established stronger bonds with other parts of the coalfield. Under the SWMF, the Swansea valley was divided into two districts: the Anthracite District and Western District. The Anthracite District covered the upper Swansea valley, while the Western District covered the lower valley where semi-anthracite and dry steam coal was mined.

The historiography of trade unionism in the coal industry is wide and varied. Ioan Matthews' regional study of the Anthracite Coalfield makes many references to the Swansea valley.[6] Matthews' main conclusions focus on the miners' use of the Welsh language and the importance of kinship bonds, as well as their determination to protect local customs, all of which influenced the development of trade unionism in the Anthracite Coalfield. Likewise, Gilbert highlights the importance of community in the South Wales Coalfield, and the elements found in the community that determined the characteristics of trade unionism, such as kinship bonds, geography and religion.[7] Francis and Smith's *The Fed*,[8] assesses the SWMF's place in the mining community, concluding that the union went beyond trade disputes to take on roles and responsibilities in the wider community.

There are several factors that influenced mining trade unionism in the Swansea valley, including the geography of the valley, the social dynamics and demography of the communities, politics, education and religion. The mining trade unionists were also advocates and supporters of the various Trades and Labour Councils in the valley, and by

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[6] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', (Cardiff: University of Wales Ph.D, 1995).
[7] David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[8] Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).

the 1920s miners took a leading role in the Trade and Labour Councils and colliery branches became the backbone of the membership.

Trade unionism in the Swansea valley was heavily influenced by the location of the collieries, colliery settlements and the economics of coal in the valley. The late development of coal combines in the Anthracite District allowed small, village collieries to continue to exist in the valley. This meant that the surrounding settlements of the collieries and their bonds of kinship had a great influence on the solidarity of miners and the strength of unionism in the valley.

Gilbert sees the link between village and pit as reinforcing familiarity amongst the miners,[9] while Matthews commented that villages had a relatively small number of large extended families which reinforced ties of kinship in the village.[10] Some collieries in the Swansea valley, particularly in the smaller villages of the valley such as Cwmtwrch, Cwmllynfell and Rhiwfawr, drew their workforce from the surrounding villages. This strengthened fraternal bonds with bonds of friendship. The collieries in Cwmtwrch and Cwmllynfell operated a custom where a job in the colliery was dependent on your family background. An unidentified collier explains how you could not get work in the Brynhenllys Colliery, in Cwmtwrch, unless you were from Cwmtwrch, as jobs were given to members of existing colliers' families first. This is supported by Will Rees, from Cwmtwrch, who commented that at the Brynhenllys Colliery: '... we make room for our own family first.'[11] This method of control was further reinforced by an emphasis on the Welsh language. The unidentified collier describes further that an Englishman, or even an

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[9] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.63.
[10] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', *Llafur*, Vol. 6, Number 1 (1992), p.98.
[11] Interview with Will Rees, Cwmtwrch, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 26/04/1974, Transcript p.4 SWML:AUD/259.

English-speaking Welshman, could not get a job.[12] This supports Gilbert's conclusion that the Welsh language reinforced the social order in mining communities.[13] The importance of the language can be explained by the fact that according to the census of 1911, in Pontardawe and Ystradgynlais Rural Districts over 80 per cent of the population spoke Welsh.[14] The language of the pits was very much Welsh, and anyone not being able to speak the language would have been at a distinct disadvantage.

Family and village ties were even transferred to the lodge. Where a colliery had workers from more than one village, then the village which had the majority at the colliery would control the lodge. Will Rees recounted that at the Brynhenllys Colliery, more workers came from the village of Cwmtwrch than the village of Cwmllynfell. As a result, Cwmtwrch workers were in a majority and therefore held the official positions.[15]

The ties of kinship and parochialism ensured the protection of customs at the colliery and strengthened the union. At these village collieries, miners were working with members of their own families, as well as their immediate neighbours. While in the larger settlements, such as Abercrave, bonds were built up between lodgers. Dick Beamish described that single men in lodgings, in many cases, were two or three to a bed because of a lack of space.[16]

The mining communities therefore had several structures in place to police themselves. Any failure in industrial solidarity amongst the miners could have been plugged by the solidarity of bonds with family and lodgers. These communities helped to

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[12] Extracts from interviews in Onllwyn and Cwmtwrch, Tape 1, 12:00 and 12:51, SWML:AUD/96.
[13] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.67.
[14] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', *Llafur*, p.99.
[15] Interview with Will Rees, Cwmtwrch, Transcript p2 SWML:AUD/259.
[16] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Tape 1 Side A 31:30 SWML:AUD/388.

foster a different kind of solidarity amongst union members which was based not only upon socialism and comradeship, but also on kinship and community.

Other methods were also used by lodges in the valley to protect the union by controlling who was joining the colliery. The Clydach Merthyr Lodge proposed at the Western Miners' Association that all workmen who were members of a lodge at a previous colliery should not be allowed to join another lodge until all contributions were up to date. This was taken further with another proposal from the same colliery, that £5 should be charged as an entrance fee to all those who wanted to join the union, but had no previous experience of working in a colliery.[17] At a vote there was a majority in favour of the motion. However, £5 was a huge amount, and there is no evidence to suggest that it was actually implemented.

In single industry mining communities, such as Abercrave, the union took on further roles beyond its immediate responsibility to the miners and involved itself in the wider community. In August 1915 discontent developed between the indigenous Welsh and Spanish communities in Abercrave. This discontent focussed mainly round the Spanish drinking and gambling on Sundays and in addition it was felt that the places of local colliers, who were fighting in the war, were being taken by foreigners.[18] Anger reached such a point that a meeting of workers in Abercrave resolved to urge the Home Office to take action and, if that failed, a general stoppage was threatened.[19] In an attempt to resolve the problem, the collieries of Abercrave sent a deputation to the Anthracite District monthly meeting to try to use the influence of the union to adopt a course and

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[17] *Llais Llafur,* 14 July 1900.
[18] *Llais Llafur*, 21 August 1915; Interview with Dai Dan Evans, Abercrave, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, Tape 1, Side A, 5:09 SWML:AUD/263; Interview with Rhys Watkins, Abercrave, Interviewed by Alun Morgan, 13/12/1972, Transcript p.1 SWML:AUD/206.
[19] *Llais Llafur*, 28 August 1915.

measures to prevent the employment of more foreigners.[20] This demonstrates the union's versatility in not only dealing with problems relating directly to mining, but also with indirect problems that were affecting the colliery and wider community.

There were several relatively large collieries in the valley such as: Tareni and Gleison, Tirbach, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Maerdy Pit, Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen East Pit and Clydach Merthyr, all of which employed over five hundred men in 1926. The majority of collieries, however, were small concerns based in or around a mining village. The average number employed in a Swansea valley colliery in 1926 was 219. If the five larger collieries listed above are not counted, then the average drops to only 160.[21] Some collieries were exceptionally small, for example the Rhiw Colliery, in Rhiwfawr, employed only 21 men in 1926.[22] The smaller the colliery the greater chance of local customs remaining important, and an emphasis on ensuring jobs for family and local residents at collieries continued to exist well into the twentieth century.

The smaller colliery was usually owned locally. Hywel Francis has commented that the owner of the anthracite colliery was known by his employees, had a shared childhood with some of them and attended community organizations, such as the chapel.[23] Ioan Matthews has also highlighted owners who lived locally in the Swansea valley, for example: Owen Powell (Brynhenllys), D. W. Davies (Pwllbach) and the Davies and Morgan families (Abercrave).[24] In an interview, Rees Brynmor Davies

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[20] *Llais Llafur*, 4 September 1915.
[21] See *Colliery Year Book and Coal Trade Directory 1926* (London: The Louis Cassier Company Ltd., 1926).
[22] *Colliery Year Book and Coal Trade Directory 1926*, p.253.
[23] Hywel Francis, 'The Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', *Llafur*, Vol. 1, Number 2 (1973), p.54.
[24] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.44.

commented that the owners '... were living in the midst, in the area...'[25] However, Gilbert's assertion that Non-Conformity in south Wales was independent of the colliery companies cannot be applied fully to the Swansea valley. Dick Beamish noted that, in Abercrave, the local coal owners attended the local chapel.[26]

This situation meant that colliers in the Swansea valley had greater contact with the local coalowners and managers than in the central valleys of the South Wales Coalfield. This could have two results: for the smaller collieries this meant a greater affiliation with their employees, while for the larger collieries it allowed a more tangible polarisation of society between those who owned the colliery and those employed at the colliery. Rees Brynmor Davies explained that the owners in Abercrave expected respect from the 'ordinary people' and they expected to be regarded in the community as the 'king pins'.[27]

By far the greatest influence on union customs in the Swansea valley coal industry, as with the rest of the Anthracite District, was the Seniority Rule. The Seniority Rule originated in the early days of anthracite mining. During the summer months when the anthracite market quietened down, the miners sought work in the steam coal areas of the coalfield. When trade picked up, the miners returned to the anthracite area to work at their places which were protected by seniority. Seniority was based on the date when a miner was first employed by the colliery. On this basis, the anthracite miner was also protected, as any redundancies or sackings were carried out on seniority – essentially last

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[25] Interview with Rees Brynmor Davies, Ynyswen Abercrave, Interviewed by Alun Morgan, 13/12/1972, Transcript p.6 SWML:AUD/207.
[26] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, , Tape 3, Side 2, 0:55 SWML:AUD/388.
[27] Interview with Rees Brynmor Davies, Abercrave, Interviewed by Alun Morgan, 13/12/1972, Transcript p.6 SWML:AUD/207.

in, first out. Likewise, when hiring took place, for example after a dispute or a temporary closure of the colliery, it was done on seniority.

Seniority was actively practiced and defended in the Anthracite District, including the Swansea valley, most notably during the Anthracite Strike of 1925.[28] A prelude to the Anthracite Strike of 1925, was a smaller dispute at the Tareni and Gleison Collieries in August 1921. The men at these collieries came out on strike because of the management's refusal to carry out the Seniority Rule while re-employing the men. Despite the matter being passed on to the Anthracite Miners' Association, the dispute did not escalate beyond the two collieries where the dispute originated. This was more than likely due to the recent 1921 lock-out. By November, the dispute was settled with victory for the miners, thus safeguarding the Seniority Rule at these collieries.[29] This dispute demonstrates the importance ascribed to the Seniority Rule by the anthracite and Swansea valley miners.

The influence the Seniority Rule had over unionism in the valley is described by Dai Dan Evans:

> The difference between the leader and the ordinary rank and file in the anthracite area is much less than in the steam coal ... In the anthracite area, if you wanted to dismiss a man who was a bit of a 'troublemaker', they would have to take possibly a hundred men out before him (because of the Seniority Rule) ... (consequently) you see you had lambs roaring like lions in the anthracite, and

[28] See chapter 6.
[29] See *Labour Voice*: 3, 24 September, 1 October, 19 November 1921.

> they had to be a lion to bloody well roar like a lion in the steam coalfield.[30]

The Seniority Rule protected the more militant union members from victimisation by the colliery owners and management. As a result the union maintained its leadership and radical influence over the rank and file. The importance, in this case, was made very apparent after the defeat of the miners in the 1926 lock-out.

Seniority also gave the lodges extra power over the colliery and miners. Will Rees described that in some collieries in the valley, at the end of a dispute, it was the lodge and not the management who decided who could go back to work:

> The lodge, they were deciding [who would go back to work], the management would give the lodge the number of colliers they would want back ...[31]

Although essentially a mining custom and one restricted to the Anthracite District, there is evidence of seniority operating outside the anthracite area of the Swansea valley, and outside the mining industry. In March 1907 the *Cambrian* reported that at Moody's Colliery, a house coal colliery in Clydach, men were seeking permission to tender notice as the management were ignoring the custom that promotions were made according to seniority.[32] However, it cannot be ascertained whether the seniority custom used at Moody's Colliery was the same as the Seniority Rule used in the Anthracite District. There is a greater similarity in another example, this time at the Clydach Merthyr Colliery. When the colliery restarted in July 1921, the lodge committee stated

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[30] Dai Dan Evans, Abercrave, in Hywel Francis, 'The Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', p.54.
[31] Interview with Will Rees, Cwmtwrch, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 26/04/1974, Transcript p.7 SWML:AUD/259.
[32] *Cambrian*, 1 March 1907.

that the men should be restarted by seniority.[33] The Clydach collieries' close proximity to the anthracite collieries further up the valley could implythat the custom of seniority leaked into collieries outside of the Anthracite coalfield. Similarly, Dick Cook, a tinplate worker from Ystradgynlais, commented that while working at the Ynyscedwyn Tin Works, he lost his job at the end of the First World War, as men returning from the army were '... claiming seniority ... claiming their jobs.'[34] However, this claim of seniority was more than likely to have been a temporary measure to protect the jobs of those who went to fight in the war.

The Swansea valley during the first quarter of the twentieth century developed an eclectic mix of radical and revolutionary politics. The development of political thought can be divided into two periods: before the First World War, when some revolutionary and radical informal political thinking and literature was present in the valley. By the 1920s a shift towards representative politics and the Labour Party had occurred, particularly at local government level.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) had been established in the valley. The dominance and influence of the ILP can in some ways be ascribed to the Rev. T. E. Nicholas or Nicholas y Glais as he was also known. He was appointed minister of Capel Sion in Glais in 1904. His sermons and lectures were used to promote the ILP, and were well received by the miners in Glais.[35] It was Nicholas who set up the Glais ILP branch in 1906. But the influence of Nicholas through the ILP stretched beyond Glais, David W. Howell commented that Nicholas

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[33] Clydach Merthyr Lodge, Minutes for Annual, General and Committee Meetings, 1 July 1921, SWCC: MNA/NUM/L/22/1.
[34] Interview with Dick Cook, Ystradgynlais, Transcript pp.5-6, SWML:AUD/222.
[35] David W. Howell, *Nicholas of Glais: The People's Champion* (Clydach: Clydach Historical Society, 1991), p.11.

'...undoubtedly played a crucial role in making the ILP organization so well organized in the Swansea valley compared with other Welsh areas.'[36] The Swansea valley did become a stronghold for the ILP. As well as a branch in Glais, there was also a branch in Clydach and ILP institutes in Pontardawe, Ystalyfera and Abercrave. Several of the valley's mining leaders in the 1920s were members of the ILP, for example Dai Dan Evans – who after joining the ILP in 1916 registered as a political conscientious objector – and James Griffiths, Anthracite District Miners' Agent.

In Clydach, during the First World War and the 1920s a base of extremist politics developed, as well as a group of conscientious objectors. Henry John described how Clydach:

> ... had ... [a] nucleus of a revolutionary type of person, being [conscientious] objectors during the war ... [they were] students of Marx ...[37]

These 'students of Marx' established a branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in Clydach in 1921 (the same year that the ILP branch in Clydach collapsed). There were also some Communist members in the union in Abercrave, for example Dick Beamish. Clydach, by 1921, had already in existence a branch of Sinn Fein.[38] The Sinn Fein branch can be linked to the large number of Irish migrants who were employed at the Mond Nickel Works.[39]

At the top of the valley, in Abercrave, syndicalist ideas influenced radicals. These ideas can be attributed to the arrival in Abercrave, from 1907 onwards, of European

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[36] David W. Howell, *Nicholas of Glais*, p.14.
[37] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Interviewed by David Egan, 01/12/1972, Transcript p.16, SWML:AUD/220.
[38] *Labour Voice*, 28 May 1921.
[39] See chapter 4 on Mond Nickel Works.

migrants: mainly Spanish, but also German, Portuguese, Belgians and French, who worked in the collieries alongside the native Welsh. Francis and Smith in *The Fed*, cited an interview with James Griffiths, who commented on the Spanish in particular:

> The young militant miners' leaders in Abercrave who emerged in the 1920s acknowledged that they primarily acquired much of their sharpened trade union consciousness and internationalist outlook from the Spaniards ... The more 'advanced' ideas of socialism and particularly syndicalism did not arrive in the upper Swansea valley with the publication of *The Miners' Next Step*, but with the coming of the Spanish.[40]

Before the First World War there was also a growth in informal transfer of political ideas with a flourishing of radical literature. In December 1912, *Llais Llafur* reported on 'Revolutionary Literature' in Abercrave. The reporter commented that syndicalist pamphlets were being bought and read by '... the young people of the place and many of the foreigners in the district.'[41] This report appears to support James Griffiths' comments about syndicalist ideas in Abercrave and the influence of the Spanish community.

Despite the prevalence of radical politics, mainly before the First World War and the early 1920s, it was the Labour Party that came to represent the miners' formal political interests. In the 1908 ballot on the affiliation of the MFGB to the Labour Party, the two SWMF Districts that covered the Swansea valley voted convincingly in favour of affiliation to the party.[42]

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[40] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.13.
[41] *Llais Llafur*, 21 December 1912.
[42] *Llais Llafur*, 23 May 1908.

District	For	Against
Anthracite	6,875	2,991
Western	5,813	2,445

The Labour Party would eventually represent the whole community of the Swansea valley in representative politics at constituency, county and Rural District Council level, with the miners playing a role in representing their communities

At constituency level, the Gower constituency was the first Swansea constituency to return a Labour candidate, John Williams, in 1906. The Neath constituency returned a Labour candidate from 1922 onwards. These constituencies benefited from a large industrial class of not only miners, but also of steel, tinplate and railway workers.

It was not until the 1920s that the Labour Party had a significant influence in the mining communities at the County and Rural District levels of local government. The Swansea valley was split between two counties. The lower and middle of the valley came under the jurisdiction of Glamorgan County Council and Pontardawe Rural District Council while the upper valley came under Breconshire County Council and Ystradgynlais Rural District Council. In some ways this divide left some miners in the upper valley with a feeling of disenfranchisement. Glamorgan was very much an industrial county with a tradition of industrial politics. In Breconshire, industrial communities were in a minority. Chris Williams has highlighted that in Brecon and Radnor, miners made up one-fifth of the male population, but at election time their votes

were overwhelmed by the rural electorate in the constituencies.[43] This meant that the Liberal and Tory tradition remained the stronger political forces.

The impact on politics amongst the miners as a result of this situation has been shown by Ioan Matthews, who argued that Dai Dan Evans felt the limited outlet for political opportunities offered by Breconshire County Council, meant that those who were politically aware drifted towards militant trade unionism and extremist political parties rather than the Labour Party.[44] However, the extent to which the views of the industrial areas of Breconshire were not represented is not as large as first appears. The Breconshire County Council elections of 1925 saw five out of eight Swansea valley seats return Labour members (two of whom were returned unopposed for Ystradgynlais and Abercrave).[45] Further, the Abercrave member, Mr. Idris Davies, was re-elected vice-chair of the council and had held the post for the previous five years. Abercrave did have a Labour voice right at the heart of the council.[46]

Breconshire County Council, in 1925, was controlled by a Progressive Alliance against the Conservatives. This alliance had controlled the council since at least the end of the First World War. Of the twenty-eight Progressives returned, fifteen were Liberal and thirteen were Labour.[47] The Labour Party was not significantly out-numbered in the alliance, and therefore it can be argued that Labour views were well represented on the council. But there is a comment in the *Brecon and Radnor Express* which appears to

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[43] Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield 1898-1947* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p.52.
[44] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.86.
[45] *Brecon and Radnor Express*, 5 March and 12 March 1925. The three seats that returned an opposed Labour member were: Cynlais, Cwmtwrch, and Pencae and Colbren.
[46] *Brecon and Radnor Express*, 19 March 1925.
[47] Ibid.

support some of Dai Dan Evans' conclusions about the character of the council. The paper commented:

> Farmers are well represented on the old and new aldermanic bench, and the progressives have seen to it that farmers should have place to a better extent than was the case years ago, especially as Breconshire is mainly an agricultural county.[48]

Despite the relatively high representation of Labour members, the Labour Party was a minority member of the Progressive Alliance, and the priorities of the council appeared to have been geared towards agricultural matters over industrial. This could explain, as Dai Dan Evans alluded to, why leading trade unionists remained in the collieries rather than standing for election in local government.

The Rural District Councils in the Swansea valley tended to mirror what was happening at county level. Pontardawe Rural District Council became Labour-controlled in 1919, and Ystradgynlais Rural District Council had a Progressive Alliance and did not become Labour-controlled until 1931.[49] Pontardawe Rural District Council did, by the 1920s, have a relatively high number of miners and industrial workers as councillors. In 1926, for example, fourteen out of the thirty seats on the council were held by workers from the mining or metal industries.

Politics did have an influence on trade unionism in the coal industry in the Swansea valley. The mining communities and miners had access to ideas and politics of socialism, syndicalism and radicalism as well as formal political organizations such as the ILP, CPGB, the Labour Party and Sinn Fein. The greatest result that politics had on

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Chris Williams, 'Labour and the Challenge of Local Government, 1919-1939', in Tanner, Williams and Hopkin (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p.142.

unionism was over the union leadership in the collieries, for example James Griffiths, Dick Beamish and Dai Dan Evans all had contact, or an involvement, with the ILP. Socialism and radicalism was the politics of the lodge, instigated by the more militant members, but it was the Labour Party that dominated politics as regards representation of the wider mining communities.

Independent workers' education played a significant and valuable role within trade unionism in the Swansea valley coal industry. The classes and lectures provided colliers, who wished to attend, with an education heavily influenced by socialist and Marxist history and theory. The education provided future lodge and district leaders with a solid foundation to lead the rank and file within the labour movement. However, the classes in the Swansea valley did not directly influence large numbers of miners, and by no means can it be argued that the valley had a rank and file well educated in the theories of Marxism.

Richard Lewis has highlighted that there were two main worker education organizations: that provided through traditional structures such as universities and by academics and purely independent workers' education, provided by and for the workers through the labour movement.[50] Both of these types of workers' education existed in the Swansea valley in the form of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) respectively. It was the NCLC which would have the greatest influence over the education of Swansea valley workers.

Although the local classes were affiliated to larger regional and national groups, they were heavily reliant on individuals to organize, run and teach the classes. Such

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[50] Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-1940* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993), p.xv.

individuals in the Swansea valley include J. L. Rees, in Clydach, and Nun Nicholas, a very active supporter and teacher of independent workers' education in the Swansea valley. Nicholas organized several lectures and series of classes under the auspices different organizations, but mainly the NCLC, throughout the valley, for example in Pontardawe, Ystalyfera and Abercrave. Nicholas was a product of the mining industry himself, who had previously worked as a checkweigher at a Pontardawe colliery.

The classes and lectures focused on what was deemed to be useful to the workers and the labour movement. As Richard Lewis has commented: 'Marxist economics and history gave an intellectual coherence to [the labour] movement and became a force in themselves for the creation of a new attitude amongst activists and subsequently amongst leaders.'[51] Lewis's analysis is demonstrated by a course taught by Nun Nicholas (teaching political economy) and J. Rees (teaching industrial history) which included lectures on 'Trade Unionism 1848-1900', 'Trade Unionism 1900-1916' and the 'Transformation of Money in Capital' (see appendix for full syllabus).[52] Although it could be argued that the education provided to workers was narrow in its focus, as the syllabus shows, the topics covered were studied in relative depth.

However, the extent to which these classes had a direct impact and influence on a large number of miners in the valley was limited. Dick Beamish described that in Abercrave it was only a minority of miners in the pit who could be described as being alert to political and social issues.[53] This is starkly demonstrated when a comparison is made between those attending the classes and numbers working at the collieries. Dick Beamish commented that in the 1920s classes that were held in the ILP Hall in

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[51] Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, p.xx.
[52] SWMF Western Miners, Syllabus of Lectures, 1921 SWCC: SC543.
[53] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Tape 3, Side A, 32:47 SWML:AUD/388.

Abercrave had an average attendance of 30.[54] Using this statistic, the percentage of men employed below ground in Abercrave collieries in 1926 attending classes works out at only five per cent. When all men employed at the collieries are considered, this percentage drops to four per cent.[55]

Those who did not attend any classes were still, indirectly, influenced by the classes. The workers' education classes provided those who attended with a solid education in class consciousness and an understanding that served the purposes of unionism at the time. As such, many of the minority who attended local classes tended to rise up the union ranks to positions of leadership, particularly at lodge level. An example of this can be found in Abercrave, Jim Evans remarked:

> The NCLC had a tremendous effect on the union in Abercrave. I think it is safe to say that everyone of the lodge leaders, they had participated in NCLC work.[56]

Further, a memorial meeting for Dick Beamish noted that the likes of Dick Beamish, Dai Dan Evans, Jim Evans, Henry John and Jim Vales all attended NCLC classes run by Nun Nicholas and out of these classes and education grew a new leadership in the local pits in Abercrave.[57]

The greatest influence that independent workers' education had on unionism in the Swansea valley is that it developed a new generation of miners' leaders who emerged in the 1920s. As Dick Beamish stated:

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[54] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Tape 3, Side A, 34:31 SWML:AUD/388.
[55] Data collated from *Colliery Year Book and Coal Trade Directory 1926.*
[56] Interview with Jim Evans, Abercrave, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 29/11/1972, Transcript pp.16-17 SWML:AUD/221.
[57] Memorial Meeting, attached to interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, SWML:AUD/9.

> ... as a consequence [of workers' education classes you] had a nucleus of men in your village who because they had taken the trouble burning the midnight oil, could then advance as men who were qualified to lead the labour movement both industrially and politically ...[58]

This new generation in turn gained influence over the rank and file in their respective lodges and districts, and piloted the political direction of unionism.

The mix of, and access to, radical politics by miners of the Swansea valley did not create a homogeneous militancy amongst the miners and lodges. There was a vast range in the extremes of radicalism and militancy amongst Swansea valley lodges. Dai Dan Evans tried to explain this difference by noting the varying ownership of the collieries, but also of the type of coal being produced.[59] This lack of uniformity is best exemplified by looking at three collieries in Ystalyfera a nd its su rrounding district: Tareni, Tirbach and Pwllbach Collieries. Evans notes that the Tareni Colliery was militant and often took part in unofficial strike action. An example of unofficial action is the 1911 Tareni Strike which took place without SWMF support and resulted in rioting in Ystalyfera. Evans explains that by contrast the Tirbach Colliery rarely came out on strike.[60]

There were also discrepancies between lodges as regards the implementation of democracy and working within the rules and constitution of the SWMF. *Llais Llafur* reported in July 1915 that the workmen at the Gurnos Colliery had elected their committee by ballot. The paper commented that this was '... a much desired

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[58] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Tape 3, Side A, 31:14 SWML:AUD/388.
[59] Interview with Dai Dan Evans, Abercrave, Tape 1 Side A, 37:05 SWML:AUD/263.
[60] Interview with Dai Dan Evans, Abercrave, Tape 1, Side A, 36:26 SWML:AUD/263.

improvement in their district',[61] implying a previous lack of use of the ballot to select committee members. Dai Dan Evans, again, discussed how the Tareni men were unconstitutional in their approach to industrial action. The 1911 Tareni dispute can be used to demonstrate unconstitutional attitudes. Further, the pay dockets of the Tareni men had a section for 'damages' printed on them, as the management expected to claim back damages for any unofficial action taken by the miners. On the other hand, Evans claimed that the men of the Pwllbach Colliery were very much in favour of the constitution.[62] Even within one town and its immediate district, such as Ystalyfera, there existed stark contrasts in the lodges' approaches to industrial conflict.

Religion in the valley had both a positive and adverse effect on unionism in the valley. Individual churchmen played a key role in the development of radical politics and independent working-class education. Examples include Rev. T. E. Nicholas, as mentioned earlier, who established an ILP branch in Glais and helped the ILP become a political force in the valley, as well as using his sermons to promote ILP politics. Also significant was Rev. R. J. Hall, from Swansea, who lectured for three years on industrial history in Abercrave before the arrival of Nun Nicholas.[63] While James Griffiths claimed that hearing the visiting Rev. R. J. Campbell, a fervent supporter of the New Theology movement, at Ystalyfera in May 1908 was influential in giving Griffiths' socialist beliefs a Christian base.[64]

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[61] *Llais Llafur*, 31 July 1915.
[62] Interview with Dai Dan Evans, Abercrave, Tape 1, Side A, 35:49 and 36:26 SWML:AUD/263.
[63] Interview with Jim Vale, Abercrave, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 10/05/1974, Transcript p.25 SWML:AUD/223.
[64] Christopher Turner, 'Religion and Labour in Wales', in Deian Hopkin and Gregory Kealey (eds), *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada 1850-1930* (Llafur/CCLH, 1989), p.80.

However, as Gilbert has argued 'as long as the chapels remained the central local institutions and the chapel elders retained the leadership of the villages, the independence of the villages expressed itself more in religious dissent and political liberalism than in concerted opposition to the colliery companies.'[65] This can be applied not only to Swansea valley communities, but also to a certain extent to valley lodges as well. A report in *Llais Llafur* in 1915 highlights the wider religious conventions that prevailed in the community:

> A protest was made at a local chapel on Sunday last against the action of the local miners. The men had decided to hold a mass meeting on Sunday to consider the position in the coalfield, and some of the members of the chapel in question thought it an "unchristian like" action ...[66]

Even by the mid 1920s, there was still a strong Non-Conformist element within lodges. Rhys Watkins, from Abercrave, commented that, after the return to work in 1926 and early 1927, the younger generation of miners' leaders in Abercrave – Dai Dan Evans, Jim Evans and Dick Beamish – had to 'fight the old guard, the old conservative ways of the old Non-Conformists ...' in the collieries and lodges in Abercrave.[67]

The greatest adverse influence religion had on unionism in the valley was during the Welsh Revival. During the Revival some lodges in the valley stopped meeting altogether, such as the Clydach Merthyr Lodge, where there were no entries in the minutes for the lodge's annual, general and committee meetings from 21 August 1904

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[65] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.251.
[66] *Llais Llafur*, 17 July 1915.
[67] Interview with Rhys Watkins, Abercrave, Transcript p.3, SWML:AUD/206.

until 12 January 1906.[68] Io an Matthews comments that after the Revival individual lodges changed the location of their regular meetings from public houses.[69] This does not appear to have been the case at the Clydach Merthyr Lodge, despite its abstinence during the Revival. The minutes for the lodge note that it was still meeting in the New Inn public house, although meetings were also held in the British School in Clydach and the Clydach Merthyr Office.[70] The influence of religion appears to have lasted for some time after the recommencement of meetings. In April 1910, it was noted that the chairman of the lodge had tendered his resignation of the position because of 'religious reasons'.[71]

Overall, it would appear that religion's influence was slightly more positive than negative. Despite the cessation of union meetings during the Revival and religion's influence over mining communities and indirectly over the lodges, the strength of belief did not disrupt unionism in the valley permanently. The contributions of individual churchmen and the spreading of Christian social ideas, such as the New Theology movement, helped to mould and develop ideas of class consciousness, socialism and the politics of a new generation of miners' leaders in the Swansea valley emerging in the 1920s.

The geography of the Swansea valley had an effect on the development of union structures in the mining industry. The 'U'-shaped valley and the location of settlements primarily on the valley floor, rather than terraced into the side of the valley, made communication between the lodges easier. The ease of movement in the valley is demonstrated by the migration of colliers up and down the valley to work in different

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[68] Clydach Merthyr Lodge, Annual, General and Committee Meetings Minutes, SWCC:MNA/NUM/L/22/1.
[69] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.58.
[70] Clydach Merthyr Lodge, Minutes, SWCC:MNA/NUM/L/22/1.
[71] Clydach Merthyr Lodge, Minutes, 25 April 1910, SWCC:MNA/NUM/L/22/1. His resignation may have been due to religious commitments such as being a deacon of a local chapel.

collieries, for example; Henry John, who started work at Moody's Colliery in Clydach, but at the end of the 1921 lock-out he went to work at the International Colliery in Abercrave.[72]

The migration in the valley, and the close proximity of lodges in certain towns such as Ystalyfera and Ystradgynlais, allowed cooperation between the lodges of the valley at different levels. This to some extent supports Francis and Smith's conclusion that geography hindered inter-valley communication, instead opinion tended to flow up and down individual valleys.[73] The Swansea valley lodges did organize themselves at a valley level into the Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges, which aimed to consider problems and operate on a valley basis. This group thus provided the Swansea valley lodges with a common meeting place where information could be discussed. There is no date given for the formation of the Group, but by the 1920s, there were seventeen lodges listed as being represented by the Group (see appendix for constitution and rules for the Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges and list of affiliated lodges).[74] The Group covered lodges from the length of the valley, from the Clydach Merthyr Colliery, Clydach, to the Abercrave and International Collieries, Abercrave. The Group also transcended SWMF Districts with collieries from the Anthracite District and Western District both being represented. However, not all collieries in the valley were part of the Group.

The Group appears to have grown from earlier traditions of cooperation between lodges at a town level. The Ystradgynlais Collieries, especially during disputes, held joint meetings for all miners working in Ystradgynlais collieries. For example, in

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[72] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Transcript p.7 and p.11, SWML:AUD/220.
[73] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.4.
[74] Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges, Constitution and Rules SWCC:SC.785.

September 1915 a mass meeting was held for union members of Ynyscedwyn, Ystradfawr, Diamond and Gurnos Collieries to discuss the Runciman Award. The meeting adopted a common decision to instruct their delegates at conference to vote in favour of a strike.[75] During the same year, the Ystalyfera lodges formed a more formal organization in the form of the Miners' Council for Ystalyfera and Neighbourhood, which was initiated by the Tareni Lodge.[76]

The greatest influence the miners' union had as regards to cooperation in unionism in the valley was by taking a leading role in the Trade and Labour Councils of the valley. There were several incarnations and re-naming of Trade and Labour Councils in the valley (see appendix for details). The purposes of these councils in the valley were described as both industrial and political. The Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council, which was established in 1916, demonstrates both the diversity of industry in the valley and cooperation, not only between mine lodges, but also unions in other industries. In 1927, the Ystalyfera and District Trades and Labour Council had an affiliated membership from lodges and branches of 2,397. Affiliated unions included SWMF lodges, Railwaymen, and tinplate sections of the Iron and Steel Confederation and Dockers' unions and transport union. But it was the miners who had the largest representation in the council with affiliated mine lodge membership of 1,511. The Railwaymen totalled 96 and the tinplaters 670. Diversity in cooperation was further exemplified by those unions who had recently seceded from the council: the Artizans,

[75] *Llais Llafur*, 4 September 1915.
[76] *Llais Llafur*, 9 October 1915.

Life Assurance Workers and Building Operatives. There was a complaint by the council of apathy from the B.I.S.A.K.T.A branch in the district. [77]

The valley's Trade and Labour Councils did not work in isolation from each other. The 1927 report of the Pontardawe and District Trade and Labour Council, which was founded in 1906, notes the existence of a joint Trades Council with Ystalyfera, as well as an affiliation to the West Glamorgan and South Carmarthen Federation of Trades Councils.[78] Unionism in the Swansea valley had a defined structure which, through various levels of organizations, linked the local lodges and branches to town, valley, district, county and national elements of the Labour movement. This supports Eddie May's assessment of '... a mosaic of individuals, groups, organizations, and events ... pieced together ...' to create a pattern of labour politics in Wales.[79] It is also relevant to point out that the founding of the Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council, in 1916, was only three years before Labour gained control of Pontardawe Rural District Council. Again as Eddie May has noted, Trade and Labour Councils proved influential in the development of the Labour Party in many cases across Wales.[80] The establishment of the Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council in 1916 must have strengthened the position of the existing Pontardawe and District Trade and Labour Council, and contributed to the growth of the Labour Party in the valley, particularly in local government.

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[77] Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council, 1927 Report MRC:MSS.292/79Y/4. British Iron, Steel and Kindred Trades Association (B.I.S.A.K.T.A).
[78] Pontardawe and District Trade and Labour Council, 1927 Report MRC:MSS.292/79S/82.
[79] Eddie May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918', in Tanner, Williams and Hopkin (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, p.61.
[80] Eddie May, 'The Moasic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918', p.70.

Although trade unionism in the Swansea valley coal industry had a lot of common features, such as membership of the SWMF and use of seniority, there was no uniformity throughout the valley. Each lodge had its own extremes of radical politics and militancy, as well as developing their own local eccentricities as regards to customs, industrial relations and social bonds between community and colliery. This lack of uniformity is best exemplified by the collieries in Ystalyfera and district, which, despite being all located in a small area of the valley, had different extents of militancy and approaches to the implementation of union rules.

Influences on coal trade unionism can be divided into two key areas: those that directly influenced the rank and file and those that had an indirect influence. The direct influences on unionism mainly originate from mining communities. They are manifested in the development of local customs, for example the use of kinship bonds to secure a employment at a particular colliery, such as the Brynhenllys Colliery, Cwmtwrch, and the use of seniority. These local customs were born out of circumstances within the community, for example the Seniority Rule that developed because of the irregular work during summer months in the early days of extracting anthracite coal. These customs involved the vast majority of people in the mining communities, to the extent that they contributed to accepted social norms of the community and eventually became enshrined in local lodge culture. As Ioan Matthews has argued, the miners' union in the Anthracite Coalfield was manipulated by miners to meet their own local needs, and had a vigorous local emphasis.[81] This was certainly the case in the Swansea valley where miners' customs and traditions grew out of a necessity to protect themselves, their jobs and their communities.

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[81] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner', *Llafur*, p.101 and p.102.

Indirect influences mainly had an influence on a minority of miners or for a short period of time, which would eventually have a greater effect on the essence of a lodge rather than on the whole 'rank and file'. Examples of indirect influences include access to independent workers' education, involvement in radical politics and religion's sway over mining communities and lodges. Independent workers' education allowed a new generation of miners' leaders to emerge in the 1920s, for example in Abercrave, who used what they had learnt to lead their respective lodges in a new political direction. These indirect influences generally had their origins outside the mining communities, but operated in the communities, for example the NCLC and radical political ideas such as Communism and syndicalism.

The diversity in mining communities and of influences acting upon lodges created a variety of responses to the mining industry and manifestations of trade unionism in the Swansea valley. The combination of local customs with agencies from within and outside of mining communities moulded a specific unionism for miners with specific needs.

Chapter 6:

Industrial Disputes in the Swansea Valley Coal Industry

The miners of the Swansea valley were involved in many industrial disputes during the first quarter of the twentieth century. These disputes varied in their causes, outcomes and scope, and had origins at local, regional and national levels. Although there are too many disputes in the Swansea valley coal industry to discuss in just one chapter, these features can be demonstrated by studying three different disputes (discussed in chronological order): the Tareni dispute of 1911, the 1921 miners' lock-out and the 1925 Anthracite Strike. These three appear to show that local disputes in the Swansea valley had a greater likelihood of violence and militancy by miners and mining communities while during the national 1921 miners' lock-out, miners in the valley adopted a more defensive and passive approach for the duration of the dispute. Several feature can be identified from some of these disputes during this period including the level of militancy and violence, and the relationship between the rank and file, and the union in relation to the dispute. This chapter will discuss these features by looking at examples of disputes which took place locally, regionally and nationally.

The Tareni dispute, which was concentrated on the Tareni and Gleison Collieries, near Ystalyfera, was sparked in March 1911 after twenty colliers were summoned to Pontardawe Police Court and ordered to pay damages and costs after a meeting was held underground, delaying traffic for two hours.[1] Attempts to solve the initial dispute led to continued strike action throughout the spring and summer of 1911, after the management refused to re-instate all of the men. The dispute twice erupted into stone throwing, violence and rioting, before finally being settled in August. Contemporary press reports drew

[1] *Llais Llafur*, 25 March 1911.

comparisons with the Tonypandy Riots of 1910, but there is no evidence that can directly link the two events, particularly in terms of scale.[2]

Unlike the Tareni Strike and the Anthracite Strike, the 1921 miners' lock-out was a national dispute which very much had its origins in 'high' industrial politics between the miners' leaders, representatives of the coalowners and politicians. It was prompted by the terms that were offered by the coalowners after the ending of state control. The lock-out was characterized by a defensive and passive mood within the Swansea valley mining communities, and was not marred by any violence or rioting.

The Anthracite Strike of 1925 can be seen as a reaction to the growth and establishment of coal combines in the anthracite coalfield of south Wales. The strike's cause was due to a perceived attack by the United Anthracite Combine on one of the anthracite miner's most sacred customs: the Seniority Rule. The dispute originated in the Amman valley, but quickly spread throughout the Anthracite District, as miners were fearful of losing the Seniority Rule. This dispute, again, witnessed Swansea valley colliers taking direct action in the form of two marches along with other miners from the Anthracite District in an attempt to close collieries that remained working. The second march culminated in a clash with police at the Rock Colliery, Glynneath.

The historiography of the three disputes varies in scope, quantity and depth. The Tareni dispute has been primarily discussed by Ioan Matthews.[3] Matthews has commented that the Tareni dispute has been largely overlooked, mainly because of the timing of the dispute in relation to other events in the South Wales Coalfield, namely the Cambrian Combine Strike, and the minor nature of the events in Ystalyfera when compared to the events at Tonypandy between the autumn of 1910 and summer of 1911. Matthews concluded that the dispute and the accompanying violence showed that the Anthracite District was just

[2] See *Llais Llafur* for comparisons. The Tonypandy Riots were on a much larger scale than any violence and rioting that occurred during the 1911 Tareni dispute.
[3] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Cardiff: University of Wales Ph.D, 1995).

as susceptible to violence as other parts of the coalfield. He also suggests that the incidents during the Tareni dispute can be explained just as much by 'traditional perceptions of community justice as to any heightening of industrial tensions'.[4]

Little has been written about the 1921 lock-out in the Swansea valley. The nature and high politics of the dispute has been covered by Page Arnot in his account of miners in south Wales between 1914 and 1926.[5] Page Arnot, although making some references to the lock-out in the Rhondda valley, pays most attention to the national developments of the dispute, such as the roles and decisions of the miners' leaders, the Triple Alliance, coal owners' representatives and politicians of the day.[6]

The Anthracite Strike of 1925 has been studied by Hywel Francis,[7] and again by Ioan Matthews.[8] Francis highlights the importance of the victory of the miners in the dispute. He describes the dispute as part syndicalist and part a belief in the righteousness and effectiveness of direct action.[9] Both Francis and Matthews comment on the role of the new combines as a cause of the strike and the miners 'defending' their established customs, of which the Seniority Rule was one. However, emphasis is also placed on other factors, such as the miners' control of output and a range of existing grievances at several collieries.[10] But it would be the issue of the custom of the Seniority Rule which would be the stimulus for the eventual outbreak of strike action and the subsequent violence.

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[4] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.249.
[5] R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners=Glowyr De Cymru: A History of the South Wales Miners' Federation 1914-1926*, (Cardiff: Cymric Federation Press, 1975).
[6] R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926*, pp.205-15.
[7] Hywel Francis, 'Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', *Llafur*, Vol. 1, Number 2 (1973), pp.53-66.
[8] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D).
[9] Hywel Francis, 'Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', p.63.
[10] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.370-1.

Local

The Tareni dispute of 1911 was one of the most serious examples of violence sparked by an industrial dispute in the Swansea valley. There had been previous examples of violence surrounding industrial disputes prior to the Tareni strike, including during the Mond Nickel Works strike in 1902,[11] and at Cwmllynfell Colliery in 1909-10. However, the Tareni dispute was different from these previous incidents in many ways. The workers at the Tareni Colliery during the dispute were largely operating outside the union, as the SWMF refused to give support to the strike. Support for the striking miners and their families came from the aggrieved community. Ioan Matthews has identified the violence as originating from a sense of traditional community justice as much as a result of heightened industrial tensions.[12] The lack of support from the union for the strikers led to the drawing up, and dissemination within the local community, of a manifesto which vehemently attacked the SWMF.

The miners at Tareni Colliery had a reputation for, and a willingness to take, unofficial and unconstitutional industrial action. The origins of the 1911 dispute can be found in the prosecution of about twenty workmen by the under-manager of the colliery, James Evans. The colliery sought damages in March 1911 against the men for having held a meeting underground and delayed the traffic of the mine for two hours. The magistrates made an order for the damages to be paid as well as costs.[13]

As a result of these prosecutions the workmen at the colliery downed tools and called for the dismissal of the under manager, who had brought the prosecutions. The Tareni men were joined on strike by those at the Gleison Number 1 Colliery, who belonged to the same lodge as the Tareni men. As early as the first week of the dispute, the men received no financial assistance from the SWMF as their actions were considered to be contrary to the

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[11] See chapter 4 for more details on the Mond Nickel Works strike of 1902.
[12] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.249.
[13] *Llais Llafur*, 25 March 1911.

Federation's constitution.[14] It was also reported in *Llais Llafur* that the dispute was very much driven by a minority of workmen this claim was repeated by the conservative *South Wales Daily Post.*[15]

The lodge's adherence to the Federation's constitution, and even a majority being in favour of strike action, can be questioned. Attempts to decide upon a decision for a return to work was called in a peculiar way – by the Ystalyfera town-crier.[16] The calling of a ballot in this manner meant that only the workmen who lived in the vicinity of Ystalyfera were made aware of the meeting. The subsequent ballot resulted in the miners voting by a majority of one against holding a ballot of lodge members.[17] When a second ballot was held for all workers on strike, the vote returned a clear majority in favour of a return to work, with 267 for and 39 against.[18]

However, the actions of the colliery's management hindered a return to work. The workers' representatives withdrew any demands regarding the dismissal of James Evans, the under-manager, but the management set three conditions that the men should accept on their return to work. The first two conditions were accepted, but the miners refused to accept the third condition, which was stated in *Llais Llafur*:

> That certain persons will not be reinstated. The reason given by the management for this was that the persons in question had threatened the officials underground.[19]

The *South Wales Daily Post* claimed that of the five men the management refused to allow to return to work, four were alleged to have been at the meeting in the Ystalyfera public house

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[14] *Llais Llafur*, 1 April 1911.
[15] *Llais Llafur*, 8 April 1911 and *South Wales Daily Post*, 6 July 1911.
[16] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.246.
[17] *Llais Llafur*, 15 April 1911.
[18] *Llais Llafur*, 29 April 1911.
[19] Ibid.

where it was decided to strike.[20] Despite the strike already being in its seventh week, a ballot on these three conditions resulted in a vote in favour of continuing the strike, with 178 against returning to work and 116 for returning to work.[21] The strike thus entered a second stage which was marred by stalemate and violence.

The first episode of violence occurred in early May 1911, nine weeks into the dispute. A procession of men and boys marched to the Tareni Colliery at ten o'clock at night, with the street lamps being put out in front of the marchers on the way to the colliery. There were claims that some of the crowd were wearing skirts and blouses to give the impression that women were present, but this was dismissed when reported in *Llais Llafur*.[22] The crowd engaged in stone throwing, resulting in windows being smashed at the house of Councillor Joseph Thomas, the colliery's checkweigher who remained opposed to the dispute. The next houses the crowd wished to target were those of the management of the colliery. Resentment had clearly grown towards the management's tangible figures in the community, as well as others who opposed the strike. The homes of the management were only spared by the presence of police.[23]

The crowd dispersed peacefully after encountering the police, although *Llais Llafur* claimed that the dispersal of the crowd was mainly due to the crowd not being able to make out in the darkness how many police were present.[24] There were in fact only two constables, although another two were sent for from Pontardawe, but were not needed after the crowd dispersed. The following hours, in some ways, harked back to social and industrial protests of previous centuries. Some of the crowd dispersed in Ynysmeudw Woods, where a bugle was heard and others who had been part of the crowd were seen following it. However, by two in

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[20] *South Wales Daily Post*, 6 July 1911.
[21] *Llais Llafur*, 6 May 1911.
[22] *Llais Llafur*, 27 May 1911.
[23] Ibid., and *Cambrian*, 27 May 1911.
[24] *Llais Llafur*, 27 May 1911.

the morning the demonstrators had dispersed. The following day, extra police were present in the area.

Attempts were made to settle the dispute, with representatives from the workmen's committee and management meeting to discuss a resumption of work. But both refused to shift on the issue of the men whom the management refused to reinstate.

A key factor that heightened tensions, throughout what was that year a hot summer, was the fact that the Tareni Colliery was kept open by the efforts of the manager, under-manager and about half a dozen blacklegs, with the aid of police protection. There were reports that colliers from Maesteg were working at the colliery, but this was dismissed locally after a Maesteg collier visited the Ystalyfera area and did not recognise anyone as coming from Maesteg.[25] While outside the colliery gates the strikers engaged in regular picketing. There were also reports of police brutality. It was claimed in *Llais Llafur* that:

> ... five young men proceeded along the canal bank [and] were met by the police and severely handled ... the men were kicked by the constables.

Llais Llafur concluded: 'if this report is true it is possible that trouble may ensue'. [26] But there is no corroborative evidence to support these accusations.

Tensions were also heightened by the distress faced by the miners and the families. *Llais Llafur* reported that strikers were dependent on the generosity of neighbours and children from Godre'r graig made daily visits to houses in Ystalyfera begging for bread.[27] This situation was certainly made worse by the lack of financial assistance from the SWMF. The workmen's committee did, however, appeal to trade unionists in the district for help to relieve the distress of the strikers and their families. There were also attempts to get

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[25] *Llais Llafur*, 1 July 1911.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Pontardawe Board of Guardians to adopt the Necessitous School Children's Act, a private investigation was made by those appointed by the local branch of the ILP, and concluded that a great deal of suffering existed and there was a need for the implementation of the Act.[28]

The financial distress, accusations of police brutality, the presence of blacklegs and picketing of the colliery culminated in a second bout of violence in July. The violence was initiated by the seizure, by strikers, of colliery officials who were working the colliery's pumps and engines. The men seized were dumped in the canal: a possible symbolic baptism which was used to wash away the sins that these men had committed against the community and the principle of solidarity. One of the officials was then dressed in a nightdress and paraded through the streets of Pontardawe: a likely interpretation of the practice of 'white-shirting'. The men were then taken back to Godre'r graig and forced to swear that they would not work at the colliery again.[29] This was probably a culmination of the frustration felt by those on picket duty as, by the end of June, pickets were on duty 24 hours a day.[30] There was also an increase in low-level resistance and direct action by the end of June; the *Cambrian* reported how telephone wires were cut by men on picket duty to hinder any telephone communications – presumably from the colliery to the police in Pontardawe.[31]

Further rioting occurred in the Ystalyfera district in mid July. Striking miners who had been attending a mass meeting in Pontardawe, which was also where the colliery company's office was based, marched back to Ystalyfera. Following the men was a large number of women and children who branched off to head towards the under-manager's house while the men headed towards the Tareni Colliery. It was estimated that there were more women and children than men.[32] There was stone throwing by the women and children at the home of James Evans, the under manager, and the *Western Mail* claimed that the house of the

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[28] *Llais Llafur*, 8 July 1911.
[29] *Western Mail*, 19 July 1911 and *Cambrian*, 21 July 1911. No mention is made in *Llais Llafur* of the incident.
[30] *Cambrian*, 30 June 1911.
[31] Ibid.
[32] *Llais Llafur*, 22 July 1911.

master haulier was also attacked and every room was wrecked and all contents smashed. However, this claim was mocked by *Llais Llafur* which made a counter-claim that the damage inflicted on the house amounted to no more than broken window panes of a probable cost of £1.[33]However, these attacks led to a police baton charge on the crowd. *Llais Llafur* commented how the 'women and children went down like nine pins', and it was stated by eyewitnesses that at least 20 women and men were injured, with some left unconscious.[34]

News of the commotion reached the crowd who had headed towards the colliery. At the height of the rioting it was estimated 800-900 were involved – most of them spectators – and involved only a small proportion of people who were actually from the Godre'r graig and Ystalyfera district. *Llais Llafur* reported most of the crowd were from Pontardawe, Rhos, Ynysmeudw and Alltwen.[35] It was also claimed in the *Cambrian* that a number of men from the Ynysmeudw Tinplate Works also took part in the rioting.[36] Rioting continued until ten o'clock at night. As well as injuries amongst the crowd, several police were injured after being hit by stones which had showered the police from the crowd. Although police reinforcements were requested, the rioting subsided before they arrived. Blame for the early disturbances was ascribed, by the *Cambrian*, to the women and children who started the stone throwing.[37]

The rioting marked a turning point in the dispute: within two weeks of the rioting the dispute had been settled. The men withdrew their demand for the reinstatement of the men who had been refused to be let back; this was withdrawn after the respective men had found work elsewhere. However, in November there were 30 convictions arising from the rioting and violence in July.[38]

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[33] *Western Mail*, 19 July 1911 and *Llais Llafur*, 22 July 1911.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] *Cambrian*, 21 July 1911.
[37] Ibid.
[38] *Llais Llafur*, 25 November 1911.

Ioan Matthews' conclusion that the events and violence during the Tareni dispute owed as much to traditional perceptions of community justice as to any heightening of industrial tensions can be substantiated to an extent. The presence of women and children in the rioting crowds and involvement of people from outside the immediate vicinity along with the 'ceremonial' dressing in white and dumping in the canal of blacklegs can be used to support this assertion.

However, this emphasis on community justice can partially be explained by the fact that the Tareni men and their families did not have the support of the SWMF. This had two consequences: firstly, this made the financial distress faced by the families and community more acute – they were forced to look inwards and rely on the community for support. Secondly, the strikers were left without the formal organized union structure to organize and deal with the dispute. Without union support the likelihood of a swift and peaceful outcome to the dispute was reduced. The rank and file were left to their own devices and to turn towards less sophisticated and formal means of conducting the strike. Without authoritative union leadership, violence and community justice were two of only a very limited number of options that were left to the miners and their community. Even local union officials were ostracised during the dispute.

Resentment against the union culminated in what was termed by the press as the 'Tareni Manifesto'.[39] In the first week of July, the workmen's committee made an appeal to local trade unionists for financial assistance. In the appeal the committee launched a scathing attack on the SWMF, extracts included:

> ... we have fought this battle [the Tareni Strike] ... with even the union of our own making deciding against us. Indeed, friends, it has been a great fight. Not only have we grappled with our common enemy, the

[39] *Cambrian*, 7 July 1911 and *South Wales Daily Post*, 5 July 1911.

> capitalist, but also with creatures whose interests are akin to the cobra and the python, the most treacherous and poisonous reptiles of their species who stalk in our midst in the guise of labour friends...[40]

The attack on the union was not printed in *Llais Llafur*, which, to some extent, criticised the workmen's committee for the spirit and language used in the manifesto.[41]

The lack of an outside agency, such as the SWMF, that could have stepped in to try and resolve the dispute meant there was a lack of authoritative leadership from outside the community to act as a restraint on the rank and file. As such, a local leadership took control of the dispute, and helped to reinforce a stronger sense of tangibility for the community towards the dispute. Events unfolded in a very local context, with all of the main protagonists being local to Ystalyfera and the surrounding district. The company was a local company, with its offices in Pontardawe and whose managers lived in the same community as the miners. This localism intensified the dispute and caused tensions to increase. Because it was a local dispute, and a local 'unofficial' leadership was in control of the strike – it gave the rank and file a greater influence over the outcome of the dispute and thus a sense of ownership over the strike: it was their colliery, their strike, their community and it was up to them to bring the strike to some kind of conclusion. The combination of a sense of community justice, localism and ultimately a lack of formal union structure providing leadership and a restraint over the rank and file allowed the possibility of violence to occur.

National

The 1921 lock-out, which lasted from April to July, was very different in both character and in the response of the rank and file. This dispute had its origins in the 'high politics' of British industry, essentially between the leadership of the MFGB on one side and the

[40] *Cambrian*, 7 July 1911. See appendix for full extracts. A complete and full version of the manifesto has proved impossible to find, as such only the extracts printed in the press are included.
[41] *Llais Llafur*, 8 July 1911.

government and leaders of coalowners on the other. The 'high politics' of the dispute is reflected in the historiography of the lock-out, for example Page Arnot who has studied the dispute very much from its 'high politics' point of view.[42] The 1921 lock-out was caused by the terms offered by the coalowners after the government's decision to end state control of the coal mines five months before this was legislated to happen under the Coal Mines Act 1920. By the beginning of April 1921, the coalowners had resumed control of the mines and declared a lock-out to enforce wage reductions. The Swansea valley lodges were unprepared for such a dispute. The valley had been suffering from high levels of unemployment, which affected the collieries and the tinplate industry in the districts. For example, in January 1921, 600 colliers in Pontardawe and neighbouring districts were forced to cease work due to a lack of orders.[43] The level of idleness had an adverse effect on the financial reserves of the lodges, *Labour Voice* reporting on the Western Miners' Monthly Meeting: '...coffers were practically empty owing to the fact that some collieries had been idle for some time...'[44]

The 1921 lock-out, unlike the Tareni strike and the 1925 Anthracite Strike, remained a peaceful dispute in the Swansea valley despite the distress and hardship suffered by the miners and their families. This distress was tackled in several ways at a local level and, just as would occur in 1926, the response of the mining communities took a defensive approach. In some parts of the valley, distress committees and canteens for children were established fairly swiftly, for example in Abercrave at the end of April.[45] However, in other parts of the valley, particularly in Ystalyfera and district, it was other agencies that took the initiative in relieving distress. By mid May, the Ystalyfera Grocers' Association was lobbying the Trades

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[42] R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926.*
[43] *Labour Voice*, 29 January 1921.
[44] *Labour Voice*, 9 April 1921.
[45] *Labour Voice*, 30 April 1921.

and Labour Council to call a public meeting so that a soup kitchen, with the full support of the Ystalyfera Grocers' Association, could be formed.[46]

There were some anomalies in the valley where miners at some collieries received unemployment benefit during the lock-out, despite those involved in a strike or lock-out not officially being eligible for such support. *Labour Voice* in June 1921 reported that Clydach collieries were receiving unemployment benefit.[47] Henry John, in an interview, explained that at Moody's Colliery, in Clydach, the lodge won a case for unemployment benefit, which worked out at about seventeen shillings a week.[48] This could have been achieved due to the fact that these collieries were closed before the industrial dispute because of an economic downturn: in early April 1921 it was estimated that there was about 2,000 unemployed people in Clydach.[49]

Despite the remoteness of the motives and origins of the 1921 dispute, which was essentially a national rather than a local dispute, the miners in the Swansea valley remained committed to the objectives and policies of the national leadership.[50] The views expressed at local meetings also mirrored those held by the national leadership. A resolution was passed in the valley which asked '...the railway and transport workers to support them [the miners] by withdrawing their labour...'[51] This reflected the initial commitments of the national leadership of the miners in the Triple Alliance with the National Union of Railwaymen and the TGWU. This mirroring of the national leadership helps to highlight the fact that it was the national leadership and not the rank and file who held the initiative and power for the miners during the dispute.

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[46] *Labour Voice*, 14 May 1921.
[47] *Labour Voice*, 18 June 1921.
[48] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, interviewed by David Egan, 01/12/1972, Transcript p.10, SWML/SWCC: AUD/220.
[49] *Labour Voice*, 9 April 1921.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

However, there was some dissension amongst the rank and file in the Swansea valley about some of the national leadership's decisions, for example its decision to send a telegram to all districts which requested that '...all our members to abstain from all action which will interfere with the measures necessary for securing the safety of the mines...'[52] Although not explicitly said, this was a reference to the prevention of pump men from carrying out their work, thus removing one of the miners' most potent weapons during the strike which could have secured victory for them: the potential flooding of the mines during the lock-out. This decision was not received well in some parts of the Swansea valley. A meeting of miners from Ystradgynlais and Ystalyfera was called to discuss the telegram sent to the districts by the national leadership. The meeting deplored the actions of the leadership and a deputation was formed to visit the pits in the district to '...induce the men operating the pumping machinery to withdraw.' This deputation was successful at the Yniscedwyn, Ystradfawr and Tirbach Collieries but was, however, less successful at the Tareni Colliery where officials were removed from pumping work. This was later overturned by a meeting of the Tareni workmen who '...objected to outside interference with their colliery...' The officials at Tareni returned to pumping work after this meeting.[53] Although the miners of the valley did engage in this direct action, it remained peaceful and again only occurred as a reaction to the national leadership rather than a reaction to the coal owners. There was some local opinion which was against such action of allowing the pits to flood and the motives of the miners in the dispute, *Labour Voice* reported that in Clydach, '...outside the mining community, local public opinion is against a government subsidy and condemns the miners for preventing the working of the pumps...'[54]

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[52] R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926*, p.209.
[53] *Labour Voice*, 16 April 1921.
[54] Ibid.

The distance at which the national leadership operated during the lock-out, away from the rank and file, is best demonstrated by the national leadership's unilateral decision to organize negotiations and disregard a previous ballot of the miners on 21 June, when a national ballot resulted in a majority 254,890 to continue the dispute (in the South Wales Coalfield there was a majority of 69,707 in favour of continuing).[55] This shows the 'high politics' of the 1921 lock-out, where decision-making, influence, initiative and power were not held by the rank and file, but by the national union leaders, coal owners' representatives and politicians in, undoubtedly, smoke-filled rooms beyond the valleys and coalfields. The Miners' Agent John James, when addressing a crowded meeting for miners in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen and surrounding districts, called to discuss the deliberations of the national leadership in relation to the terms of the settlement of the lock-out, declared '...that the democratic principle of rule by majority of the numbers had been disregarded...'[56]

The 1921 lock-out in the Swansea valley remained free from any serious outbreaks of violence such as had been seen in the 1911 Tareni dispute and the 1925 Anthracite Strike. There were very tangible effects of the dispute for the miners and their communities in the valley: the imposition of the Coal Emergency Directions, distress committees and canteens. However, the 1921 lock-out was a very distant dispute in terms of the amount of influence the rank and file miners had over the outcome of the dispute. The national nature of the lock-out meant that ownership and agency was held by the national leadership, unfortunately the miners and their mines and their communities became pawns in a game of high stakes, top down politics. Page Arnot's emphasis on the 'high politics' of the lock-out is justified to an extent, as the role and actions of the grass roots members was very much a reaction to the decisions and actions of the national leadership. Most, if not all, of the power lay with the national leadership; this prevented a leadership vacuum from developing at a local level and

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[55] R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926*, p.211.
[56] *Labour Voice*, 9 July 1921.

restrained militant and violent actions by the rank and file. The rank and file miners were merely left to defend their communities as best they could, and 'sit out' the lock-out until their national leaders had resolved the dispute on their behalf – regardless, at times, of the views and democratic decisions of the rank and file members.

Regional

The Anthracite Strike of 1925 had its origins in the Amman valley, but also involved anthracite miners from the Swansea, Neath and Dulais valleys in both the strike and direct action which was taken. The growth of coal combines in the anthracite coalfield with the development of the Amalgamated Anthracite and United Anthracite companies by the mid 1920s undermined the traditional modes of ownership which had been based mainly on local or small scale levels of ownership. The local and small scale levels of ownership had fostered many customs that were unique to the anthracite, such as the Seniority Rule. The late development of the coal combines in the anthracite, when compared to other parts of the South Wales Coalfield, allowed these customs to remain well into the twentieth century.

The Anthracite Strike has been seen to have been caused by these customs coming under threat because of the establishment of the new combines. Although the dispute was triggered and justified as a defence of the Seniority Rule, both Francis and Matthews have noted that the focal issue was the miners' control of output and the perceived greater threat to other anthracite miners' customs.[57] These threats allowed tensions to build up and several customs had already been lost under the combines simply because they did not exist in writing; James Griffiths described the Anthracite Strike as having a kind of inevitability.[58]

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[57] Hywel Francis, 'Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', pp.54-5, and Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.370.

[58] Interview with James Griffiths, interviewed by Richard Lewis and Hywel Francis, 20/11/1972, Transcript p.12, SWML/SWCC: AUD/90.

The dispute was sparked after a series of customs were challenged by the United Anthracite combine at the Ammanford Number 1 Colliery. The collier Will Wilson was dismissed after he refused to move places because it had not been sanctioned by a General Meeting of the workers at the colliery, which, custom had dictated, should have taken place. After a General Meeting was held and sanctioned Wilson's refusal to move, the colliery refused to reinstate him, thus breaching a further custom held dearly by the anthracite miner – the Seniority Rule. The disregard of the Seniority Rule at Ammanford Number 1 Colliery was seen as a possible threat to the custom throughout the whole Anthracite District. However, there had been earlier strikes caused by the defence of the Seniority Rule, particularly in the Swansea valley, as at the Tareni and Gleison Collieries in August 1921. But these disputes did not escalate and spread beyond the immediate colliery affected. But in 1925, by the second week of July, the strike had spread to all areas of the anthracite coalfield, including the Swansea valley, with only a handful of exceptions of collieries in the Neath and Dulais valleys.

The hub of the dispute remained in and around Ammanford and district. Support for the dispute from collieries outside this district was not initially that enthusiastic. A majority of miners in the Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen collieries in July 1925 initially voted to refuse to tender notices, contrary to the decision of the District meeting; a later vote did decide to take strike action.[59] A letter to the *South Wales News*, from D. Davies of Cwmllynfell, regarding the Anthracite Strike, commented that the miners made idle by the strike were '...standing on our rural roadside discussing ways and means to get out of the tangle ...' that the miners were in.[60] This lack of enthusiasm can partially be explained by the nature of the strike. Tommy Nicholas concluded that:

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[59] *Labour Voice*, 11 July and 18 July 1925.
[60] *South Wales News*, 24 August 1925.

> They [the miners] didn't really know what it [the 1925 Anthracite Strike] was about ... because, it wasn't a money strike ... it was a principle strike. And very few people took any interest; they'd follow the leader, but took very little interest as to the grounding or the bottom of it. See, if it was wages, everybody would know...[61]

Despite such doubts at the beginning and during the strike, the dispute would demonstrate tangible levels of solidarity amongst anthracite miners and with other workers. This is highlighted by two marches that took place in July 1925 by miners from different collieries and different valleys in an attempt to shut collieries that were still working in the Dulais valley. This direct action resulted in the second march climaxing in a violent clash between miners and police at the Rock Colliery, Glynneath.

Mid July was marked by two very different marches on consecutive nights. The first march originated in the Amman valley from a mass meeting at the Cwmamman Recreation Ground, where it came to light that two collieries were still working in Dulais valley. A resolution was moved, and unanimously carried, that a march by night would be organized to meet the workmen at the collieries still at work.[62] At 10 o'clock at night, a march started from Ammanford square and proceeded through Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen and into the Swansea valley, headed by town brass bands. Ianto Evans estimated that when the procession arrived in Ystradgynlais, there was a crowd of between 15,000 to 20,000. However, *Labour Voice* reported that 8,000 were present in the crowd which arrived in Crynant – still a significant number.[63] The procession left Ystradgynlais and proceeded to Crynant in the Dulais Valley. The marchers reached the railway station in Crynant at around 5 o'clock in the morning.

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[61] Interview with Tommy Nicholas, Neath, interviewed by Hywel Francis, 16/05/1974, Transcript p.1, SWML/SWCC: AUD/97.
[62] Autobiographical note by Evan (Ianto) Evans to R. Page Arnot, cited in R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926*, p.270.
[63] Ianto Evans cited in R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926*, p.270 and *Labour Voice* 18 July 1925.

Those arriving for work at Crynant railway station were requested by the crowd to return home; the workmen did and the marchers achieved their aim.[64] There was no indication of significant violence at Crynant. Ianto Evans claimed that there was a skirmish when the workmen's train arrived, but this did not escalate. Evans stated that the police who were present at the railway station 'were many times outnumbered',[65] as such the police would have been unlikely to try to counter this skirmish with force of their own, and thus the possibility for further, escalated, violence was limited.

In contrast to the relatively peaceful first march, a second midnight march was organized the next night. *Labour Voice* claimed that this second march was inspired by the success of the direct action taken by the first march.[66] Unlike the march from Ammanford, this second march originated in the upper Swansea valley after a mass meeting, *Labour Voice* reporting that the idea for a second march was instigated by 'some ardent spirits in the upper part of the Swansea valley...'[67]

The second march had the aim of stopping the Rock Colliery at Glynneath in the Dulais Valley. The marchers were called together by the local town criers, and started their procession from Ystradgynlais at around 2 o'clock in the morning and arrived at the Rock Colliery at about 6 o'clock in the morning. It was not only miners who were present on the march; Dick Cook, a Swansea valley tinplater, claimed that although he was not a miner, he did go on the march because '...it was a feeling of the injustice being done to miners and the way they were doing things [a possible reference to the direct action taken]...'[68]

The procession was met outside the Rock Colliery by two lines of police, estimated to be 150 in number. The police refused the crowd permission to go within around 150 yards of

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[64] *Labour Voice*, 18 July 1925.
[65] Ianto Evans, cited in R. Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners, 1914-1926*, p.271.
[66] *Labour Voice*, 18 July 1925.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Interview with Dick Cook, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 24/01/1974, Transcript p.10, SWML/SWCC: AUD/222.

the colliery, but a deputation of the marchers was allowed to meet with the workmen. When the deputation failed to return to the crowd after the twenty minute time limit set by the police, confusion and rumour spread through the waiting crowd that a trick was being played against them. Those at the back of the crowd started to push forward, the police seeing the edging forward of the crowd launched a baton charge. It was reported in the *Western Mail* that the police blamed the cause of the baton charge on some men from the Swansea valley towns and villages of Cwmtwrch, Ystradgynlais and Abercrave who '...were hostile and would not listen to reason'.[69] *Labour Voice* reported that a resolution was later carried 'condemning the uncalled-for attack by the police and especially their refusal to supply ambulance requisites for the wounded.'[70] Prosecutions would arise from this incident, Dick Beamish commented on how the police got people's details to follow up the prosecutions:

> ...a lot of men were injured, some badly injured and ... the police became as if they were expressing sympathy with the injured men, and it transpired that every man who gave his name and address, that is the injured men ... they ended up in the Assizes in Cardiff...[71]

After the baton charge, the deputation arrived back from its deliberations with the miners of the Rock Colliery who had agreed to return home. The procession was successful in its aim of bringing out the miners of the colliery, but as a result of the confrontation with the police, there was an increased police presence in the Anthracite District, including in the Swansea valley and surrounding areas at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, Cwmgors and Pontardawe.

The strike would be marked by further violence, but this would be limited to the town of Ammanford and district, which experienced rioting which effectively left the town in the hands of the strikers between 28 July and 6 August 1925.

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[69] *Western Mail*, 17 July 1925.
[70] *Labour Voice*, 18 July 1925.
[71] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 07/11/1972, Transcript p.2, SWML/SWCC: AUD/9.

However, after the events at the Rock Colliery, the Swansea valley remained relatively quiet for the remainder of the strike. *Labour Voice* commented, on several occasions, how the strike gave miners the opportunity to complete jobs they would not have otherwise have had the time to do; for example, it was reported that some Cwmtwrch and Cwmllynfell miners connected their houses with the District Council's sewer, while in Ystradgynlais, male members of the local chapels were engaged in maintenance at their chapels.[72]

The Anthracite Strike of 1925 had less of an impact on the Swansea valley than in other areas of the Anthracite District, such as Ammanford. However, Swansea valley miners were involved in violence during the dispute. Although this strike was a regional dispute, it did allow some large scale, active and direct rank and file involvement, particularly surrounding the marches from Ammanford and the Swansea valley which were well supported. But the wider militancy did recede and retreated to the crucible of the dispute – Ammanford – while the Swansea valley remained relatively peaceful. Despite the use of direct action and violence during the strike, the turning point which ultimately ensured that the strike would end in victory for the miners was the withdrawal of the safetymen.

The direct action and resulting violence surrounding the marches at the beginning of the dispute can again be explained by a sense of ownership of the strike, and the role of leadership. Ioan Matthews has noted that the official leadership was sidelined for periods during the strike.[73] This can be partially identified by the almost mass movement decisions that were made regarding the first march to Crynant, and the voluntary joining of the march by other miners along the route of the march. Again, the second march appears to have been a spontaneous decision after the success of the first march, and initiated by the miners themselves.

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[72] *Labour Voice*, 15 August and 22 August 1925.
[73] Ioan Matthews, 'The World of the Anthracite Miner' (Ph.D), p.382.

The success of the first march was certainly an inspiration for the idea of the second march, and not only gave miners the confidence that they could achieve their aims with direct action but that the rank and file could have a real influence on the outcome of the strike as their actions in marching had ensured all collieries were closed. A lack of authoritative leadership can also be identified as contributing to the violence at the Rock Colliery. This point has been highlighted by Dick Beamish who stated that at the Rock Colliery, there was a 'lack of strategic leadership'.[74]

This lack of strategic leadership can be seen in the deputation that was sent to meet the miners of the Rock Colliery. It is probable that the deputation consisted of the leading figures of the crowd, thus leaving those outside the colliery without significant leadership. This allowed rumours to be spread without being dismissed and for the pushing at the back of the crowd to start, again without any authoritative leadership to stop it.

It is important to note the role the police played in the two marches. Ianto Evans stated that the police were outnumbered on the first march to Crynant and did not confront the crowd with violence. But the police were in far greater numbers at the Rock Colliery, this may have been a reason why they were willing to proceed with a baton charge. *Labour Voice* actually praised the crowd for not retaliating against the police.[75] Although pushing and rumours were started by the crowd, it was the police who initiated the violent reaction and not the crowd in general.

Hywel Francis' conclusion that the strike was part syndicalist and part a belief in the righteousness and effectiveness can be substantiated to some extent.[76] The marches that involved Swansea valley miners did demonstrate a belief and effectiveness of direct action, and this belief was vindicated as both marches achieved their desired aims.

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[74] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Tape 1, Side A, 3:15, SWML/SWCC: AUD/261.
[75] *Labour Voice*, 18 July 1925.
[76] Hywel Francis, 'Anthracite Strike and Disturbances 1925', p.63.

Conclusion

The coal industry in the Swansea valley experienced industrial disputes of different natures, size and degrees of militancy and violence: locally, regionally and nationally, such as the 1911 Tareni dispute, 1925 Anthracite Strike and the 1921 lock-out. The violence that accompanied the Tareni and Anthracite strikes and the absence of violence in the 1921 lock-out can be partially explained by the local nature of disputes and the role of the union and authoritative and formal leadership within the union and the community.

The local nature of industrial disputes did have a partial impetus in leading to violence. Local disputes, such as the Tareni strike which affected just one lodge, to some extent increased the tangibility of the dispute, as a clear distinction could be drawn within the community as to who were the 'victims' (miners) and the 'offenders' (owners/management) of the dispute. Although this is true in the case of other industrial disputes, the local nature intensified these roles. The localism of the dispute also drew in the wider community or surrounding area, such as the involvement of people from other Swansea valley communities and tinplaters during the rioting in Ystalyfera, and the marches during the Anthracite Strike.

However, the main feature which appeared to have determined the extent of violence and passivity during a dispute was the presence, or lack of, formal and authoritative leadership within the local lodge, in the wider regional districts and the coalfield and national union. An explanation for the violence in the Tareni dispute can be found in the SWMF's unwillingness to support the strike. This discredited the local leadership who were ignored by the local rank and file and actually targeted during rioting and violence alongside the management of the colliery. A lack of authoritative leadership through a formal trade union saw the Ystalyfera industrial workers and their families engaging in less sophisticated forms of protest, notably community action through rioting and violence.

Likewise, the disturbances at the Rock Colliery during the Anthracite Strike can also be traced to a lack of leadership. The disturbances, which were reported to have been caused by some miners pushing forward towards the police lines, took place while the marchers' deputation was inside the colliery negotiating its closure. It can be assumed that those in the deputation were, or had put themselves forward as, spokesmen or leaders of the marchers.

A lack of authoritative leadership meant that there was no restraint on the rank and file, thus empowering them and giving them ownership and controls of the situation as such the ability to have an influence over the dispute and its outcomes.

This can be reinforced by the rank and file's passivity during the 1921 lock-out. This was a national dispute and as such a distant dispute in terms of the rank and file's ability to influence the outcome of the lock-out. The high political nature of the lock-out meant that the national leadership remained in control of the dispute as regards the miners' interests, thus disenfranchising (literally at times) the grass roots membership, denying them any sense of ownership of the lock-out. As a result the rank and file were left reacting to the decisions of the national leadership, rather than holding the initiative and agency to engage in direct action.

It is also important to comment on the role of other industrial workers who participated in the disturbances that occurred, particularly tinplaters who were involved in rioting in Ystalyfera and the marches during the anthracite Strike. The tinplaters' involvement in the rioting in Ystalyfera can be explained by the fact that it was community action, and they were simply drawn in as members of the community. As regards to the Anthracite Strike, there is evidence to suggest that tinplaters were involved in the marches, but no solid evidence to claim that they were involved in the violence at the Rock Colliery. A comment in *Labour Voice* in September 1925 highlights how the majority of tinplaters were still very much committed to conciliatory and peaceful means:

> Local tinplaters who are chuckling over the 7½ per cent advance recently added to their wages, and secured without a day's strike, profess their inability to understand why the same amicable spirit prevails in the tinplate trade is not also found in the coal trade. A great many years have elapsed since there was a big strike in the tinplate trade, yet the workers' condition has steadily improved.[77]

It can therefore be concluded that a lack of authoritative leadership over the rank and file was a key instigator in the emergence of violence during industrial disputes. The lack of leadership gave the rank and file an unrestrained agency which could easily allow militancy to escalate into violence.

[77] *Labour Voice*, 5 September 1925.

Chapter 7:

1926 General Strike and Miners' Lock-out

By 1926 the Swansea valley had approximately 40 collieries, the majority of which were extracting anthracite coal. Although coal was the largest industry in the valley, what made the Swansea valley different from most other valleys in the South Wales Coalfield was the variety of industry in the locality. The General Strike demonstrated the level of trade unionism in the valley, and the solidarity shown by their fellow workers towards the miners.

The General Strike in the Swansea valley unfolded in very much the same way as in other areas of the South Wales Coalfield. The valley communities responded to the strike by taking a collective approach, with the establishment of a myriad of committees and Councils of Action to coordinate the collective response of the workers. The strike was well supported by workers in other industries apart from coal. The period of the General Strike passed peacefully in the valley. However, the extent to which there was a transference of power from the traditional institutions to workers' committees does not have appeared to have reached the levels suggested by Hywel Francis for other valleys in south Wales.[1]

The miners' lock-out which started before, and continued after, the General Strike followed similar lines to the rest of the coalfield. The response of the valley communities was a collective approach with the establishment of communal kitchens and other collective activities, such as boot repairing and entertainment. Although the majority of the lock-out period passed passively, there was a level of violence near the

[1] Hywel Francis, 'South Wales', in Jeffrey Skelley (ed.), *The General Strike 1926* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp.232-60.

end of the lock-out to prevent the removal of outcrop coal. The lock-out in the Swansea valley does satisfy aspects of Gilbert's arguments about the development of solidarity and collective action, resulting from community structures and local geography.[2] There are also elements during the lock-out of the 'alternative culture' noted by Francis and Smith.[3] They state that the 'alternative culture' existed 'where social, political and cultural norms were being increasingly rejected ...' and in its place a 'new behavioural pattern' emerged.[4] Francis and Smith see the 'alternative culture' becoming apparent during the 1925 Anthracite Strike and the 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out. During the 1926 miners' lock-out, they argue that it became 'diversified and deepened so that it was founded on class discipline, resourceful quasi-political illegality, direct action resulting often in guerrilla and open warfare, collectivist action of various forms, perverse humour and escapism.'[5]

What added an extra dimension to the lock-out in the Swansea valley was the involvement of non-colliery workers. Despite the diversity of industry in the valley, particularly the metallurgical industries, these industries were heavily reliant on coal in order to operate. The Mond Nickel Works, for example, was deliberately located in Clydach because of the proximity of anthracite coal further up the valley. This heavy reliance on coal was made apparent during the lock-out, when the majority of the metal industries in the valley found it difficult to remain open owing to the lack of good quality coal to maintain the high temperatures for the furnaces. This meant that the

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[2] David Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action: Social Change in Two British Coalfields, 1850-1926* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[3] Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998).
[4] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.54.
[5] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.56.

metallurgical workers suffered on similar lines to the miners, but they did have access to some of the communal kitchens in the valley along with the miners.

The end of the lock-out and the return to work met with disappointment in the valley. There were attempts to assign blame for the defeat on those in the central and eastern valleys of the coalfield. This led to demands from some of the lodges for the Anthracite District to split from the rest of the coalfield as regards union organization.

The General Strike

The General Strike was preceded by the onset of the miners' lock-out which was the catalyst for the General Strike. The miners' lock-out started with an element of confusion amongst the miners in some parts of the valley. The cessation of work was due to begin at midnight on 30 April, but at one colliery it started several hours earlier. At the Tareni Colliery, near Ystalyfera and employing 745 workers, the men stopped work at 2pm on 30 April. The confusion arose as the men thought, wrongly, that the start of the strike was at midday rather than at midnight.[6] The remainder of the collieries in the valley came out at midnight. A report from the valley in the *South Wales Daily Post* on 1 May noted that all the collieries were closed.[7] The coal dispute did have an immediate impact on some of the other industries in the valley. On 3 May, it was reported that the Gilbertson's Steel Works, Pontardawe, had ceased work because of a lack of coal.[8]

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[6] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 1 May 1926. *South Wales Daily Post*, 3 May 1926 gave the time of cessation of work as 2:30pm.
[7] *South Wales Daily Post*, 1 May 1926.
[8] *South Wales Daily Post*, 3 May 1926.

However, the effect of the miners' dispute on other industrial workers increased further by the start of the General Strike on 3 May, which was actively supported by workers in several industries. The strike in the valley soon settled down into a routine of an almost carnival atmosphere and established a pattern that would continue during the subsequent lock-out – a defensive approach that was intended to protect the mining communities, while maintaining a peaceable atmosphere. The *Labour Voice* reported that they had '...yet to learn of any untoward incident in this area [Swansea valley] during the whole period [of the General Strike]. Thanks also ... to the local Strike and Emergency Committee [in Ystalyfera] who have done all in their power to maintain a peaceful atmosphere...'[9]

The General Strike in the Swansea valley saw a focus on communal activities and entertainments. The organizing of activities and of the strike in the valley was a fine example of the Welsh committee system. In Ystalyfera, the local Strike and Emergency Committee handled the day-to-day running of, and worker organization during, the strike. A Council of Action was also established in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen. These Strike and Emergency Committees and Councils of Action worked as umbrella organizations. In Ystalyfera there also existed various other committees which came under the Strike and Emergency Committee, including a sports committee and a music committee. One of the activities organized by the sports committee was a football match between Ystalyfera and the neighbouring village of Godre'r graig – Ystayfera won 14-6.[10] The activities that were organized were only possible, in many instances, because of the cooperation and contributions of the local inhabitants, for example the two local bands

[9] *Labour Voice*, 22 May 1926.
[10] Ibid.

at Ystalyfera – Ystalyfera Town Band and Ystalyfera Public Band – took it in turns to play musical selections at each meeting held, as well as parading the streets on several occasions.[11] The Swansea valley, especially around the Ystalyfera district, to some extent, resembled a holiday camp atmosphere – the workers were off work, and they and their families enjoyed organized entertainment of varying kinds, everyday, for free.

Not all of the activities that were provided were for entertainment purposes. There was a political dimension at times to the meetings that were organized. At Ystalyfera, the Strike and Emergency Committee arranged for speakers to address meetings, such speakers included James Griffiths, miners' agent, and David Jenkins of the NUR, Skewen. These political meetings demonstrate the cooperation between various industrial workers and their union representatives during the strike. Despite the frivolity of some of the activities, the political motivations of the General Strike were very much apparent and remained evident during the strike. As Gilbert has argued, the social activities helped to create a diverse number of social bonds, which increased the consciousness of community during strikes and created links tying workers to the miners.[12]

The Council of Action at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen brought under its control several workers' institutions. The Council contained representatives of all affiliated unions and women's sections, and representatives from the Co-op. The Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Council of Action brought together working-class institutions in the locality and despite a TUC General Council Bulletin ordering the cessation of all strike bulletins on the 10 May the Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Council of Action issued a bulletin during the strike from

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.96 and p.100.

the third day until the strike ended.[13] The continuation of the Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen bulletin can be seen as an example of the communication problems between the TUC and the various Councils of Action throughout the country. As Gilbert has noted, the Councils of Action that existed in the valleys had a more popular and broader base than the strike committees of the coastal towns.[14] This was the case at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen. The Strike and Emergency Committees and the Councils of Action provided a valuable focus for the valley communities and ensured an element of solidarity was maintained between the workers and from the communities through the provision of communal activites.

However, the transfer of power that Hywel Francis suggests had occurred in places such as Bedlinog and Mardy does not have appeared to have occurred to the same extent in the Swansea valley.[15] The influence that the Councils of Action and Strike and Emergency Committees gained during the General Strike tended to focus on the provision of communal entertainment and political activities rather than a genuine usurpation of power. Further, the Rural District Councils appear not to have chosen to take any action that would have undermined the workers' committees. An example of this was a meeting of the Pontardawe Rural District Council on 10 May, which passed a motion that they would not take any action to implement and administer the Coal Emergency Order and Directional 1926, by 13 votes for to 9 against.[16] This act by the Pontardawe Rural District Council, which had been Labour-controlled since 1919,

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[13] TUC General Council Bulletin, 10 May 1926 cited in Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p.60; details of Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Council of Action: Emile Burns, *General Strike! – Trades Councils in Action* (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1975) , p.129.
[14] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.95.
[15] Hywel Francis, 'South Wales', p.233.
[16] Pontardawe Rural District Council, Minute Books November 1925 – December 1926, WGAS: RD/Pd15.

removed any threat of recrimination by the state in the central Swansea valley, and thus allowed the workers and the local Strike and Emergency Committees and the Councils of Action to be free to do as they wished within the law.

There does seem to have been a greater transfer of power at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen than in other areas of the Swansea valley. This may be due, in part, to the geographical location of Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen which, although coming under the jurisdiction of Pontardawe Rural District Council, is located on the fringe of the Swansea valley and the upper Amman valley.[17]

The General Strike remained solid in the Swansea valley for all of the nine days of the dispute despite the diversity of workers in the valley. Workers from all of the main industries in the valley took part in the General Strike in support of the miners, including the metallurgical workers (steel and tinplate) and transport workers (railways and buses). The *Cambrian* commented that there were no buses or trains running in the area. The bus stoppages prevented some children from attending school in Ystalyfera.[18] Despite some of the tinplate and steel works being unable to work before the General Strike because of the lack of coal those workers in the works that remained open did join the strike. The Welsh Plate and Sheet Trades Joint Industrial Council, of the tinplate industry, commented on the '...lightning stoppage of all Association works on the morning of Tuesday, May 4th 1926...'[19] Other industries were also involved in some of the communal meetings, particularly union representatives, as mentioned earlier the

[17] See map of Swansea valley.
[18] *Cambrian*, 15 May 1926.
[19] Joint Industrial Council: Welsh Plate and Sheet Trades, 1920-36 (1 of 3), Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Workmen's Representatives, 28 June 1926 MRC:MSS.36.J24b.

presence of David Jenkins of the NUR Skewen, speaking at a meeting in Ystalyfera alongside miners' agent James Griffiths.

The calling off of the General Strike came as a surprise to the workers of the Swansea valley and was met with disappointment. The *Cambrian* reported that '...the news of the cancellation of the strike was not received seriously in Pontardawe and the upper Swansea valley.'[20] This disbelief could be attributed to the difficulty of communication with the TUC or the fact that the strike had been so solid within the confines of the Swansea valley, that the strike had not been perceived as being called off because of the workers' experience of the strike locally.

The workers were, initially, reluctant to return to work. The *South Wales Daily Post* reported that there was no general return to work in the Swansea district and the railwaymen, dockers and millers disregarded TUC orders.[21] In Swansea, crowds gathered up to midnight on 13 May in High Street singing hymns, the 'Red Flag' and the 'Marseillaise'.[22] However, within a day or so of the calling off of the strike, the return to work was well under way. The railwaymen settled on 14 May and returned to work on the 15 May after assurances that there would be no victimisation. Tinplate and steel workers also returned to work; the *South Wales Daily Post* noted on 22 May that the Ystalyfera, Glanrhyd and Ynysderw (Pontardawe) tin mills were in 'full swing'.[23] Despite the return to work, the bonds that were built up with the miners appeared to

[20] *Cambrian*, 15 May 1926.
[21] *South Wales Daily Post*, 13 May 1926.
[22] *South Wales Daily Post*, 14 May 1926.
[23] *South Wales Daily Post*, 22 May 1926.

have survived the calling off of the General Strike: after their return to work, the railwaymen promised support for the miners.[24]

However, in several instances, particularly in the tinplate and steel industries, the union leadership and men's representatives were almost apologetic to the owners of the works because of the men's involvement in the General Strike. On 7 June, John Hodge admitted that, by participating in the General Strike, his members had broken the constitution of the Joint Board of Representatives of employers and workmen.[25] Likewise, a similar attitude was adopted by representatives of tinplaters. The workmen's side of the Joint Industrial Council for the Welsh Plate and Sheet Trades also admitted that the stoppage by its members to participate in the General Strike was:

> ... a direct violation of the established custom that has always existed in the tinplate trade relative to stoppage without notice on the part of the Employers and the Employed, as well as being a breach of the new constitution entered into on the 14 August 1914.[26]

The workers' representatives then agreed, in future, to observe the custom 'in its entirety'.

The General Strike passed peacefully and, to some extent, the conformity of the valley communities virtually made the strike a non-event. The General Strike demonstrated the ability for workers from several industries and unions to cooperate with each other in support of the miners, regardless of the diversity of industry in the

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[24] *Cambrian*, 15 May 1926.
[25] News clipping: *South Wales Daily Post* (?), 7 June 1926 MRC:MSS.36/S127/24.
[26] Joint Industrial Council: Welsh Plate and Sheet Trades, 1920-36 (1 of 3), Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Workmen's Representatives, 28 June 1926 MRC:MSS.36.J24b.

valley. Although Strike and Emergency Committees and the Councils of Action were set up, there does not appear to have been a transference of power to the extent in other communities, as suggested by Hywel Francis.

1926 Miners' Lock-out

The end of the General Strike meant that almost ten thousand mineworkers employed in the collieries of the Swansea valley were left locked-out to continue the struggle alone. With the continuation of the coal lock-out, those tinplate and steel workers who had returned to work at the end of the General Strike were also faced with sporadic unemployment because of the scarcity of coal.

The start of the miners' lock-out in 1926 meant a third dispute in five years for the Swansea valley mineworkers and their families. Many of those locked out in 1926 were still paying off debts that they had incurred during the 1921 dispute and the 1925 Anthracite Strike. Although the victory for the miners in the Anthracite dispute may have given them a sense of confidence politically entering the 1926 lock-out, the miners were in a poor state financially, and would be faced with a further war of attrition. The previous strikes had given the miners, their families and communities, valuable experience and had strike-hardened them. The seven-month-long lock-out saw the miners adopt a siege mentality. The main weapon the miners and their communities had to defend themselves during the lock-out was communal action. Swansea valley communities established a variety of communal responses, for example communal kitchens, entertainments, political meetings, lectures and boot clubs. The extent of the communal activities and the resistance to the lock-out created, what Francis and Smith

have argued, an 'alternative culture'. This alternative culture was described by Francis and Smith as an increasing rejection of social, political and cultural norms.[27]

The 'alternative culture' and communal activities led to an increased level of solidarity, not only amongst the miners, but also within the wider communities. The establishment of communal institutions set up by the miners also reinforced a level of dual power between the collective organizations of the workers and the local organs of the state, such as the Rural District Councils and the local Boards of Guardians. This dual power originated during the General Strike and was maintained through the lock-out.

The lock-out was met with a reaction by the whole community, bringing in a politicisation of elements in Swansea valley communities, such as women, religious organisations and the local shopocracy. The response of the whole community and the establishment of communal activities, in particular the communal kitchens, helped to prevent a substantial return to work and blacklegging during the lock-out. However, the return to work saw defeat for the miners and a reversion to society's accepted norms and the collapse of the 'alternative culture' and collective community action, for example the communal kitchens.

Collective Action During the Lock-out

Collective action during the lock-out took several forms, from necessity such as the communal kitchen, to other activities which raised funds and provided an element of escapism through communal entertainments, as well as political meetings and lectures.

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[27] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.54.

This collective can be used to argue that aspects of the 'alternative culture' were present in the Swansea valley.

The most tangible example of communal activity in the valley during the lock-out was the establishment of communal kitchens. The kitchens were initiated by the miners through their lodges or distress committees. By late May to early June 1926, kitchens were being established in the valley, for example the Joint Works Committee of workmen from Ynyscedwyn and Ystradgynlais collieries set up a kitchen with £100 that was left over from the 1925 Anthracite Strike.[28] While in Clydach, it was decided at a mass meeting to open a kitchen after receiving £250 from the Miners' Federation.[29]

The kitchens were housed in a variety of places, which were already well established community buildings. In Ystalyfera, Panteg and Wern Schools were used; in other communities in the valley chapels were widely used, for example Eynon Chapel in Ystradgynlais, Bethesda Chapel in Ynysmeudw and Hebron and Calfaria Chapels in Clydach. The Swansea valley had a total of 23 communal kitchens altogether during the lock-out, from Ynystawe, near Clydach, in the lower valley to Abercrave in the upper valley. There were five kitchens in Ystradgynlais alone.

By no means could the communal kitchens in the Swansea valley be labelled 'soup' kitchens. A reporter for the *Cambrian* revealed the menu for one of the Ystradgynlais kitchens, which included meat and lentil stew, baked potatoes, roast potatoes and bread and jam. It was also stated that Welsh meat only was used. The average cost per meal, at a Ystalyfera kitchen was stated as 1 shilling 9d.[30] It was suggested by Francis and Smith that some of the kitchens received supplies from

[28] *South Wales Daily Post*, 7 June 1926.
[29] *Labour Voice*, 5 June 1926.
[30] *Cambrian*, 11 June 1926.

farmers who donated their produce to prevent it from being stolen and being used by the kitchens anyway.[31] Henry John, from Abercrave, denied that such activity was practised in Abercrave, but he did acknowledge that it did happen in some places.[32]

The kitchens achieved some Herculean feats, considering the circumstances that they faced such as difficulties of funding and the procurement of supplies. The kitchen at Godre'r graig fed over four hundred people daily while at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, during one week, the kitchens provided 28,370 meals to children and adults. The Ystradgynlais kitchens provided two meals a day, even when other kitchens were struggling to stay open.[33] Contributions to help fund the communal kitchens after their initial establishment came from a variety of sources. Donations were received from workers who were still in work, for example workers at the Mond Nickel Works, Clydach, made substantial contributions each week. In Abercrave there were contributions from teachers, Co-op employees and individuals.[34] Those still employed at the collieries also donated money to the cause, the *Labour Voice* reported that 'contributions are now coming in from the safetymen and officials at the various collieries [in Ystradgynlais].'[35] As Gilbert has stated, members of the local middle class, such as colliery officials, shopkeepers, teachers, stationmasters and undertakers, were all integrated into the community and that in mining communities, the interests of the community were perceived as the identical to the miners' interests.[36] The middle

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[31] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.56.
[32] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Interviewed by David Egan, 1/12/1972, Transcript p.29, SWML:AUD/220.
[33] *Labour Voice*, 19 June and 28 August 1926.
[34] *Labour Voice*, 23 October 1926 and 22 January 1927.
[35] *Labour Voice*, 11 September 1926.
[36] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.69.

classes in the Swansea valley do appear to have identified with the miners' interests during the lock-out.

Contributions to the miners' distress funds stretched far beyond the local community. Dick Beamish, from Abercrave, commented on the money from Russia that was sent to the MFGB, and how it was used to help sustain the communal kitchens across Britain. However, he does not make a direct reference to Russian money in the Swansea valley.[37] But there is evidence of money from America being used to support valley kitchens. The *Labour Voice* reported in August 1926 that the closure of the communal kitchens in Ystalyfera was prevented by a small donation and 'in view of the promised financial support from America ...'[38] The Swansea valley radical Dai Dan Evans had spent time in the United States before he was deported in 1926. During the lock-out, Dai Dan Evans returned to Cwmgiedd in the Swansea valley. The financial aid from America may be linked to Evans' affiliation to the country. However, there is no direct evidence of this.

Francis and Smith stated that 'within a community under siege, the miners and their families armed with their essentially proletarian institutions of the 'Fed', the 'Co-op', the institute and the chapel, along with the ILP, CPGB, Labour Party and the remainder of the Trade Union movement ...'[39] To an extent this is what happened in the Swansea valley and the communal kitchens are a prime example of Francis and Smith's argument. The kitchens demonstrate the valley communities' reliance on working-class organisations. The kitchens were opened through the local lodge or funds from the

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[37] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Interviewer unknown, date unknown, Tape 3, Side 1 46:40 SWML:AUD/388.
[38] *Labour Voice*, 21 August 1926.
[39] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.55.

'Fed' and were reliant on the wider working classes to help to provide continued funding for them. A *Labour Voice* report also highlights the role of the Co-op. The report stated that nearly all of the contracts for some of the communal kitchens for supplies were placed with the local Co-op societies.[40] A large number of the kitchens were housed in the local chapel vestries.

However, despite the successes of the communal kitchens that were established in feeding the mining communities of the valley there was, in some quarters, resistance to the opening of the kitchens. The *South Wales Daily Post* reported the comments of Mr. D. J. Edmunds, a member of the Pontardawe Board of Guardians, who was '...against the opening of a soup kitchen on the grounds that it did away with the sacredness of home life', he went on to claim that 'money would be better spent more profitably and economically by mothers at home.[41] His political allegiance cannot be ascertained, but Edmunds was a local licensed victualler.

In every community in the valley during the lock-out, concerts, sports, lectures, carnivals and even gymnastic displays were organized by the local Distress Committees and became regular fixtures throughout the summer and autumn. The communal entertainments helped to raise funds for the miners, in particular, the communal kitchens, but also raised funds for clothing, and more importantly by October and November, boots for children. The Godre'r graig Committee held a concert to raise funds for footwear and clothing.[42] The entertainments also involved the local bands who toured the valley playing at different events each week. The Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Silver Band toured further afield, including mid and west Wales, sending back the money that

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[40] *Labour Voice*, 3 July 1926.
[41] *South Wales Daily Post*, 28 May 1926.
[42] *Labour Voice*, 23 October 1926.

was raised. Gilbert has referred to these means of acquiring funds as a 'bazaar economy'.[43]

A further communal activity that was ever-present during the lock-out was the political. These meetings were regular and performed two valuable functions. The first was to help to contribute to the feelings of solidarity, maintaining a class and community consciousness, such a speech was given by Nat Watkins, at Ystalyfera, who spoke about the lead up to, and calling off of, the General Strike, and the issues that were at stake during the lock-out.[44] Secondly, the meetings allowed details and news of the lock-out to be spread to the communities. The political meeting kept the grassroots mineworker well informed of the progress of the lock-out, both nationally and locally, for example a general meeting in Clydach, in August, by William Griffiths, a delegate at the district meeting at Swansea, gave a report on the Bishop's National proposals.[45] The meetings were usually addressed by various speakers from the Labour movement, including a speech at Ystalyfera by Oliver Baldwin, the socialist son of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin.[46] These political meetings can again be linked to features of Francis and Smith's 'alternative culture'.

Another element of the political meeting was the political lecture, such as that held for the communities of Cwmtwrch and Cwmllynfell on 'Economic History and the Worker'.[47] The lock-out gave workers the opportunity to educate themselves about socialism, capitalism and Marxism. The presence of radical political doctrine in these political meetings can be held up as the communities' rejection of the accepted political

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[43] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.98.
[44] *Labour Voice*, 17 July 1926.
[45] *Labour Voice*, 14 August 1926.
[46] *Labour Voice*, 23 October 1926.
[47] *Labour Voice*, 25 September 1926.

norms. The Minority Movement was also active in the valley, holding meetings at the ILP institute in Ystalyfera. Three delegates were sent to the national conference in London but due to the financial distress the delegates cycled to London.[48] The communal entertainments and political meetings held in the Swansea valley appear to support McIlroy's argument that there was a stress on internal solidarity and holding the miners together.[49] The communal activities and political meetings did ensure that throughout the lock-out workers and communities were kept politically and socially aware and conscious.

One of the biggest influences cementing a sense of solidarity was the communal kitchen. Apart from providing the miners and their families with the essential meals to help them survive the lock-out, the kitchens became a common focus for the communities and created and maintained a sense of camaraderie amongst the miners. James Griffiths commented on the importance of the role the communal kitchens played: '...we went through the seven months in our area without a single breakaway ... due ... to the fellowship engendered by that one meal a day.'[50] This was echoed by a contributor to the *Labour Voice*, who commented that the 'kitchens in the few weeks of their existence have done more to promote that brotherly feeling and comradeship than could have been done by years of propaganda.'[51] Gerard Noel goes further, by describing mining communities during the lock-out as becoming communes, with the communal kitchen at the centre.[52] The communal kitchens did provide a sense of

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[48] *Labour Voice*, 26 June 1926.
[49] McIlroy, 'South Wales', in McIlroy, Campbell and Gildart (eds), *Industrial Politics and the 1926 Mining Lock-out* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p.144.
[50] Cited in Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.57.
[51] *Labour Voice*, 24 July 1926.
[52] Gerard Noel, *The Great Lock-out of 1926* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1976), p.149 and p.151.

solidarity and were the centre of the community, but the idea of a 'commune' replacing the community is difficult to apply to the Swansea valley, simply because the diversity of society did not allow very high levels of conformity within the community, which would be found in a commune.

The solidarity built up by the communal activities stretched beyond the miners and their families to encompass some people who did not require assistance. The kitchens in particular were popular with children in the Swansea valley, even if their families did not need to use the kitchens. Mrs Richards, from Ystradgynlais and a daughter of a colliery official, described how her brother went to the soup kitchens to be like the other boys, even though there was plenty of food in their house.[53] However, in Pontardawe it was decided to feed all children for 'political reasons'.[54] The communal activities brought the miners and the wider community together, allowing the whole community to identify with the struggle.

For some people, though, the communal kitchens provided an opportunity to 'improve' the mining classes. A contributor to the *Labour Voice* commented how '... the local feeding centres ... have done so much to alleviate acute distress and incidentally to improve the moral standing of the people concerned.'[55] This comment must be a reference to the ban on swearing and smoking in the kitchens, mainly because of the presence of women and children. The writer's comments do suggest that some people in the valley had different agendas in helping the miners. It was the communal activity that fostered the development of an 'alternative culture' in the Swansea valley,

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[53] Interview with Mrs Richards, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Philippa Dolan, 15/4/1975, Side A 22:37 SWML:AUD/459.
[54] *Cambrian*, 30 July 1926.
[55] *Labour Voice*, 24 July 1926.

as occurred in other valleys of south Wales and as put forward by Francis and Smith. The communal kitchens, entertainments and political meetings saw a shift in emphasis from the individual to the collective or community. As Gilbert has commented 'the strength of communal identification shifted the accountancy of rational action away from individual interests towards collective interests'.[56] These collective interests are best demonstrated by the actions of those within the community who helped to establish an 'alternative culture' in mining areas. The 'alternative culture' saw the development of new social and cultural norms in the Swansea valley; for example, in Ynysmeudw the billiard saloon was opened in the mornings free of charge for young men to use.[57] Also, the manager of the South Wales Transport Company arranged to transport people to and from the places where entertainment and amusements were taking place; and in Tai'rgwaith, near Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, ice cream vendors Cresci and Impanni gave free ice cream to the miners' children.[58] Further examples can be found amongst the miners, an article in the *Labour Voice* described new norms developing amongst those locked out:

> The prolonged coal stoppage has deprived many of what they considered necessary and others a luxury. The pipe smoker dearly loves his "briar", and rather than go without a smoke, he will turn to what is now known as the "Riverside Blend". This can be had cheaply, and for the picking, as it grows in abundance on the flat near the river and during the past weeks

[56] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.255.
[57] *Labour Voice*, 22 May 1926.
[58] *Labour Voice*, 26 June 1926.

> many have been seen picking the common "colts foot" and "peppermint" which are dried then mixed.[59]

Even in the Swansea valley where there were sizeable numbers of industrial and non-industrial workers outside the mining industry in the locality, an 'alternative culture' still developed.

The Swansea valley followed on similar lines to what Francis and Smith have argued: that as the lock-out stretched into the summer and autumn of 1926, the 'alternative culture' became deepened and diversified.[60] This manifested itself in the Swansea valley, in a diversification of the communal kitchens. The kitchens were adapted to provide collective services, such as boot repair and haircuts, as well as the provision of meals. Such a diversification occurred in communal kitchens in Abercrave and Ystalyfera.[61] Also, Francis and Smith's assertion that the 'alternative culture' developed its own morality code of conduct can be applied to the Swansea valley.[62] A sense of moral and social justice appeared to have developed by those locked out. There were thefts from the local industries, such as the tinplate works and the Mond Nickel Works, where scrap iron and coal were stolen.[63] Ho wever, there are some examples of the 'moral code of conduct' being undermined or not observed by a minority in the valley. The *Cambrian Daily Leader* reported a theft from the communal kitchen in Ynysmeudw, which was located in the Bethesda Chapel vestry; in total 10lbs of butter, a quantity of sugar and other provisions were stolen.[64] It appears that the

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[59] *Labour Voice*, 30 October 1926.
[60] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, pp.55-6.
[61] *Labour Voice*, 4 September and 16 October 1926.
[62] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, p.59.
[63] *Labour Voice*, 10 June and 4 September 1926.
[64] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 12 June 1926.

'alternative culture' and sense of class and community solidarity did not reach everybody in the valley.

Industrial Workers

The end of the General Strike saw an initial return to work for the majority of industrial workers. However, the metallurgical industry's heavy reliance on coal meant that the tinplate and steel works in the valley operated sporadically throughout the lock-out, as work was dependent on the availability of coal. Gilbertson's Steel and Tinplate Works, Pontardawe, and Player's Tinplate Works, Clydach, are just two examples of works opening and closing depending on the supply of coal. At times when foreign coal was available, it was not always of sufficient quality to be used for metal working. The *Labour Voice* commented that the 'local tin workers ... maintain that the British collieries need have no fear of foreign competition, as far as tinworks are concerned, ... the coal now used is of an inferior quality and most unsuitable.'[65]

There were initial discrepancies between industrial workers at the same works as to how they were affected by the lockout, particularly in the tinplate industry. Those employed to work the boilers and furnaces were affected first while those employed in the finishing departments, in the first weeks of the lock-out anyway, had some more work because of the lag between production and finishing of tinplates. But as the lock-out continued and production in the works stopped completely, the finishing departments soon became idle as well. By September, the *Labour Voice* commented in Ystalyfera, apart from the building trade, local industry was at a standstill and the

[65] *Labour Voice*, 21 August 1926.

Ystalyfera Tin Works were completely idle through lack of coal.[66] The coal crisis therefore meant that the metal workers were often out of work. The situation was described by Dick Cook, a tin worker from Ystradgynlais: 'There was no coal to supply our boilers and ... furnaces, there was no coal to be had and so you were out [of work] just the same [as the miners].'[67]

The experiences of the industrial workers varied. They were entitled to unemployment assurance and poor relief as they could not work because of the coal crisis. Single men, for example, received between fourteen and fifteen shillings a week.[68] Generally, because they and their families were receiving dole money, they were not able to attend the communal kitchens. Although some industrial workers were slightly better off, for example a donation was made by the owners of the Gilbertson's Steel Works to the communal kitchens in the Pontardawe district on the condition that the employees of the works should be allowed to use the kitchens. Therefore some steel and tinplate workers did have access to the communal kitchens. There were instances of tinplaters, particularly single men, leaving the area during the lock-out in search of work elsewhere. Dick Cook and his brothers went to Hereford where they had family. They worked on the farms and supplemented their income by fishing and poaching, selling what they had caught at the local market. Any money they earned was sent back to Ystradgynlais where they returned to resume work in the tin works at the end of the lock-out.[69] When the Mond Nickel Works finally closed due to the lack of coal in October 1926, each employee received ten shillings a week from the company. Added

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[66] *Labour Voice*, 4 September 1926.
[67] Interview with Dick Cook, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 24/01/1974, Transcipt p.8, SWML:AUD/222.
[68] Interview with Dick Cook, Ystradgynlais, Transcript p.8, SWML:AUD/222.
[69] Interview with Dick Cook, Ystradgynlais, Transcript p.9, SWML:AUD/222.

to this, if they desired, the workers could also claim from their accumulated profits as part of the work's profit sharing scheme.[70]

In many cases, particularly the metal industries, the industrial workers suffered to a lesser extent along with the miners. However, the impact of the lock-out on these industrial workers was not uniform, this was due to the sporadic availability of coal at different works, and the different provisions made available to these workers by the state and the company that employed them.

Dual Power and Owners

The extent to which an 'us and them' attitude developed and was reinforced locally is difficult to judge. It was much easier for this attitude to develop against national institutions and individuals, but local factors contributed to having a less clear distinction between 'us' and 'them'. This was mainly due to the actions of the local apparatus of the state – the Rural District Councils and the Boards of Guardians – and the local capitalist classes – coal owners and industrialists.

The Rural District Councils and the Boards of Guardians did try to ameliorate the distress in the valley, particularly the distress of children. The Feeding of Necessitous School Children Act was implemented by the Rural District Councils in the valley. However, the role of the Board of Guardians in relieving the distress of the miners was limited due to the legal situation the miners found themselves in. Although the miners were locked out, from a legal point of view they were on strike and thus not

[70] See chapter 4 for more details on the profit share scheme at the Mond Nickel Works.

entitled to relief.[71] Miners with families could claim relief for their wives and children though. A Ministry of Health circular (Circular 703) issued on 5 May 1926, stated:

> Where the applicant for relief is able-bodied and physically capable of work the grant of relief to him is unlawful if work is available for him or he is thrown on the Guardians through his own act ... though the Guardians may lawfully relieve such dependants if they are in fact destitute.[72]

Pontardawe Board of Guardians, in October 1926, were paying 12 shillings to 11 shillings 6d. to wives and families of miners lock-out. The chairman of the Guardians in Pontardawe concluded that when compared to Bridgend, Neath, Merthyr and Pontypridd, he thought that the Pontardawe scale showed that the Guardians were paying well. In total, Pontardawe Guardians were paying £1500 a week in relief (industrial workers put out of work because of the coal stoppage must also be taken into account in this weekly total).[73] But miners who were single men did not receive anything.

The dual power system was initially established during the General Strike, and continued and developed throughout the lock-out. The local Distress Committees and their affiliated communal organisations, including the Co-op, were working alongside the local apparatus of the state. The creation of a dual power system in the Swansea valley did not lead to the two systems openly competing with each other. On the contrary, in some aspects of administration they appeared to have worked together. A

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[71] G. D. H. Cole, cited in Gerard Noel, *The Great Lock-out of 1926*, p.111.
[72] Extract from Ministry of Health Circular 703, 5 May 1926, cited in Gerard Noel, *The Great Lock-out 1926*, p.129.
[73] *Labour Voice*, 30 October and 23 October 1926.

consensual approach was adopted as the opposing authorities of power appeared to identify the other's strengths and used them for the benefit of the miners.

There are two examples from the valley that can demonstrate this cooperation which focus on the issue of relief. As mentioned above, single men who were locked out were not entitled to anything from the Board of Guardians. This caused considerable grief and distress amongst single men in the valley who had either lodgings to pay or mothers to support. The extent of distress led to a procession being organized to the Board of Guardians in Pontardawe from Clydach. The procession was banned by the police. Instead the men travelled in twos and threes to avoid police attention. On arrival in Pontardawe a deputation was sent to the Board of Guardians. But the Guardians insisted that they could not relieve single or married men involved in the dispute. Instead the Guardians suggested that the communal kitchens provide a second meal for the single men.[74] The Guardians also collected money for the relief of single men lodgers.[75] This can be viewed as an admission by the Guardians of their limitations, and recognition that the communal kitchens could offer some kind of solution.

The other side of the coin is highlighted by Dick Beamish of Abercrave. Beamish described how during the lock-out the Co-op in Abercrave had reached a position where it could no longer afford to keep giving credit. Instead of credit from a 'proletarian' organisation, the miners had to turn to the apparatus of the capitalist state, in the form of the Board of Guardians, to claim relief for their families.

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[74] *Labour Voice*, 17 July 1926.
[75] *Labour Voice*, 14 August 1926.

The cooperative attitude between the workers' organizations and committees, and the Rural District Councils and Board of Guardians can be explained, to some extent, by the presence of Labour members on the councils and boards. Pontardawe Rural District Council was Labour controlled, and out of the 30 seats on the council, 14 were held by mining and metallurgical workers.

Unlike some parts of south Wales and Britain, the 'demonization' of the local capitalists and mine owners by the workers was not always clear-cut and easy. Surprisingly, the miners and their communal organisations in the valley did receive support from coal owners, collieries and local industrialists. The *Cambrian Daily Leader*, along with other publications, reported that Sir Alfred Mond and his colleagues on the board of the Amalgamated Anthracite Collieries Ltd. made personal donations amounting to £350, for the relief of the distress amongst the company's employees' dependants. The £350 was divided between collieries in Ystradgynlais and Ammanford.[76] This was a generous act, if not a little peculiar. Effectively, by giving the donation the owners were aiding the miners' resistance against the coalowners. Although Mond can be viewed as holding 'progressive' attitudes in his approach and ideas towards industrial relations, it is still difficult to reconcile his actions with the purpose of the lock-out - to defeat the miners.[77] Possibly Mond was concerned about the future of his parliamentary seat in Carmarthen, which lay on the edge of the coalfield. He had previously lost his seat to a Labour candidate in Swansea in 1923.

Yet Mond and the board of the Amalgamated Anthracite Collieries Ltd. were not alone in showing generosity towards the miners. The Tirbach Colliery Company

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[76] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 3 June 1926.
[77] See chapter 4 for examples of Sir Alfred Mond's approach and ideas towards industrial relations.

gave the local kitchens in Ystalyfera coal and firewood. The *Labour Voice* commented that 'This is a great gift ... for it solves a very difficult problem for the [local Distress] Committee.'[78] This donation can be partially explained by the fact that the Tirbach Colliery Company was a local company and therefore the owners might have had a greater sense of affiliation to their employees. Further, the company was relatively small in comparison to the larger combines of the central and eastern South Wales Coalfield, and in the rest of Britain. Therefore they would have had little, if any, influence over the outcome of the lock-out. These two examples do highlight the complex relationship that existed between some miners and coal owners. As Gerard Noel has stated, the purpose of a lock-out is to use it as a weapon to bring hardship on the employees so that they will be forced to return to work and accept the employers' terms.[79] By giving assistance to the miners, these owners were effectively subsidising the miners and easing the hardship. Possibly the owners were either confident of success, or assumed that the outcome of the national lock-out would not be decided in the Swansea valley. It must also be stated that the local Distress Committees and kitchens accepted such gifts.

Local industrialists also made contributions in the valley. Following an appeal for financial assistance, Messrs. W. Gilbertson's and Co., Pontardawe, made a grant of £20 to each of the kitchens at Pontardawe, Ynysmeudw, Rhydyfro and Alltwen. However, this donation was only made on the condition that the men employed by the company were allowed to use the communal kitchens as well as the miners.[80] The continual disruption of work at Gilbertson's Works caused frequent unemployment. By

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[78] *Labour Voice*, 12 June 1926.
[79] Gerard Noel, *The Great Lock-out of 1926*, p.111.
[80] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 9 July 1926.

ensuring that the employees of Gilbertson's had access to the communal kitchens the owners of the works would have gained favour with them, as well as the local mine workers. Again, Gilbertson's was a local company and the distress in the local mining communities was a very apparent and everyday reality.

Community, Women and Shopocracy

The lock-out had a wider impact beyond the miners and metal workers. There was a lack of coal generally in the valley, including households. The *Cambrian Daily Leader* at the end of May reported that ratepayers in Pontardawe were dismayed by the Labour members of the council as they refused to appoint a coal rationing officer earlier in the dispute.[81] The Coal Emergency Order was not put into place by Pontardawe Rural District Council until July. The distress caused in the valley would have an impact on others in the community – most notably women in mining families and the shopocracy.

Women in the valley threw themselves into the fight when the lock-out started. Women were involved in many aspects of the miners' response, such as the setting up of women's committees and helping to run the communal kitchens. However, there was a stark division in the roles played by men and women. This was particularly true for women, whose contributions tended to follow along traditional gender lines: for example, in the communal kitchens the men were in charge of the organising and controlled the day-to-day running of the kitchens while the women served the meals[82] McIlroy has argued that the contributions of women in the communal kitchens helped to

[81] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 29 May 1926.
[82] *Labour Voice*, 24 July 1926. The author is aware that, while highlighting that women's roles tended to follow and reinforce existing gender roles at the time, he has discussed this under a title which could be construed as again reinforcing a traditional gender role for women.

sustain solidarity and to bring women into the dispute.[83] This was true in the Swansea valley, women came into contact with the realities of the dispute at a communal level as well as an individual level. William Morley commented in an interview how it was the women who gave the blacklegs abuse.[84] The involvement in communal activities certainly increased women's awareness, if it did not already exist.

The women were also the first to suffer when funds at the local kitchens became low. In Ystalyfera, in late August, it was decided to stop women diners from using the kitchens until more funds were found.[85] This can be seen as an extension of what happened in the home. Mrs Edith Jones, from Ystradgynlais, described that during times when food was scarce her mother would go without.[86] The decision to stop women's meals rather than men's meals at the communal kitchens could be viewed as a political move. This would maintain morale and to prevent any adverse political propaganda against them if the men were not able to be fed in the kitchens.

As with the communal kitchens, women's roles at committee level also tended to follow gender lines, for example supporting men and making provisions to help other women and children. The women's committees played a valuable role, especially near the end of the lock-out, as it was these committees that organized boot and clothing collections to be distributed to the neediest, particularly for children during October and November. Such a committee was formed in Clydach in November. Women's committees also aided in the raising of funds for the communal kitchens, for example

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[83] McIlroy, 'South Wales', p.147.
[84] Interview with William Morley, NUM Discussion Group, Tape 1 07:28 SWML:AUD/504.
[85] *Labour Voice*, 28 August 1926.
[86] Interview with Mrs. Edith Jones, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Philippa Dolan, April 1975, Tape 1 24:58 SWML:AUD/458.

the Labour Women's section in Pontardawe organized a lamp day to raise money for the miners' distress fund.[87]

It was not only the miners' wives who would play an important part in sustaining the miners' efforts. Women councillors on the local Rural District Councils and women outside mining families made valuable contributions to the miners and their families. Mrs L. W. Evans highlighted a campaign relating to the women's campaign for the relief of miners' wives and children to start a collection for the national fund for miners. As a result, the Pontardawe Rural District Council passed a resolution extending assistance to the women's section to administer such a scheme.[88] The female members of Pontardawe Board of Guardians also made arrangements for women with special nourishment needs to be given an extra pint of milk.[89]

Women had three main options to obtain food for their families from the local shopocracy during the lock-out: the Co-op, the local independent trader or the chain store, such as Pegler's in Ystradgynlais. The Co-op was ideal for those who were Co-op members. Mrs Thomas, from Ystradgynlais, described how at the Co-op families could run up a debt for six months and at the end of the half year families would receive their dividend and this would help pay off their debt.[90] However, in communities which had a greater reliance on the coal industry for employment, the Co-ops found it more difficult to give credit, for example as mentioned earlier the Co-op in Abercrave could not afford to keep giving credit. This does appear to make sense, as a large majority of people in Abercrave were locked out and the continual giving of credit would have

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[87] *Labour Voice*, 13 November 1926.
[88] *Labour Voice*, 29 May 1926.
[89] *Labour Voice*, 5 June 1926.
[90] Interview with Mrs Thomas, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Philippa Dola, May 1975, Tape 1 09:00 SWML:AUD/462.

severely reduced any profits and dividends that the Co-op would have made in Abercrave.

Private grocers were prepared to give credit, although the *South Wales Daily Post* reported in early June that many trades people in Pontardawe insisted on cash payments rather than credit, as during the 1921 dispute they had given credit and 'discovered it to be a dead loss.'[91] Complaints were also brought by the Ystalyfera Grocer's Association who claimed that there were several examples of people gaining credit at one grocer, and then handing in relief vouchers at another shop.[92] Gilbert has argued that such actions were seen as 'a violation of the 'bond' between the grocer and customer...'[93] There is evidence to suggest that the 'bond' between trader and customer went further, with some of the shop owners identifying themselves with the distress of the community: in mid November the Ystalyfera and District Grocers' Association stated that 'they [the grocers of the district] suffered in common with the people ...'[94] Although the shop owners did suffer through the need to give credit and less custom; Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans, Lower Cwmtwrch, commented that not many shops collapsed, but that they did go short.[95]

The majority of grocers did give credit as the lock-out continued through the summer and into the autumn. Mrs Williams from Ystalyfera, whose father had a grocery shop in Cwmgiedd, commented that in the 1921 dispute some families had

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[91] *South Wales Daily Post*, 1 June 1926.
[92] *South Wales Daily Post*, 18 June 1926.
[93] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.98-9.
[94] *Labour Voice*, 13 November 1926.
[95] Interview with Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans, Lower Cwmtwrch, Interviewed by Philippa Dolan, 1975 (?), 43:31 SWML:AUD/481.

debts of £60 to £70; the debt was paid off at 3d. a week.[96] No doubt a similar method of re-payment was agreed after the 1926 lock-out. However, credit was not given by the chain stores, such as Pegler's in Ystradgynlais.[97] In the case of Pegler's, it did remain popular during the lock-out even though cash payment was required, simply because it was cheap. Henry John commented that he used to walk to Pegler's in Ystradgynlais because it was cheaper.[98]

The religious community also made a contribution to aid the miners' efforts. As mentioned earlier, many of the communal kitchens were housed in chapel vestries throughout the valley. There was also assistance from the Salvation Army which organized the collection and distribution of food parcels, clothing and boots, as well as organizing picnics for children.[99] The role played by the chapels and the Salvation Army does support Noel's assumption that solidarity in south Wales included the participation of religious bodies.[100] However, it could be argued that the solidarity of religious movements was based more on Christianity rather than socialism and class. What can be asserted is that the wider community was largely dragged into the miners' dispute in one way or another.

Blacklegs

Blacklegging did occur in the Swansea valley during the lock-out, but it was neither sustained nor did the miners return to work en masse. There were several returns to

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[96] Interview with Mrs Williams, Ystalyfera, Interviewed by Philippa Dolan, June 1975, Tape 1, Side 1 09:20 SWML:AUD/485.
[97] Interview with Mrs Thomas, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Philippa Dolan, May 1975, Tape 1, Side1 09:20 SWML:AUD/462.
[98] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Transcript p.27, SWML:AUD/220.
[99] *Labour Voice*, 29 May and 10 July 1926.
[100] Gerard Noel, *The Great Lock-out of 1926*, p.152.

work during the period of the lock-out, but all of them involved only a small number of men. At Steer Pit in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen in May 1926, non-union labour was used to erect screens and surface equipment. There were no reports of picketing; instead, the Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Trades and Labour Council sent a deputation to meet the non-union men who made assurances that they would join the union without delay.[101] A blacklegging case occurred at the Pwllbach Colliery in Ystalyfera, where men working the hard-heading returned to work twice during the lock-out. Whether these men were members of the SWMF cannot be ascertained, but the local miners were concerned enough to demand that they continue to stay out. They first returned to work in June, but ceased work after a week, mainly because of an appeal by James Griffiths for the men to stop work. The miners locked out at Ystalyfera, like those in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, left the situation of the blacklegs to the miners' leaders to deal with. In July, the same men returned to work for a second time. This again caused agitation amongst those who remained out. But direct action by miners was averted after James Griffiths again made an appeal, this time to the miners, not to do anything that would bring them into contact with the police.[102] There are no further reports about the hard-heading workmen at Pwllbach Colliery after mid August. It can be assumed that the community had resigned itself to the fact that these men were determined to return to work. The miners' leadership's fears of police action inhibited any direct action and did maintain peace.

However, when a similar problem occurred in Birchgrove, where two men had returned to work at the Birchgrove Collieries in October, a more direct approach was

[101] *Labour Voice*, 5 June 1926.
[102] *Labour Voice*, 14 August 1926.

taken. This time pickets were organized and waited for the men to finish work. The situation was resolved peacefully and at a general meeting a resolution was passed pledging allegiance to the Federation.[103] The use of direct action through picketing had reversed the return to work, something that the miners' leaders could not prevent at Pwllbach Colliery. Likewise, in Abercrave, during November when twelve men at the International and Abercrave Collieries had been filling small coal, the miners again took direct action. An unofficial demonstration was organized to ask the men to cease work, but by the time the demonstration arrived, the men had already left work.[104] The use of direct action picks out a further feature of the 'alternative culture' present in the Swansea valley.

There was also the peculiarity of three collieries in the valley that worked right through the lock-out: Wernbwll Colliery in Tai'rgwaith, near Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, and Rhiw and Gover Collieries in Rhiwfawr, near Ystradgynlais. The three collieries were kept open without the help of outside labour. They were family-run small collieries and their production of coal was not a serious threat to the effectiveness of the miners' strength in the Swansea valley. However, there is evidence to suggest that these collieries were perceived as a threat locally, or at the very least resented. The *South Wales Daily Post* reported how at an unnamed colliery in Rhiwfawr, the pump was broken, horses' harnesses and collars and tools were stolen. The broken pump led to the flooding which made the level unusable.[105] This attack does appear to be a serious attempt to sabotage the colliery and prevent anyone from working there.

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[103] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 22 and 23 October 1926.
[104] *South Wales Daily Post*, 12 November 1926.
[105] *South Wales Daily Post*, 23 November 1926.

There were also suggestions that the breakaway Spencer Union was attempting to operate in the district. William Morley described that a small number of men attended meetings in the area, but they did not breakaway.[106] This, to some extent, does demonstrate the loyalty that the miners in south Wales, and in the Swansea valley, had to the SWMF.

Such incidents of blacklegging did not pose that much trouble. A bigger problem came from the outcropping of coal by colliers, coal-owners and profiteers. The outcropping of coal was initially done by miners who dug coal for the benefit of the community. The coal was used for cooking and heating at either the communal kitchens or by the miners in their homes. But as the lock-out continued, the outcrops started to be worked for profit. Locked-out miners involved in the outcropping of coal were well organised: in Cwmgiedd men engaged in outcropping worked regular shifts.[107] The sale of outcrop coal was, at times, a lucrative way to earn money, and thus proved very tempting to miners who were locked out and struggling to make end meet. As early as the end of May, outcrop coal in the valley was reaching prices of 30 shillings a load.[108] The miners' agents tried to resolve the situation and stop outcropping for profit. But ultimately it was left to the miners themselves to take action. At the Lower Cwmtwrch communal kitchen, men selling outcrop coal around the district were refused meals.[109] This can be seen as an attempt by the community to maintain solidarity and class discipline. Similar action was taken in other parts of the valley. Noel highlights though how there was confusion between those who were digging outcrop coal for themselves

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[106] Interview with William Morley, NUM Discussion Group, Tape 1 05:03.
[107] *Labour Voice*, 17 July 1926.
[108] *Labour Voice*, 22 May 1926. The paper does not state how much defined a 'load'.
[109] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 25 August 1926.

and those who were effectively blacklegging by a making a profit. He argues that much depended on the interpretation of how the coal was being used.[110] There was certainly a very thin line between the digging of outcrop coal for personal use and for the benefit of the community and for profit. The sale of outcropped coal also undermined the miners' position, as coal became available on the open market. Some coal owners also participated in the working of coal in the valley. The Gover Colliery, at Rhiwfawr, produced between eighty and a hundred tons a week. It was the coal owners who worked the coal, a situation that the local mining leaders were helpless to prevent.[111]

The availability of relatively large quantities of outcrop coal in the Swansea valley attracted attention from other areas of south Wales. The trickle of outcrop coal in the summer had started to turn into a flood by the late autumn. Throughout the last week of October and through November, the *Labour Voice* made continual reports of the number of lorries in the Swansea valley 'hunting for outcrop coal'.[112] This caused aggravation in the valley as outcrop coal was being transported to other districts by road and by rail from Ystalyfera, Ystradgynlais and Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen areas. There were reports of one lorry from Pontypridd.[113] The miners' leaders were unable to deal with the removal of coal. Instead the miners took it upon themselves to try to prevent the removal of coal. Pickets were set up in the communities: at Ystalyfera there were twenty-three pickets, working in relays of eight hour shifts. These pickets did have some success as many drivers were reported to have left the valley with empty

[110] Gerard Noel, *The Great Lock-out of 1926*, p.103.
[111] *Cambrian*, 24 September 1926.
[112] *Labour Voice*, 23 October 1926.
[113] Ibid.

lorries.[114] But these attempts to remove coal led to an atmosphere of desperation and paranoia in the district. It was reported in Ystalyfera that buses were being stopped, and passengers and every space on the buses were searched for concealed coal.[115] As a result the police presence in the area was increased and the pickets came under investigation.

Despite overall small-scale blacklegging and the outcropping of coal, there was not a sustained or even en masse return to work. The lack of blacklegging in the Swansea valley can be partially explained by factors of geography and kinship. The valley's semi-rural location did help to relieve some of the distress, particularly when it came to the provision of food. It was common in the valley for miners, along with other workers, to keep gardens which allowed them to grow vegetables, as well as space to keep animals. Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans described how their father, a collier, kept pigs, ducks, geese, chickens, and sheep.[116] This allowed the miners to supplement their diet of vegetables and meat that they had produced themselves. Again, Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans explained how their father would kill some of the animals in the garden to feed the family and their mother would share what she had with the neighbours.[117] Miss Jones, from Ystradgynlais, related how her parents had a small business selling eggs, bacon and butter.[118] The semi-rural lifestyle of the Swansea valley miners can be seen as helping to alleviate some of the distress faced by the

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[114] *Labour Voice*, 6 November 1926.
[115] *South Wales Daily Post*, 11 November 1926.
[116] Interview with Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans, Lower Cwmtwrch, Tape 1 02:23 SWML:AUD/481.
[117] Interview with Bessie Webb and Hannah Evans, Lower Cwmtwrch, Tape 1 43:31 SWML:AUD/481.
[118] Interview with Miss Jones, Ystradgynlais, Interviewed by Philippa Dolan, March 1975, Tape 1 08:03 SWML:AUD/457.

miners, and thus reducing the level of desperation felt amongst miners that could have driven them back to work.

Solidarity amongst the miners was reinforced by bonds of kinship. Gilbert has argued for the importance of kinship in labour recruitment and career progress.[119] The importance of kinship can also be applied to unionism. The fact that the Swansea valley was made up of relatively small communities with their own colliery or collieries meant that close family ties were connected to the community and the colliery. At collieries in Cwmllynfell and Cwmtwrch a system was operated where a job at the colliery was dependant on if you had family already working at the colliery or not. This made blacklegging virtually impossible in such communities as not only would the blacklegs be defying their union, but also their fathers, sons, brothers, uncles and neighbours. In larger communities such as Abercrave, a similar sense of solidarity was manifested in lodgings. Dick Beamish described how in some cases in lodgings, miners had to sleep two to a bed because there was not enough space for a bed each.[120] This situation would intensify the opportunity to use peer pressure as a means of maintaining solidarity.

However, the peer pressure from families and neighbours may have had an adverse effect, particularly at the smaller collieries. The village of Rhiwfawr had two collieries that worked throughout the lockout. One was worked by owners, but it can be concluded that at the other colliery possibly one or two families decided not to take part in the coal dispute and remained at work. Or, that the size of the colliery meant that the men were not locked out, for example the Rhiw Colliery, Rhiwfawr, employed only 21

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[119] Gilbert, *Class, Community and Collective Action*, p.252.

[120] Interview with Dick Beamish, Abercrave, Interviewed by Hywel Francis, 07/11/1972, Tape 1, Side 1 31:40 SWML:AUD/261. See chapter 5 for details on solidarity in the Swansea valley coal industry.

men in 1926.[121] This is best exemplified by the fact that it was at the smaller collieries that the return to work started at the end of November.

These factors all contributed to a general increased sense of solidarity and reduced the possibility of blacklegging. But those who did break the communal and fraternal bonds were ostracised by the mining community. Henry John described how the blacklegs in Abercrave – about half a dozen – were 'sent to Coventry'. The end of the dispute did not lead to an end of the bad feeling. Henry John goes on to comment that, sometime after the lock-out had ended, some of the blacklegs opened a shop in Abercrave which was boycotted by those involved in the lock-out.[122] The success of this boycott is unknown.

Return To Work

By November, the miners in the Swansea valley still did not look like giving in to the owners. By the end of the month the Anthracite District was in a minority compared with the rest of south Wales. The *Labour Voice* reported on 4 December that 'A ballot of the miners was conducted at each of the local lodges and without exception the returns showed a majority against re-opening negotiations with the coal owners. Subsequent events, however, proved that the Anthracite District was in a minority ...'[123] Such a refusal to re-open negotiations is demonstrated by the results of a vote taken on the issue at the following lodges:[124]

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[121] *The Coal Trades Directory and Colliery Year Book 1926*, p.253.
[122] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Transcript p.8, SWML:AUD/220.
[123] *Labour Voice*, 4 December 1926.
[124] *South Wales Daily Post*, 29 November 1926.

Lodge	For	Against
Primrose (Pontardawe)	32	74
Tyrdach (Ystalyfera)	113	178
Gilwen (Ystalyfera)	22	110

Despite the Swansea valley miners' refusal to accept a re-opening of negotiations with mine owners there began a trickle back to work in November.

The return to work started with the smaller collieries. The *Cambrian Daily Leader* ran a list of the numbers who had returned to work and at which collieries, as follows:[125]

Colliery	Number of Colliers Returning to Work
Cwmtawe	30
Rhiw	14
Cwmnant	15
Llwyndu	35
Unnamed Colliery in Pontardawe	40

Even by 26 November, the *South Wales Daily Post* reported that '...there is no visible sign of the men returning to the big collieries in the Swansea valley...'[126]

The trickle back to work saw an increase in radicalism, or possibly just naked desperation in the valley. The first call was for the withdrawal of the safetymen from

[125] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 16 November 1926. There is a possibility that these numbers may have been massaged for propaganda purposes by the press.
[126] *South Wales Daily Post*, 26 November 1926.

the collieries. A mass meeting in Clydach in October demanded such an action.[127] This call was repeated by other lodges in the valley. The Anthracite Strike of 1925 had seen the safetymen removed from the collieries and was a significant action which helped to gain victory for the miners. Hywel Francis commented that the withdrawal of the safetymen in 1925 was a '...unique and unprecedented decision in the whole history of the South Wales Coalfield.'[128] Given the fact that such an action had helped to secure victory in 1925, it is not surprising that such a call was made again a year later in 1926.

However, a possible withdrawal of the safetymen in 1926 was more difficult than in 1925. Mr D. B. Jones, secretary of the South Wales Colliery Craftsmen's Association stated that 60 per cent of safetymen in south Wales were members of his association and they would remain at work.[129] Unlike the Anthracite Strike of 1925, such action by the safetymen was nearly impossible across the whole coalfield owing to their allegiance to a different union. A second action that can be identified as a radicalisation of the miners in the Swansea valley was a call for the separation of the Anthracite District from the rest of the coalfield. This was mainly due to the increasing number of miners that were returning to work across south Wales. Such a call was backed by lodges in the Swansea valley such as at Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen.[130] It was thought that because of the future viability and profitability of the Anthracite District the anthracite miners were in a stronger position to hold out in any future industrial dispute, without being tied to the steam coal districts of the central and eastern valleys. Again, this can be linked to the Anthracite Strike of 1925, when the anthracite miners

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[127] *Labour Voice*, 9 October 1926.
[128] Hywel Francis, 'The Anthracite Strike and Disturbances of 1925', *Llafur*, Vol. 1, Number 2 (1973) p.19.
[129] *Cambrian Daily Leader*, 8 October 1926.
[130] *South Wales Daily Post*, 30 November 1926.

went on strike without the steam coal districts and won the dispute. However, such a suggestion of secession did not go any further beyond discussion. If anything it can be seen as an attempt to place blame for the failure of the miners to secure a victory on the actions of those in other areas of south Wales outside the Anthracite District. The radicalism amongst the miners is also highlighted by the actions of a few colliers in their attempts to stop men returning to work near the end of, and after, the lock-out had ended. Francis and Smith in *The Fed* brought to light that to carry o ut 'effective picketing', Ystradgynlais miners indulged in historical gymnastics and disguised themselves as 'Scotch Cattle'.[131] Despite the assertion made by Francis and Smith coming from only one source, there does appear to be some further evidence that can be viewed as supporting this claim. The *Labour Voice*, on 25 December 1926 had a headline "Masked Pickets at Onllwyn". The accompanying article went on to claim that the pickets were attempting to stop men going to work.[132] The masked pickets physically attacked men who were going to work. Although these men were not described as being disguised as 'Scotch Cattle' they were masked and the use of violence does show some similarities with the Scotch Cattle movement of the first half of the nineteenth century. Further, Onllwyn is in the Dulais valley, but scores of men from the Swansea valley were employed in collieries in Onllwyn, this is again similar to the traits of the Scotch Cattle who generally operated outside their own mining community. The violent picketing can be traced to the collapse of the miners' position at the end of the lock-out. Let down by the formally organized trade union movement, these men took it upon themselves to use more informal and simplistic methods of

[131] Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, pp.62-3.
[132] *Labour Voice*, 25 December 1926.

industrial action – the use of violence. The numbers involved in such activity, however, were small and ineffectual in combating the return to work, but could be viewed as an attempt at 'guerrilla warfare' to try and sustain the fight.

The end of November also saw an increase in illness, especially amongst children. The *Labour Voice* reported the prevalence of tonsillitis and scarlatina in Abercrave, which it claimed was the result of the cold weather and heavy rain.[133] Medical costs were difficult to pay at anytime, let alone during a lock-out that had already lasted over 6 months by November.

There was not a return to work en masse in the valley until the national return to work on 30 November. But the return to work was not always straight-forward. Pumping and safety checks had to be carried out at the collieries before work could resume. Even by 11 December, the *Labour Voice* commented that a few collieries had still not restarted.[134] The settlement of price lists was also an issue and until price lists had been settled in each department whole collieries were kept idle; such a situation arose at the Varteg Colliery, Ystalyfera.[135] The defeat of the miners also meant that internal political problems had to be resolved. At the Ystalyfera Colliery there was a difference regarding men who had joined the Craftsmen's Union.[136]

The return to work did not mark the resumption of peaceful industrial relations. At the Diamond Colliery in Ystradgynlais, about 30 repairers and their assistants struck work because of a dispute over weekend work and payment. The repairers employed at

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[133] *Labour Voice*, 13 November 1926.
[134] *Labour Voice*, 11 December 1926.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

the Wernplymis Colliery struck in sympathy with those at the Diamond Colliery.[137] At the Tareni Colliery the afternoon men returned home after management requested that the men reach their level through a different pit shaft which was thought to be unsafe.[138] The miners may have been defeated in the lock-out but in the Swansea valley they still had the passion and confidence to continue with strike action and militant behaviour.

The miners were also not re-employed en masse either. The length of the lock-out meant that it took a while for the production of coal to reach full capacity. As a result the collieries re-employed the miners in stages, as production gradually increased in the following weeks and months. Henry John described the situation in Abercrave:

> We didn't all go back together at once ... in Wanclawdd [Colliery] ...I couldn't go back there, they didn't have a place for me ... we all went to work down Wernplymis [Colliery] near the Diamond Colliery [Ystradgynlais], and we all had work there ... until we were absorbed back into these collieries [in Abercrave].[139]

It was the victory in the Anthracite Strike of 1925 that had the greatest impact on the return to work in 1926. The security of the Seniority Rule ensured that colliers were able to return to their place of work once the colliery had work for them. James Griffiths, miners' agent, noted the importance of seniority:

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[137] Ibid.
[138] *Labour Voice*, 18 December 1926.
[139] Interview with Henry John, Abercrave, Transcript p.30, SWML:AUD/220.

> ... When the '26 strike [1926 miners' lock-out] ended ... and when the pits re-opened we had an agreement, a condition that the re-employment would be on the basis of Seniority Rule...[140]

The operation of seniority did, to some extent, hinder the return to work as each miner had to wait his turn until his workplace was required to start again. But the use of the Seniority Rule did ensure that victimisation of radicals or union members was prevented. As a result, this made it difficult for coal owners to attack the SWMF or impose an industrial union on the miners. The collieries in the Swansea valley, as well as in the rest of the Anthracite District, kept their radicals, and more importantly the SWMF and its strength in the district was left intact. The extent to which the union maintained its strength is demonstrated by the confidence the Swansea valley miners had to withdraw their labour within days of the return to work in December 1926.

However, the implementation of the Seniority Rule during the return to work was mainly on the goodwill of the coal owners, who agreed to re-employ the miners on the basis of seniority. The re-employment of men on the grounds of seniority was not always operated. At the Glantwrch Colliery, near Ystalyfera, the men on their return to work were confronted with a notice that their places of work were up to tender and would be given to the lowest bidder.[141] The colliery management blatantly ignored the Seniority Rule, and possibly saw the miners' defeat in the lock-out as an opportunity to undermine the implementation of seniority at the colliery.

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[140] Interview with James Griffiths, Miners' Agent, Interviewed by Richard Lewis and Hywel Francis, 20/11/1972, Transcript p.15, SWML:AUD/90.
[141] *Labour Voice*, 11 December 1926.

Conclusion

The 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out unfolded in very much the same way as other parts of south Wales and Britain. The General Strike was well supported by other workers outside the mining industry in the valley, particularly tinplaters, steel workers and railwaymen. The lock-out was met by a communal response by the miners and their communities through the establishment of kitchens, entertainments, meetings and lectures. But the defensive nature of the miners' response contributed to the eventual defeat of the miners at the end of November.

Although a dual power system did appear during the General Strike, and did continue during the lock-out, there was not a transfer of power in the valley as in other areas highlighted by Hywel Francis. The existence of dual power meant that the workers' committees – Strike and Emergency Committees and Councils of Action – ran aspects of the valley's communities along with traditional apparatus of the state – the Rural District Council and the Boards of Guardians. The best description of this situation in the valley is a dual power system rather than a distinctive transference of power.

The dual power system continued and developed during the lock-out. But the systems that existed, rather than competing and holding suspicions of each other, seemed to cooperate. This can be explained by the influence of the Labour Party and the presence of miners and other industrial workers as councillors on the Rural District Councils.

Francis and Smith's conclusion of an 'alternative culture' coming into existence in south Wales during the lock-out can be applied to the Swansea valley. There was an

adaptation of conventional social, political and cultural norms and values, for example collective action in the form of communal kitchens, the use of direct action to prevent a any work taking place at collieries, or any coal leaving the district, the development of a dual-power system and the discussion and presence of radical politics at political meetings. A possible long-term effect of the 'alternative culture' in the Swansea valley was the change in leadership of union lodges after 1926, when a younger generation replaced the previous generation of leaders who had been influenced by Non-Conformity, such was the case in Abercrave.[142]

However, this 'alternative culture' did not mark a permanent paradigm shift in the social thinking of miners and mining communities. The 'alternative culture' developed out of necessity and circumstance. The use of communal activities made the miners stronger and was a natural development during the lock-out. But it can also be viewed as a tangible manifestation of an 'us and them' or siege mentality. If you were 'one of us' you had access to the communal provisions and the temporary norms and values associated with a communal outlook and the distress caused by the lock-out. But once the lock-out ended, the communities of the valley reverted back to the accepted conventional social and cultural norms and values. As McIlroy has concluded: 'The catastrophe did not affirm a new alternative society in south Wales ...'[143]

The diversity of industrial workers and the response of some coal owners and industrialists in the valley revealed a different feature to the lock-out than in other valleys, where the miners dominated the working class. Some industrial workers, most

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[142] Refer to p.144 of this dissertation.
[143] McIlroy, 'South Wales', p.153.

notably the tinplaters and steel workers, suffered similar distress to the miners, and in some instances had access to the communal provisions of the miners, for example the tinplaters in the Pontardawe district. A distinct feature of the lock-out in the Swansea valley was the role played by some of the local coal owners and industrialists. This was especially apparent through the provision of money and supplies for the relief of distress amongst the miners. Such acts can only be explained by the different affiliations that the owners and industrialists had with their employees and the locality.

The General Strike and miners' lock-out in the Swansea valley demonstrated a high level of solidarity in the valley. This solidarity and unionism can be explained through political, geographical and community factors. The General Strike showed the willingness of trade union members from a variety of industries to support each other and the miners based on principle. While the close proximity, and inter-reliance, of the different industries in the valley gave a further sense of solidarity, as other industrial workers were drawn into the conditions and situations faced by the miners. This was strengthened by the fact that the different industrial workers shared the same geographical and social spaces in the valley, for example residential, religious and group organizations. This helped to foster a response by the Swansea valley communities to the lock-out, rather than a sense of the miners within the communities standing alone.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Trade unionism in the Swansea valley was not homogeneous; it varied between industries and workforces, and as such each industry developed a form of unionism which best suited the unique characteristics of that industry and the workers it employed. As such, three distinct strands of unionism developed in the Swansea valley, each centred around a key industry, namely conciliation in the tinplate industry, industrial cooperation in the nickel industry and a more confrontational approach in the coal industry.

Trade unionism in the tinplate industry had its roots in the Swansea valley with the formation of an organized union in Ystalyfera in 1868. But it was not until the formation of The Independent Association of Tinplate Makers in 1871 that the tinplaters of south west Wales, including the Swansea valley, became formally unionized. It was this union which established the two pillars of tinplate unionism: the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule. These two principles gave tinplaters a benchmark for wages, and through the 36 box rule, some control over the output of tinplates.

However, throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the tinplate industry was susceptible to economic slump, over-production and acute competition caused by the high concentration of tinplate works in south Wales. These economic conditions severely limited the effectiveness of trade unionism in the industry. A new union, The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, which was formed in 1887, was also afflicted by the continued fluctuations in the tinplate industry. Despite several attempts to re-establish the List of 1874 as the standard wage, both unions were unable to maintain it for a sustained amount of time.

This situation was made worse by the introduction of the McKinley Tariff in 1891, which restricted Welsh tinplate exports to the industry's main market – the United States. It was the impact of the McKinley Tariff which hindered The South Wales, Monmouthshire and

Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, as the economic slump saw the union not only struggle to sustain its members, but the union also became embroiled in internal struggles, particularly between millmen and tinhousemen; the union leadership also had to deal with unruly branches.

The ultimate outcome was a schism in tinplate unionism and the dispersal of tinplate workers into six different unions. As a result there was a move towards conciliation with the different unions representing the workers, working with the tinplate masters in an attempt to prevent debilitating industrial disputes. It also aimed to bring an element of stability to the tinplate trade by, together, controlling output to prevent over-production and ensuring the tinplate masters worked with, rather than against, each other for the greater good of the industry. This removed the threat of acute competition, such as the undercutting of prices and wages.

The establishment, in June 1899, and growth of the conciliation throughout the twentieth century was very much a top-down idea. The key leaders that emerged in the tinplate industry after the collapse of The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, namely Ben Tillett of the Dockers' Union and John Hodge of the Steel Smelters' Union, were both advocates of conciliation. The tinplate industry appeared to have learnt the lessons of the late nineteenth century and adopted a new strategy towards industrial relations which helped to preserve industrial peace in the twentieth century. This proved beneficial to both worker and masters.

However, there were some anomalies within tinplate unionism, which was highlighted by 'New Unionism', for example the Dockers' Union. Keith Laybourn has concluded that 'New Unionism' was '...more important in encouraging skilled unionists to be less sectarian

than it was in organizing the unskilled.'[1] This is true in the sense that skilled workers were now part of unions which represented workers from several industries and of varying levels of skill, for example in the Dockers' Union. But tinplaters did have a tradition of being part of a union which had always represented skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers within the tinplate industry. It could be argued that, to some extent, sectarianism within the tinplate trade was reinforced by the 1899 schism. This is best exemplified by the divisions between workers in the mill and the tinhouse, who joined different unions when the new structure of unionism was established in 1899. The industry at the beginning of the twentieth century was plagued by inter-union disputes and mistrust between millmen's unions and tinhousemen's unions. Despite these divisions the tinplate trade, by the beginning of the twentieth century, had established its own approach of trade unionism, conciliation, which would remain the ethos of the industry for the best part of the rest of the century.

The nickel industry in the Swansea valley was more recent in its formation than the tinplate and coal industries, and was established during a period of growth in 'New Unionism' in the Swansea valley district, particularly through the Dockers' Union and its links with the tinplate trade. The Mond Nickel Works, Clydach, was founded by Ludwig Mond, who from the outset adopted a paternalistic approach providing workers with paid holidays, pensions, relatively good wages, social, leisure and educational activities, and housing. Despite this paternalistic approach, the owners vehemently resisted any strike action by their employees, for example in 1902 and 1922, when the owners and management always attempted to keep the works open. This was done by either through the use of strike breakers, as in 1902, or by exploiting divisions amongst the workers, as in 1922, when non-unionized workers, or workers in different unions continued to work.

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[1] Keith Laybourn, *A History of British Trade Unionism, c.1770-1990* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1992), p.91.

Until the mid 1920s, there were elements of traditional union activity existing in the Mond Nickel Works – employees were members of unions respective to their occupation and did engage in strike action. A change in unionism began to develop during the First World War with the establishment of a works council, which effectively by-passed the traditional role of trade unions. With the works council, it was the workers who represented themselves.

The final death knell for traditional unionism in the Mond Nickel Works was the industrial and social experiments implemented by Alfred Mond, the son of Ludwig Mond and an advocate of industrial cooperation. Alfred Mond put his beliefs into practice at the Mond Nickel Works: a profit share scheme which was first implemented in 1925 for example. The impact of two heavy defeats of strike action in 1902 and 1922, the works' paternalistic attitude and the use of profit share schemes meant that by the mid 1920s, the Mond Nickel Works was largely non-unionized. As a result, the workers at the works came to adopt industrial cooperation as their primary approach to industrial relations.

The coal industry in the Swansea valley was marked by a more confrontational approach when compared to the tinplate and nickel industries in the valley. The miners of the Swansea valley developed a strong sense of solidarity based on aspects of community life such as the Welsh language, kin relationships and village bonds, independent working-class education, as well as political and ideological links. This fostered a more confrontational approach to industrial relations.

However, unionism in the Swansea valley coal industry was not homogeneous. Different collieries and different parts of the valley had their own eccentricities, customs and levels of militancy. The anthracite collieries in the upper valley were protective of their customs such as the Seniority Rule, which contributed to the 1925 Anthracite Strike. Different collieries also had different levels of militancy and trade union solidarity: the Tareni Colliery had a reputation for unconstitutional and militant activity; this is best

exemplified by the 1911 Tareni Strike which took place without the support of the SWMF and culminated in rioting in Ystalyfera. However, there were some collieries which remained working during industrial disputes, for example the Rhiw Colliery, near Ystradgynlais, during the 1926 miners' lock-out.

Solidarity was created in several ways; in the smaller villages solidarity was a construct of loyalty to other village members, to family members and the use of the Welsh language, all of which were used as a 'right to entry' and a means of controlling who did and who did not work in the colliery. In the larger villages, towns and collieries, solidarity was created more along the lines of politics and ideology fostered by independent working-class education, a sense of 'defending' the mining communities and a strong leadership in union lodges, for example in the Abercrave Collieries. Although the majority, if not all, of the miners in the Swansea valley were members of the same union, the SWMF, factors such as identity, language, settlement, lodge leadership, education, and even the type of coal being cut all influenced the development of unionism within each colliery and lodge.

There were attempts to draw together different lodges, for example with the Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges, in the local Trade and Labour Councils and during big industrial disputes, such as the 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out, when strike committees were formed. Although the Swansea valley had its own unique aspects as regards to trade unionism, the valley through the SWMF had links with the rest of the South Wales Coalfield and to miners across Britain. As a result, as well as miners being involved in local and regional disputes, such as the 1911 Tareni and 1925 Anthracite Strike, Swansea valley miners were also involved in national disputes, for example the 1921 lock-out and the 1926 General Strike and miners' lock-out. The coal industry thus provided the Swansea valley with a third strain of unionism, namely a more confrontational approach which resulted in the

Swansea valley miners being engaged in several industrial disputes during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Throughout the period of 1870 – 1926, the dominant union within the valley and district changed. Initially it was the unions of the tinplaters which took a leading role in unionism. This was particularly true regarding The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, whose leadership gave assistance to the gas lamplighters of Swansea, which resulted in the lamplighters gaining an advance in wages equal to three shillings a week.[2] The same union took the lead in attempts to put forward labour representative candidates in Swansea, particularly in parliamentary elections, for example the tinplaters nominated Thomas Phillips, General Secretary of The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, in a by-election in Swansea in 1893.

After the formation of the SWMF, coal workers took an increasing role within the labour movement. Tinplaters' representatives did continue to be involved in labour politics, Ben Tillett for example stood as a Labour candidate in the first 1910 General Election in Swansea. At a local level it was the miners who took the lead; this was particularly true within the Trade and Labour Councils of the Swansea valley. In the Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council, miners made up the majority of members, and in its 1928 annual report, it commented on the '...apathy that exists' of the B.I.S.A.K.T.A Union in the district.[3] It was also miners' leaders such as James Griffiths and Dai Dan Evans who were the main supporters of independent working-class education in the valley, as well as former miners, such as Nun Nicholas, who were running the education classes.

The differences in approaches that emerged between the tinplate, nickel and coal industries in the Swansea valley during this period can be explained by several factors such

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[2] *Cambrian*, 13 December 1889.
[3] Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council, 1928 Annual Report, MRC:MSS.292/79Y/4.

as the size of the industry, welfare and philanthropic provisions, divisions amongst workers and the economic conditions that each industry operated in. Each of these factors contributed to the direction each industry took as regards to trade unionism and industrial relations.

The nickel industry in the Swansea valley was centralized on just one works – the Mond Nickel Works, Clydach. This meant that on very few occasions were the Mond workers dragged into a wider dispute outside the works. As such, it was also easier for the owners and management to put into place their experimental ideas about industrial cooperation as these ideas did not need consent from the wider industry to make these plans work effectively. Also, the number employed in the industry was relatively small. During the First World War, when employment at the works was at its peak during the period of study, the Mond Nickel Works employed in the region of 2550. This gave the nickel workers very little numerical strength in their own right.

The tinplate industry was larger in comparison to nickel, but its strength was still concentrated in the south Wales region. The concentration of works in these regions did allow for a greater amount of cooperation between workers' representatives and the masters, which subsequently allowed for the formation of a conciliation board by the beginning of the twentieth century. The interests of tinplaters were also well served by their unions, particularly the Dockers' Union, as it was the tinplaters who made up the backbone of this union in the early twentieth century.

However, with the formation of the SWMF in 1898, the miners of south Wales had linked itself to the national miners' union – the MFGB. Mining was a much larger industry, employing in south Wales at its peak in 1913 232,800, and in 1926 still employing 156,381 workers. In the Swansea valley alone in 1926 the coal industry employed approximately 10,000. The nature and size of the mining industry meant that Swansea valley miners were more likely to be dragged into confrontational industrial disputes, not only at a local and

regional level, but also at a national level, as was the case in 1921 and 1926. It was also more difficult, if not impossible, to construct a separate approach to unionism based solely on the Swansea valley, but which also complemented the approaches adopted by miners in the rest of south Wales and Britain.

Different levels of welfare and paternalism also existed within each industry. The tinplate and nickel industries had a tradition of welfare from above and paternalism. The Mond Nickel Works had a vast array of welfare and leisure activities, provided by the works for both workers and managers. Such provisions included good wages, pensions, housing and paid holidays; as well as activities that allowed workers to follow sporting and musical interests and hobbies such as gardening and photography.

The tinplate industry's paternalist tradition had its roots in the nineteenth century, which saw the establishment of works schools, libraries and attempts to improve conditions of work, particularly surrounding ventilation, for example the Ynyspenllwch Works had a school for its workers' children and William Williams, owner of the Worcester and Upper Forest Works, prided himself on providing relatively good conditions for his workers. The tinplate unions' roles as regards to welfare mainly centred on financial benefits including sickness and death payments to workers and their families.

The welfare and leisure activities that existed in the mining industry were implemented from a bottom-up approach. Activities, libraries and independent education were provided by the miners for the miners. A strong independent working-class education developed within the valley, which was instrumental in the political thinking of the miners and allowed a new generation of miners' leaders to emerge. This new generation of miners' leaders, such as James Griffiths and Dai Dan Evans, would take leading roles, not only in the Swansea valley but also within the wider activities of the South Wales Coalfield and the labour movement.

One thing which limited strong and united action between workers in the nickel and tinplate industries was division amongst themselves. The tinplate industry, despite having a tradition of one union representing all workers in the industry, was plagued by divisions, particularly between the millmen and those employed in the tinhouse. It was not until the splitting of the workforce into different unions was this division somewhat resolved. However, divisions still remained between millmen who joined two competing unions: the Steel Smelters' Union and the Tin and Sheet Millmen's Association. Suspicion between the unions continued into the twentieth century, and culminated in inter-union disputes, such as at the Glanrhyd Works in 1911. These divisions, at times, hindered the tinplaters from taking a united stand.

Strikes at the Mond Nickel Works in 1902 and 1922 were also hampered by divisions amongst workers. In 1902, the strikers were subjected to the importation of strike breaking labour in an attempt by owners and management to keep the works open. In 1922, it was divisions amongst workers within the Mond Works which contributed to the defeat of the strike. Not all workers at the works were unionized by 1922, and workers in other unions at the works did not come out in support.

Within the mining industry in 1921 the SWMF encompassed different types and grades of workers within the mining industry, for example those who had previously been members of the South Wales Colliery Enginemen and Mechanics Union. This was reinforced by most mining communities which demanded solidarity. During industrial disputes the nature of Swansea valley communities, where mining was the dominant industry, and the communal role of the union, provided miners with support mechanisms such as communal kitchens and fund raising activities which allowed them to sustain themselves for longer periods. The level of solidarity and the representation of just one union by 1921 meant that

the miners could support themselves to a much greater degree and were not distracted by inter-union rivalry, or a concerted return to work before the end of the dispute.

Economic conditions also played a role in the type of unionism which developed. The tinplate industry was susceptible to 'boom and bust' cycles, which was made worse by a depression in the tinplate industry caused by the introduction of the McKinley Tariff in 1891. These economic conditions made it almost impossible for the unions of the time to maintain for prolonged periods the two pillars of tinplate unions: the List of 1874 and the 36 box rule. However, improvements in the economic circumstances of the industry coincided with the establishment of the Conciliation Board. The board played its part in helping to sustain the condition of the industry by regulating wages and helping to prevent over production. The relatively stable economic conditions of the early twentieth century helped to consolidate the Conciliation Board, and linked the board with stability and improvement in the industry.

The nickel industry, despite a post-war slump in the early 1920s, remained an economically strong industry which expanded in the pre-war years. The good economic conditions allowed for the further investment in welfare provisions by the owners for employers, such as the clubhouse which was completed in January 1909 at a cost of £4000.[4] Such conditions also allowed the maintenance of relatively good wages and other financial benefits at the works. Proactive intervention by the management in the search of new markets for nickel in the early to mid 1920s allowed the works to recover from the post-war slump. Innovations, such as the profit share scheme, were able to flourish in the improved economic conditions and gave the workers a vested interest in Alfred Mond's promotion of industrial cooperation.

The coal industry in the pre-war years did benefit from an expanding coal industry, particularly in the anthracite coalfield. However, during this time the miners developed a

[4] Centennial Committee, Chairman Raymond Jones, *100 Years of Producing Nickel* (Clydach Nickel Refinery Commemorative Book, 2002), p.8.

tradition of an aggressive confrontational approach to trade unionism in their campaigns to gain a minimum wage and a maximum working day. However, the 1920s saw a severe decline in the coal industry and the traditions of confrontation developed in the pre-war years were used as a means of attempting to defend their industry and communities, which again led to confrontation.

The Swansea valley's almost unique position in a south Wales context, in the sense that it encompassed a diverse number of industries, has allowed trade unionism to be studied in each of the key industries in the valley: tinplate, nickel and coal. Despite the industrial workers living in the same valley and even in the same communities, there was a varied approach to trade unionism in each industry. It can therefore be concluded that there was no one type of unionism, to the extent that unionism in the Swansea valley was as diverse as the industries and workforce.

Trade unionism was influenced by the specific needs of a particular industry; these specific needs were influenced in turn by the size and geographical location of the workforce, attitude of owners and masters, unity of the workforce and economic performance. As each of these factors affected the tinplate, nickel and coal industries in different ways, unionism was thus affected and developed in different directions. Three different approaches to trade unionism and industrial relations appeared in the Swansea valley – conciliation, industrial cooperation and a more confrontational approach. It can therefore be concluded that trade unionism was shaped and moulded to best fit the unique characteristics and requirements of each industry, despite all three industries and workers in those industries being aware of, and in contact with, each other's approach. This conclusion, to an extent, supports the conclusion Clegg et al. that the structure and policies of unions that emerged from 1889 were determined

by the requirements of survival in differing industrial contexts.[5] If anything, the examples from the Swansea valley prove that the unions did not automatically adopt a single approach, but that the approach that best fit their industry developed and evolved throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century.

[5] H. A. Clegg, A. Fox and A. F. Thompson, *A History of British Trade UnionsSince 1889, Volume 1, 1889-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp.87-96. The argument in these pages is considered by John Lovell, *British Trade Unions, 1875-1933* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1977), p.24.

Appendix A
Tinplate works of the Swansea valley.[1]

Tinplate Works	Location
Beaufort	Morriston
Bryn	Ynysmeudw
Dyffryn	Morriston
Glanrhyd	Pontardawe
Gyrnos	Lower Cwmtwrch
Morriston and Midland	Morriston
Park (Glanyrafon)	Clydach
Phoenix (Gilwern)	Lower Cwmtwrch
Player's	Clydach
Gilbertson's (Pontardawe)	Pontardawe
Upper Forest and Worcester	Morriston
Ynyscedwyn	Ystradgynlais
Ynyspenllwch	Glais (Clydach)
Ystalyfera	Ystalyfera

[1] Paul Jenkins, *Twenty by Fourteen*, Appendix A, pp.243-5

Appendix B
Collieries of the Swansea Valley, 1926.[2]

Colliery	Owner	Number Employed
Abercrave	Abercrave Colliery Co.	U = 224 A = 74
Birchgrove	Birchgrove Collieries, Ltd.	U = 194 A = 117
Blaencaegurwen	Blaencaegurwen Colliery Co.	U = 298 A = 65
Brynderi	Brynderi Anthracite Colliery	U = 96 A = 45
Brynhenllys	Brynhenllys Colliery Co. (1923), Ltd.	U = 235 A = 36
Clydach Merthyr	Graigola Merthyr Co., Ltd.	U = 470 A = 130
Cwmclydach Graigola	Hill, Ltd., S. & J.	U = 62 A = 20
Cwmgorse (Slant)	Cleeves' Western Valleys Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	Total = 365
Cwmllynfell and Ystradowen	Cwmllynfell Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	U = 350 A = 75
Cwmnant	South Wales Anthracite Co., Ltd.	U = 1 A = 1
Cwmtawe	Cwmtawe Anthracite Colliery Co.	U = 40 A = 10
Diamond	Gurnos Anthracite Collieries Co., Ltd.	Total = 400
Duke Anthracite	The Duke Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	U = 110 A = 40
Gellyfro	Gellyfro Anthracite Colliery Co., Ltd.	U = 11 A = 3
Gilwen and Betting	Globe Collieries Ltd.	U = 272 A = 72
Glantwrch	Glantwrch Colliery Co.	U = 33 A = 11
Glyncoch (Level)	John, J. & D. W.	U = 29 A = 5
Gover	Gover Colliery Co.	U = 5 A = 1
Golynos (Level)	Golynos Colliery Co.	---
Graig Level	Graig Colliery Co.	U = 124 A = 38
Graigola	Llwyndu Colliery Co., Ltd.	U = 78 A = 17
Gurnos	Gurnos Anthracite Collieries Co., Ltd.	Total = 250

[2] *Colliery Year Book and Coal Trade Directory, 1926* (London: The Louis Cassier Company Ltd.,1926)

Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen East Pit	Gwaun – Cae-Gurwen Colliery Co., Ltd.	U = 624 A = 136
Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Maerday Pit	Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Colliery Co., Ltd.	U = 591 A = 200
Gwaunclawdd	Gwaunclawdd Abercrave Colliery Co., Ltd.	U = 142 A = 39
Hendreforgan (Slant)	Gwys Anthracite Collieries Ltd.	U = 53 A = 18
International Anthracite	Llwynllafrod Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	U = 202 A = 65
Lower Cwmtawe	Lower Cwmtawe Anthracite Collieries Co.	U = 23 A = 5
Lower Graigola (Slant)	Lower Graigola Colliery Co.	U = 23 A = 5
Mynydd Bach	Thomas, W. D. & David. H.	U = 16 A = 4
Moody's Graigola 1 (Level)	Moody's Graigola Colliery	U = 86 A = 25
Old Level	Cwmceiros Colliery Co.	U = 23 A = 6
New Brook and Tyle Penlan Drifts	New Brook Colliery Co., Ltd.	U = 36 A = 10
Pwllbach	Pwllbach, Tirbach and Brynamman Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	Total = 40 (Developing – 300 in normal times)
Penwern Level	Evans, William. D.	U = 3 A = --
Rhiw	Lewis, D. J.	U = 16 A = 3
Tareni and Gleison	South Wales Primrose Coal Co., Ltd.	U = 600 A = 107
Tirbach	Pwllbach, Tirbach and Brynamman Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	Total = 530
Ynisgynon	Varteg Anthracite Collieries, Ltd.	---
Ynyscedwyn	Gurnos Anthracite Collieries Co., Ltd.	Total = 600
Ynysfechan and Gwyn's Drift	Tawe Vale Collieries Co., Ltd.	U = 175 A = 25
Ystalyfera Slant	Ystalyfera Collieries Ltd.	U = 44 A = 43
Ystradgynlais Shaft	Gurnos Anthracite Collieries Co., Ltd.	Total = 450

U = Employed Underground.
A = Employed Above Ground.

Amalgamated Anthracite Collieries Ltd. owned the following companies in the Swansea vallley:

- Cleeves' Western Valleys Anthracite Collieries Ltd.
- Gurnos Anthracite Collieries Co., Ltd.

Appendix C
Rules of The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, selected extracts.[3]

Established July 1887

Motto: 'For the Labourer is worthy of his hire'

Constitution

This union shall be composed of persons directly employed in the production of tinplates, viz. Rollers, Doublers, Furnacemen, Behinders, Shearers, Picklers, Annaelers, Tinmen, Washmen, Risers and Assorters.

Objects

The objects shall be to raise funds by Contributions, Levies, Fines, Donations and interest on capital, to provide a weekly allowance for the support of members who may be locked out or on strike, to obtain legislative enactments for the protection of labour, to protect all members when unjustly dealt with by their employers or managers in any respect whatever, to assist all Associations that have the same object of protecting labour, to support Parliamentary and Municipal labour candidates, to obtain compensations for accidents where the employers are liable, to resist any unjust regulations in connection with the employed of its defending legal proceedings, in connection with any trade disputes, to maintain the 1875 standard of wages, to provide a labour newspaper, and for defraying the necessary expenses of management.

Membership

All men wishing to become members of this union shall pay the sum of 6d. per week to the Central Fund of the Union, and boys above 16 of age 3d. per week. Members joining after the 3rd of July, 1887, must pay a double contribution, viz., 1s. per week per man and 6d. per week per boy, until such time that their payments are equal with the first members of the union, and then pay the weekly contribution of 6d. and 3d. respectively. Any member will be exempt from payment of his weekly contribution if out of a situation or prevented from working in consequence of illness or depression of trade. Sufficient proof must in each case be given that the cause of his being out of work is not through his own negligence.

Cessation of Labour

No branch or works of this union shall give any notice of strike, or of an intended alteration in the hours of labour, until its case has been laid before a council or committee meeting for the examination and approval. Any branch or works, or number of men in a works or branch ceasing work, without the consent or approval of either the committee or council meeting, such persons, works or branches shall forfeit all claims or protection from this union.

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[3] Rules of The South Wales, Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Tinplate Workers' Union, Selected Extracts, SWCC:MNA/PP/118/62.

Allowance to Members Ceasing Work

When members, after every reasonable effort, fail to persuade employers to settle disputes by conciliation and arbitration, providing such members are in compliance, and have paid all legal demands made upon them by the officers of the union, and having complied with rule 27, they shall receive from the funds of the union during their non-employment as follows: - Full Members 12s. per week, and if married for each child under 14 years of age 1s. per week if not working; and boys 6s. per week. If the central fund will not meet the demands made upon it, the Executive Committee shall have power to levy an equal rate per member, sufficient to allow the weekly sum promised.

The funds of this Union shall not be drawn upon or applied for any purpose until the same reach the sum of £20,000, or when the same be reduced below £10,000.

Control of Disputes

The control and guidance of works or branches both in prices and practices, shall be vested in the Union. No agreements to be made at or by works or branches unless with the sanction and direction of the Executive Committee ...'

Appendix D
SWMF, Western Miners, Syllabus of Lectures 1921.[4]

Industrial History – Teacher – Mr J. Rees, Trebanos.
Political Economy – Teacher – Mr Nun Nicholas.

Industrial History – Syllabus

Lecture	Topic
1	Introduction: The "Variety of Theories"
2	From Primitive Communism to the Rise of the State
3	Towards Feudalism
4	Feudalism
5	The Passing of Feudalism
6	Rise of Commerce and Growth of Towns
7	The Guild
8	Economic Conditions of the 16th Century
9	The Creation of the Proletariat
10	The Rise of the Capitalist Mode of Production
11	The Historical Origin of the Modern Working Class
12	The Industrial Revolution
13	The Effects of the Industrial Revolution on Working Class Conditions
14	The Rise of the Trade Unions
15	Struggles of the Capitalist Class for Political Power
16	The Revolutionary Period – 1829-1848
17	Trade Unionism from 1848-1900
18	Trade Unionism from 1900-1916
19	The Logic of the Machine
20	In Conclusion: A Summary

[4] SWMF, Western Miners, Syllabus of Lectures, 1921, SWCC:SC543.

Suggested Books for Students:

Engels, *Origin of the Family*
Lafargue, *Evolution of Property*
De Gibbins, *Industrial History*
Lipson, *Economic History*
Sidney Webb, *History of Trade Unionism*
Mark Starr, *A Worker Looks at History*
Craik, *History of the Modern Working Class Movement*
Cole, *Self-Government in Industry*

Political Economy – Syllabus

Lecture	Topic
1	Political Economy: Scope, Objects, Categories, Schools
2	Political Economy: The Methods of the Various Schools
3	The Concept of Value – Its Origins and Development
4	Analysis of the "Concept" of Value
5	Value and Ex-Value
6	Historical Development of Ex-Value
7	Economic Analysis of Exchange Value
8	The Act of Exchange
9	Money and the Money Commodity
10	Money as the Medium of Circulation
11	Further Functions of Money
12	Transformation of Money in Capital
13	Production of Surplus Value
14	The Rate of Surplus Value
15	Absolute and Relative Surplus - Value
16	Wages
17	Accumulation of Capital
18	The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation Profit
19	Profit
20	Profit (Continued)
21	Wages and prices
22	Rent

Appendix E
Mond Nickel Works, Clydach, Profit Share Scheme.[5]

THE MOND NICKEL SCHEME

'Further reference to a scheme within my own knowledge may serve to show that a gain-sharing system may quite easily operate as part of the wider scheme containing the more familiar elements of profit-sharing and co-partnership.

The Mond Nickel Company at its works is engaged in the production of metallic nickel, nickel sulphate, nickel ammonium sulphate, and copper sulphate. These various metallurgical processes are all interlocked and dependent on each other to obtain the final marketable products. In endeavouring to arrive at a basis of cost of production, it therefore became necessary to calculate the cost of the various products back to one standard. The main product, nickel, was chosen for this purpose, and the average cost to produce a ton of metallic nickel was adopted for the purpose of this scheme. The average cost in the year 1924 was taken as basis.

It is worth emphasising this, as it is sometimes thought that if various products are produced from a certain process or constituent to those process, a scheme of gain-sharing of this character can not be carried out. I would point out that the standard cost adopted for this purpose is a calculated one, and has no necessary reference to the actual works or plant cost. It was deliberately fixed at the time when it was known there were going to be considerable reductions in the cost of production owing to improvements which had been made, and which would come into operation, the benefit of which the Board felt they would like to share with the staff and the workmen. The amount, therefore, which they received as their participation was anticipated to be, and has proved to be, very considerable.

Provisions have also been made for fluctuations and fundamental changes in cost as well as rate of interest on capital invested. These are necessary elements to keep a fair balance between the interests of the capitalist and the interest of those engaged in production. A further point is, this scheme endeavours to combine gain-sharing and profit-sharing in one scheme, and that, I believe, is unique.

THE SCHEME IN DETAIL

I can not do better than detail the relative sections of the scheme as set out in the official document:

PARTICIPATION IN SAVING IN COST

(A) ***Monthly Credits and Debits***

1. For the purpose of this scheme (which shall be deemed to have come into operation on the 1st day of March 1925), and in order to ascertain the saving in cost, the actual cost of production shall be calculated for each month.

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[5] Details published in: Alfred Mond, *Industry and Politics* (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1927), pp.116-20.

2. When in any month the Actual Cost of Production is less than the Standard Cost, the amount of such difference between the Actual Cost of Production and the Standard Cost shall be credited to the general account as follows:
   (a) The whole of any saving in cost up to and including £2 per ton shall be credited to such general account.
   (b) If such saving in cost exceeds £2 per ton but not £3 per ton, there shall be credited to such general account, in addition to the whole of the first £2 per ton so saved, 50 per cent of the balance of such saving in excess of £2 per ton up to £3 per ton.
   (c) If such saving in cost exceeds £3 per ton, there shall be credited to such general account, in addition to the amounts above specified, 25 per cent of the balance of such saving in excess of £3 per ton.
3. When in any month the Actual Cost of Production exceeds the Standard Cost, the amount of such excess shall (subject as hereinafter provided) be debited to the general account as follows:
   (a) The whole of such amount up to and including £2 per ton shall be debited to such general account.
   (b) If such amount exceeds £2 per ton but not £3 per ton, there shall be debited to such general account, 50 per cent of the balance thereof in excess of £2 per ton up to £3per ton.
   (c) If such amount exceeds £3 per ton, there shall be debited to such general account, in addition to the amounts above specified in this sub-clause (3), 25 per cent of the balance of such amount in excess of £3 per ton.
4. Of the total amount credited or debited in each month to the general account 75 per cent shall be allocated to the workmen and 25 per cent shall be allocated to the other employees, and such proportions shall accordingly at the end of each month be carried from the general account to the credit or debit of separate accounts.
5. The total amount so credited or debited to the separate account of the workmen in each month shall be apportioned amongst the workmen individually in proportion to the hours worked in such month by such workmen respectively at the standard rate of wages paid to such workmen respectively during such month, and no addition shall be made in the case of workmen on day work in respect to any additional rate of wages paid by the Company for work on public holidays or overtime, or in the case of workmen on shift work in respect to any additional rate of wages paid by the Company for work on public holidays or for weekend work.
6. The total amount so credited or debited to the separate account of the employees (other than workmen) in each month shall be apportioned amongst them individually in such proportion as shall be determined by the Company from month to month, and in arriving at such apportionment the Company shall take into account the salaries paid to such employees respectively.
7. As soon as practicable after the close of each month each employee shall be duly informed in writing by the Company in such manner as the Company may determine of the amount (if any) credited or debited to him under this Scheme for such month.

(B) ***Annual Account***

1. As soon as practicable after the end of each financial year an account shall be taken by the Company, who shall ascertain the balance (if any) standing to the credit of each employee in respect of such financial year after deducting all sums (if any) debited to his account in respect of such period. In the event of such account showing a balance under this clause to the debit of any employee at the end of such period, such debit shall be cancelled and shall not be carried forward to the debit of the account of such employee in any subsequent financial year.
2. The amount so ascertained to be standing to the credit of an employee at the end of a financial year shall (subject as hereinafter provided) be a capital credit owing by the Company to such employee.
3. The company shall as soon as any amount shall be ascertained to be so standing to the credit of an employee, issue to him a non-transferable certificate showing the amount so ascertained, and shall upon the amount of each successive annual capital credit being ascertained under this Scheme endorse upon such certificate particulars of the amount of such annual capital credit.
4. Copies of the Certificate of the Auditors for the time being of the Company, as to the amount to be credited or debited to the general account under this Scheme at the end of every financial year shall be posted up at the Clydach Works of the Company.

INTEREST AND BONUS

(A) ***Fixed Interest***

Every annual capital credit of each employee shall bear simple interest at the rate of 5 per cent per annum, calculated from the 1st day of May immediately succeeding the period for which such annual capital credit shall be ascertained. Such interest shall be payable (subject to deduction of income tax) not later than the 1st day of August in each year, the first payment of interest in respect of any annual capital credit being payable not later than the 1st day of August in the financial year following the financial year in which such annual capital credit begins to bear interest.

(B) ***Bonus***

Whenever the Company shall in respect of any financial year declare a dividend on its Ordinary Share Capital for the time being at a rate exceeding 5 per cent thereon, the employees shall (subject as hereinafter provided) be entitled to receive an additional sum from the Company by way of bonus in respect of such financial year upon the amounts from time to time standing to the credit of their respective capital accounts at the end of the previous financial year under this Scheme, provided that no bonus shall accrue in respect of the capital account of any employee in respect of the period commencing on the 1st day of May in the financial year in which he shall die or retire or cease to be in the employment of the Company. Such bonus shall be calculated at a rate per annum equal to one-half of the excess of such rate of dividend over 5 per cent, and shall be payable (subject to deduction of

income tax) not later than the 1st day of August in the financial year following the financial year in respect of which the dividend at such rate on such Ordinary Shares of the Company is so declared.

VARIATION OF STANDARD COST

If at any time during the continuance of the Scheme any change or modification or improvement shall be made in the process of manufacture or in any plant which results in a substantial alteration in the actual cost of production, the Board of Directors shall by resolution vary the Standard Cost in such manner as it shall in its absolute and uncontrolled discretion determine, having regard to such change, modification or improvement, and the standard cost as so varied shall be the standard cost for all the purposes of the Scheme until again varied in accordance with this rule.

The scheme has been very successful. The lowest paid worker has received an average of 9s. per week rising to 12s. 6d. per week for the ordinary shift man. These workers are in effect in the position of cumulative participating preference shareholders, and the total credited to them exceeds 20 per cent of their wages.'

Appendix F

Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges Constitution and Rules.[6] (No Date)

Objects

a) To consider problems and policies from the standpoint of the interest of all workers within the Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges.
b) To unify the entire working class forces operating within the Swansea Valley Group for concerted action, should the necessity arise.
c) To promote workers control of industry by establishing the necessary organization, such as Lodge Committees and other means towards industrial efficiency.

Conference Room and Headquarters

The New Swan Hotel, Ystalyfera.

Lodges Represented by Group

Abercrave	Hendy Merthyr	Trebanos
Brynhenllys	International	Waun
Clydach Merthyr	New Varteg	Yniscedwyn
Cwmllynfell	Pentwyn	Ynisgeinon
Felinfran	Pwllbach	Ystalyfera
Graig Daren	Tareni	

[6] Swansea Valley Group of Mine Lodges Constitution and Rules, SWCC:SC.785.

Appendix G
Tareni Manifesto – Extracts from *Cambrian*, 7 July 1911.

'The Tareni Workmen's Committee on Wednesday morning issued an appeal to the public for financial support. The appeal contained the following paragraphs giving reasons why they did not accept financial support sooner –

1. Although appreciating to the full the aforementioned assistance, we were cognisant of the fact that all classes of workmen in the district were prepared to assist in this noble cause, and have therefore decided to make an organised appeal to this district so as to relieve the distress of the workmen in an effective manner.
2. We of Tareni were determined to prove to all fair minded men that we had really a grievance and, what is still better, the courage of our convictions, on the strength of which we were, and are, prepared to fight in a manner that will secure for us an honourable conquest. In every war, whether military, civil or industrial, there is great suffering, and it is useless to hide the fact that we of Tareni have suffered: also we have endured with fortitude, courage and good spirit the ravages of four months' conflict with the most powerful company of mining magnates in the district without the assistance of our boasted hypocritical federation.'

FIGHTING THE BATTLE

"Aye, we have fought this battle, gentlemen, with even the Union of our own making deciding against us. Indeed, friends, it has been a great fight. Not only have we grappled with our common enemy, the capitalist, but also with creatures whose interests are akin to the cobra and the python, the most treacherous and poisonous reptiles of their species who stalk in our midst in the guise of labour friends.

It is useless to expatiate on the merits of our dispute, but the crux of the whole affair is the fact that the management desire to victimise a certain number of our best men. This is what the men are trying to prevent, even if it takes another four months to do it. For all the practical succour that has already been given to us especially by our tradesmen, we feel deeply grateful, for there is no army of men worthier of support in time of need than the champions of labour and the soldiers of industry, of which we of Tareni are proud to be a unit."

Appendix H

Trade and Labour Councils in Swansea Valley During Period of Research.[7]

- Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen Trades and Labour Council.

- Pontardawe and District Trade and Labour Council (Established 1906)
  (Later Swansea Valley Trade Council).

- Ystalyfera and District Trade and Labour Council (Established 1916).

[7] Information from the MRC:MSS.292/79G/18; MSS.292/79Y/4; MSS.292/79S/82. (Archive numbers in order as listed above).

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