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**SOUTH WALES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR:  
THE COAL INDUSTRY AND ITS COMMUNITY.**

**Submitted in candidature for the degree of  
Philosophiae Doctor of the University of Wales**

**by**

**Stuart Robert Broomfield B.A. (Wales)**

**April 1979.**

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STATEMENT

I declare that this dissertation, 'South Wales During The Second World War : The Coal Industry and its Community', is the result of my independent investigation, carried out under the guidance of my director of studies, Dr. David Smith of the University College, Cardiff, and that all indebtedness to other sources is acknowledged by explicit references in the text or in the notes to the text.

I declare further that this dissertation has not already been accepted in whole or in part for any degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... *Stuart R. Broadfield* .....

Confirmed ..... *David Smith* .....

Date ..... *April 1979* .....

## SUMMARY

During the Second World War the history of the South Wales coal industry was dominated by two phenomena; declining output in the face of urgent and increased demand, and in the sphere of industrial relations, a wave of unofficial strikes which culminated in a coalfield wide stoppage in March 1944, just weeks before D - Day.

It is the contention of this thesis that rather than being cause and effect, the unofficial strikes and output decline were two separate responses to the prevailing conditions in the industry.

Contemporary events alone did not account for these responses. Pre-war experience was crucial in moulding the attitudes that shaped war-time behaviour. The miners entered the war with a legacy of bitterness produced by unemployment, strife and the impoverishment of the mining communities.

The return to full employment brought about by the war did little to appease the miners whilst war-time experiences tended to justify and re-emphasise pre-war attitudes. Work conditions deteriorated; events at the time of the Fall of France underlined the industry's dependence on market forces; unfavourable wage comparisons with factory workers suggested that miners were still to be treated as second class citizens; and government concern, following years of neglect, was viewed cynically as being purely for pragmatic advantage.

Government measures to increase output always boiled down to placing the responsibility on the depleted and tiring workforce at the coalface and when the decline continued the miner was accused of unpatriotic behaviour. This in turn lowered morale. A measure of the frustration engendered can be seen in the reaction of miners to their own union

leaders whom they sometimes attacked with a vehemence equal to their rejection of the management of coalowners and government officials.

To those who ran the industry the reactions of the miners in the war were seen as a combination of the inexcusable and the inexplicable. However this apparent irrationality was crucial in forcing the government to examine the technical state of the industry, the results of which provided the platform from which nationalisation was launched. Thus the war-time experience in the coal industry was the final, and perhaps vital thrust towards reorganisation of the coal industry which had been argued about for twenty years before the war. South Wales was as it had been for so long, a crucial exemplar of the dilemmas of the British coal industry and of the distinct communities that existed because of it.

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ABBREVIATIONS

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| A.A.C.     | Amalgamated Anthracite Company            |
| A.A.C.C.   | Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee  |
| C.O.       | Conscientious Objector                    |
| C.P.G.B.   | Communist Party of Great Britain          |
| E.C.       | Executive Council                         |
| E.W.O.     | Essential Works Order                     |
| I.L.P.     | Independent Labour Party                  |
| I.R.O.     | Industrial Relations Officer              |
| M.A.G.B.   | Mining Association of Great Britain       |
| M.F.G.B.   | Miners Federation of Great Britain        |
| M.P.R.     | Military Participation Ratio              |
| N.A.C.M.   | National Association of Colliery Managers |
| N.C.B.     | National Coal Board                       |
| N.E.C.     | National Executive Council                |
| N.U.M.     | National Union of Miners                  |
| P.V.M.     | People's Vigilance Movement               |
| R.C.P.     | Revolutionary Communist Party             |
| S.W.M.F.   | South Wales Miners Federation             |
| S.W.M.I.U. | South Wales Miners Industrial Union       |
| S.W.M.L.   | South Wales Miners Library                |
| T.U.C.     | Trades Union Congress                     |
| W.N.P.     | Welsh Nationalist Party                   |

## INTRODUCTION

The history of the South Wales coalfield in the first half of the twentieth century is an intensely dramatic one. Indeed, it has been as much the preserve of the fiction writer as of the historian. It is a history that is vividly remembered by those who lived through it and has therefore proved to be most fertile ground for exponents of the new discipline of oral history. Within South Wales the memory of those years has been handed down almost as a mythology to succeeding generations which is often-times recalled in relation to contemporary economic and political events. "No Return To The Thirties" is a common enough political slogan of to-day, even amongst those with no personal experience of that decade. The scars inflicted upon the society of South Wales by economic depression, poverty and industrial strife are such that retribution for those ills has been sought in each succeeding decade. Any study, therefore, of the decade immediately following the depression years must take great cognisance of the impact generated by the 1930's experience, and especially so, in relation to the coal industry, around which so much of the historical drama took place. Events that occurred during the years of the Second World War at times seem more coloured and influenced by the attitudes forged in the years before-hand than by contemporary developments themselves. A clear reflection of this facet can be gleaned in the works of

perhaps the most outstanding Welsh poet and writer from the coalfield who wrote in wartime, Alun Lewis. Those wartime stories of his in which Welsh characters appear show a characteristic obsession with their formative experience in the Depression years.<sup>1</sup>

Over recent years a stereotype of the cloth-capped, down-at-heel, bitter, left-wing South Wales coalminer of the 1930's had become a frequent image for most people through radio and television. So well-known are the images of the period in people's minds that it is somewhat surprising to reflect that serious historical study of these years is only just under way.<sup>2</sup>

At present an historical assessment of the period from secondary sources can only be obtained through learned articles and short essays in compendiums on modern Welsh history, or searching for references in works which take the wider scope of British history. Such is the dearth of material that Professor Marwick was moved to comment upon it, regretting that, due to a shortage of secondary works on modern Welsh history, his own work concerning the social effects of modern war upon Britain in the twentieth century, neglected Wales, somewhat.<sup>3</sup>

If a period of history that has been popularised to such an extent as South Wales in the 1930's is largely devoid of detailed study it is not surprising that the succeeding decade is similarly afflicted. The student of South Wales in the Second World War wanders into

virgin historical territory. Not even fiction writers, with one exception,<sup>4</sup> have created any overall picture, most likely having been lured away from a coalfield without hunger marches, stay-down strikes and riots, by the myriad of other aspects of wartime existence upon which to exercise their expertise. Nonetheless the historian of the Second World War is particularly fortunate in his primary sources. The monitoring of both the industrial relations of the coal industry and its output performance by Government departments, plus the large number of enquiries into the organisation of the industry have left us with a rich seam of statistical material and official comment which provides a detailed account of the day to day running of the industry in these years, whilst, secondly, the coalfield threw up out of its own environment one documentary writer, B. L. Coombes, whose dramatised documentaries<sup>5</sup> give a thorough description of life underground in the war, and are a great help in assisting our understanding of the mentality of those who worked in the industry.

With the exception of Professor W. H. B. Courts most valuable contribution to the Official History of the Second World War series, "Coal"<sup>6</sup> what little other secondary work that exists on the Second World War makes hardly any use at all of these sources particularly as they tend to concentrate on the long term effects of the war, rather than the actual events of wartime, although

Angus Calder presents a useful cameo in the dozen or so pages allotted the coal industry in his comprehensive study of Britain throughout the Second World War.<sup>7</sup> With regard to the coalmining industry wartime events are often <sup>only</sup> considered in an assessment of their influence in the developments leading to nationalisation in the post-war-world. A detailed study of the war years in terms of their own intrinsic value and contribution to our history seems long overdue. For South Wales the war is a link period between the coalfield of the depression and the coalfield of the N.C.B., a watershed period in coalfield history which is worthy of special study a separate, distinctive period.

Claims to distinctiveness may seem inappropriate when detailed study will reveal that many of the decisions made, and developments created in those years were dominated by attitudes forged in the past or by hopes kindled for the future, but nevertheless the war years are very different from those which preceded them, in that the problems faced by the industry were of a differing nature, requiring a greater flexibility of attitude on the part of all those concerned.

Particularly from the middle years of the war, concern for the type of society to be created in the aftermath of the war was a dominating theme. To some there would be an opportunity created for reconstruction. and the putting into practise of cherished ideals, such

as a National Health Service, a humanitarian national insurance scheme, or nationalisation programmes, for example, all very much measures devised as responses to prevent the strife and hardships that typified the thirties. Others viewed the end of the war with a greater degree of trepidation, fearing a direct return to slump and depression. In the light of past experience a consolidation of their economic position in the last years of the war was a priority if the effects of impending disaster were to be cushioned. Both these attitudes towards the future, therefore, were moulded in the pre-war years rather than the war itself.

This collective memory of the past that has so dominated the history of the South Wales coalfield has sprung, largely, out of the conflict in the industrial relations between the coalowners and the miners union, the South Wales Miners Federation, which had been formed in 1898. This conflict was exacerbated by fluctuations in the coaltrade which dictated the economic norms of coalfield society.

The SWMF had begun to flex its industrial muscle in the years immediately prior to the First World War and then, during that war itself. Advances were made both in terms of organisation and in wage standards, but the hopes of prosperity in the post-war world were soon to be cruelly destroyed, as 'the wheels of progress

were reversed sharply from 1921 onwards'.<sup>8</sup> World trade decline led to mass unemployment and wage-cuts, and the gradual undermining of the power of the SWMF. It was the memory of this sudden turnabout of fortunes, so swiftly following upon a war, after which the equivalent of the 'Promised Land' had been proffered, that remained ingrained upon the minds of many of those living through the Second World War.

The miners strength was to be sapped even more by the General Strike of 1926 and the nine-months Lockout which followed. The strength of the union declined as membership fell, misery and demoralisation increased and an alternative "union" organisation offered itself as a more "reasonable" representative of the miners.

The ten years of coalfield history following the General Strike are an action - packed decade full of the struggle of mining communities for survival. In the depths of defeat, the communities suffering under the combined weight of hunger, unemployment and dejection still engendered a spirit of resourcefulness and self-respect to the extent that a fight-back full of both vehemence and resolve is maintained. In the industrial relations of the industry the whip-hand possessed by the owners in the immediate years after the Lockout is gradually removed so that by the end of 1930's the union establishes an equal authority, evidenced

by the setting up of a mutually acceptable conciliation machinery. The years, 1938 and 1939 appear as plateaus of relative calm from which to review the prior decades of turbulence. It was not that all conflict had been satisfactorily resolved, far from it, but that there was a distinct change of tempo in that conflict, a defusing of atmosphere.

At the heart of the fight-back in the coalfield communities was the revival in the fortunes of the SWMP, which, indeed, had been the focal point of the offensives and counter offensives of the 1920's and 1930's. It was seen by the owners as the prop upon which industrial workers and their wives and families leaned for support, and as being politically motivated to hoot. If it could be kicked away, not only would the coal-owners have a freer hand in the running of the industry but also a community support system would be removed, thus weakening the community itself and making its inhabitants more amenable to 'economic' demands than they had proved in the past.

Following the General Strike and Lockout the situation almost came about as the membership was substantially reduced and thousands had to leave their valleys in search of work elsewhere. The coalowners were able to capitalize upon this demoralisation by further reducing wages and by encouraging the growth of a "non-political" union. At this time of sustained



offensive on the part of the employers the SWMF's own house was not in the strictest order. A reformist leadership, on the one hand struggling to maintain its membership, was, on the other, fending off constant attack and criticism from the 'Young Turks' of a fledgeling Communist Party which was beginning to propose itself as a realistic alternative leadership, (with the exception of the period between 1929 and 1932 when they dipped their own wings somewhat by adhering to a political line that pushed them into isolation). More pertinent, however, was the fact that the union was not organised effectively enough to confront the situation it faced, Reorganisation had been the source of fruitless debate for a number of years with many arguing against the old geographically based district organisation dominated by professional miners' agents.

Down to 1934 the SWMF only managed to maintain the solid support of about one half of the workers in the coalfield. It was stuck in a defensive campaign against the employers. The prime task with so many members out of work could not be to enhance the conditions of those members in work, but to maintain the unity and integrity of the organisation itself.

Reorganisation finally came in 1934. A more centralised system of organisation was established with a rank and file Executive Council. According to Dai Dan Evans,

'No one who held full-time office at pit or E.C. level could be elected to the E.C. So this brought a breath of pit into the E.C.'

Whether it was the breath of the pit on the E.C., or not, re-organisation brought with it some degree of re-vitalisation, and this presented an opportunity to launch a series of limited actions, although still essentially defensive in character. The aim was to root out the owner-supported South Wales Miners Industrial Union, which posed itself as the alternative union organisation to the SWMF, from the coalfield. Only when established as the sole negotiating body for miners in the coalfield could more aggressive demands be put.

Fierce campaign's were mounted around the two pits where the SWMIU was strong, Bedwas and Taff Merthyr, and when agreements were eventually made with the coalowners and the SWMIU they were seemingly most conciliatory and appeared to offer only limited gains to the SWMF. These agreements were open to the vilification of many militants in the SWMF, but they were made with one essential aim - to establish beyond all doubt, the SWMF as the sole representative organisation for Welsh miners. This was despite the fact that the agreements with local management were not in every case dissimilar to those formerly associated with the SWMIU and that the most ardent fighters for the cause of the SWMF, the

unemployed and 'blacked' miners in the localities of the pits concerned, were often debarred from working in those pits. The SWMF could offer them no guarantee of work.

Following the settlement at the Taff Merthyr colliery in 1938 the SWMIU folded up its organisation. 100% genuine trade unionism was almost achieved in the coalfield. There was now a shift in SWMF policy. Having established the right to trade unionism the union could initiate campaigns itself rather than simply respond to the thrusts of the owners. In 1939 the final steps to eradicate non-unionism were made with the issuing of notices at a number of collieries. At the same time the situation concerning unemployment was easing as the belated rearmament programme was creating a small boom in industry - then, came the war, and with it, the potential of a powerful leverage to achieve economic and other demands, given the desperate need for coal. At such a time of national crisis, however, the pressure was on the union to ensure that such new found influence be used with responsibility.

Fears were widespread that the SWMF could not use its strengthened bargaining position with a respect for the national interest, especially as its President was a Communist, Arthur Horner, but an examination of Horner's leadership from when he became President in 1936 to the start of the war, illustrates that he was

not a man to seek out pitched battles with his opponents. By 1938 the SWMF was at a stage where it could feel confident to use its industrial strength if necessary to achieve goals which it had set itself, such as the establishment of 100% unionism. The leadership, however, was firmly attached to the establishment and use of industrial conciliation machinery, and that, whilst aware that the industrial power which the union possessed could be most effective, such power should be used in a limited way. Thus the conciliatory agreements at Bedwas and Taff Merthyr, and adherence to industrial conciliation led the union officials into a conflict with a element of its own membership which became involved in unofficial strike action and stay-downs. Such actions were relabelled by E.C. members 'wanton', 'arbitrary' and 'flippant'. The use of the stay-down such an effective weapon in the campaign against the SWMIU was now condemned as undemocratic, seen as a few men dictating to the coalfield. It angered the SWMF leaders that, having struggled throughout the 1930's to preserve the unity of the organisation, some elements could act in a divisive manner.<sup>10</sup> These elements did not consider themselves to be divisive. They argued that they were merely pressurising the union into wielding its power more positively in order to enforce the rights of its members. Thus a debate that was to dominate the relationship between the union leadership and its rank and file during

the latter war years was begun before the war had started.

The unofficial strikes that took place towards the end of the 1930's were usually localised and were largely a belated response to the growth of the Combine Movement amongst the owners. This trend to much larger companies and the reduction in the number of small-time colliery owners was leading to a more impersonal conduct of industrial relations and much more rationalisation conscious management. The larger the company concern, the more confident they felt of pressing innovation, machinery and stricter controls of the work processes on the workmen. The most notorious firm amongst the coalowners for such behaviour was Powell Duffryn's or as one militant has labelled the company, "Poverty and Death".<sup>11</sup> Their policies seemed to take little cognisance of the fact that things had changed somewhat between 1927 and 1938 and a sustained antagonism was maintained against the union. In January 1938, the SWMF EC called for an inquiry into conditions of work at Powell Dyffryn collieries.<sup>12</sup> Following a wave of unofficial strikes in 1943 the SWMF EC at that time instituted a similar enquiry. Thus, several of the problems emerging for the SWMF in 1938 and 1939, which tended to be brushed aside due to the exigencies of war in the first few years of the war, began to re-emerge more forcefully during the later war years.

At the centre of the disputes in which the SWMF

leadership found itself in confrontation with its own members was the limited extent to which the leadership used its industrial power as a bargaining weapon, as opposed to the arts of negotiation and conciliation. It was their concept of the responsible use of power which had been put into practice in the making of the Bedwas and Taff Merthyr agreements. It seemed to rank and file members that the union leadership's commitment to an ideal - 100% unionism, before 1939 - was being put before local bread and butter issues, issues which tended to affect the ordinary membership most directly. Ironically by a quirk of fate, the union had no sooner established its hegemony in the coalfield, than the war began, and the contribution to the war effort became the prime consideration of the union. Whilst in the early years of the war this consideration seemed paramount to most union members after three or four years, increasing war weariness and deteriorating conditions of work, the strong belief that their own personal needs had been seriously neglected provoked many miners into attitudes which had been formulating in the years before the outbreak of war. March 1944 was the peak of discontent when the coalfield wide strike over the Porter Award took place.<sup>13</sup>

At this time although heavily criticised by the press and seemingly without public support, the miners were not too much out of step with a large section of

public opinion, which during 1943 and early 1944 was in a mood of leadership rejection. In the country at large the Government that was leading the country towards a victory in war was being rejected by large sections of the population as is indicated by the series of defeats that government candidates suffered in by-election at the hands of the Commonwealth Party.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of the unofficial strike wave the SWMF were urging that unity be maintained so that the final victory would be hastened, whilst their members, keenly aware of government blunders made in relation to their industry were more interested in ensuring their own personal security after the war had ended. Their desire to try and ensure their future security was partly brought about by fears of a post-war depression, but also reflected the national mood following the announcement of the Beveridge Report which had raised a national debate on what the nature of post-war society should be. This phenomenon had partly been responsible for the growth of the Commonwealth Party in many parts of Britain but they had hardly any impact in South Wales. Its supporters tended to be middle class idealists who believed that they could achieve their aims by joining such a party, voting in by-elections and gaining M.P.'s. The South Wales miners were perhaps, more cynical and were

certainly more battle-hardened, chastened by their post 1918 experiences. They needed a greater security than election promises to rest their fears, thus economic advances obtained while in a position of strength were necessary to cushion the blow of a possible depression.

This dissatisfaction engendered by the South Wales miners' might appear at a glance to be surprising. Superficially it appears that the miners came out of the war with a lot more than they had when it started. Several of their professed long-term objectives had been fulfilled. They received a large increase in wages and, whilst much of it was to counteract the effects of inflation, there was a genuine advance as is indicated by the improvement in relation to other industrial workers. At the end of the war, too, the nationalisation of the industry seemed to be firmly on the agenda, and this had been the unions proposed ideal for the reorganisation of the industry since 1912. Thirdly within the unions of mineworkers themselves there had been an achievement obtained, long called for by progressives, the formation of an all-in union for every mineworker in the country, the NUM.

The proponents of the Military Participation Ratio Theory might submit that the mining industry presents a perfect example of their thesis. In sum



the theory suggests that at a time when the state is fighting for survival, the willing co-operation of the masses is militarily essential and efforts must be made to win them over and convince them that they are fighting for themselves.<sup>15</sup> The award of higher wages after a period of wage cuts and only minimal rises, plus acceptance of the workers representatives plans for the running of the industry, would appear to be a case supporting the theory. Certainly the willing co-operation of the miners, a traditionally hostile and volatile workforce, was an absolute essential to the government, hence it would appear sensible for the government to make concessions to the workers demands. However, a brief examination of the main achievements, increased wages and nationalisation will reveal that only in the case of the wage increase was there a possible M.P.R. factor operating.

Both the large wage awards of the Second World War, the Greene Award in 1942 and the Porter Award in 1944 were a response to the increased demand for coal and to agitation on the part of miners that appeared to threaten output. By the middle of 1941 output was falling short of demand to an alarming degree, and agitation was widespread amongst mineworkers for an increase in pay, especially in relation to the wages received by workers in armaments factories. The Greene

Award raised the wage levels of the miners quite considerably, yet within twelve months a further increase in pay was being demanded by the miners. Not only had the Greene Award failed to act as an incentive to increase production, it had quelled discontent in the coalfields for only a momentary period, and the unrest unleashed in the latter half of 1943 was by far the most serious of the war. The Porter Award, intended to stem this feeling, probably through ignorance stirred even more unrest. However, by the time anomalies had been ironed out there was another fairly significant increase on most mineworkers weekly pay, and they had climbed to fourteenth position on the ladder of industrial workers' pay - although, just as significantly, this was done at the cost of public support, which had largely been behind them in 1942.

Whilst the Government clearly recognised that something had to be done to ensure that the mining work force remained at work the wage award were made grudgingly, and the miners were consistently chastised in the spotlight of national publicity. The result of this approach was that at no time did the miners accept their wage increases with any enthusiasm and thus these rises had very little impact on their effectiveness at their places of work. By late 1944, anyway, the uncertainty of the future and the desire for security

in the post-war world made the Porter Award increases appear as inadequate. Hence, not only does the M.P.R. break down because it does not achieve the desired effect - the greater co-operation of those involved in the domestic war effort - but the sour atmosphere which surrounded the 'give' and 'take' only contributed to deep felt mistrust that existed on all sides in the industry, which was a large factor in any case in the problem of production.

Whether an M.P.R. factor exists at all should also be assessed in another light. Would the wage increases have taken place if there had not been a war? A hypothetical question perhaps, but relevant to the discussion. Before the war the SWMF had established itself as the only acceptable negotiating body for miners. Having achieved this authority, it was at a stage where it could begin to use it, and certainly pressure was building up from below for it to do so. It was poised in a position from which it could try to achieve a substantial improvement in the miners' standard of living. Its weakness, undoubtedly, was that not only was there still a large pool of unemployed miners, but also the economic state of many of the mining companies was such that they could not withstand large increases. If they were made, many were likely to go out of business and, indirectly to add to the unemployment problem. The war altered this situation

considerably. The miners position was strengthened not only by the trend towards full employment but also by the massive increase in the demand for coal which made the co-operation of the mineworkers essential to the war effort. Government intervention in the industry in 1942 and especially in its setting up of the Coal Charges Account<sup>16</sup> also ensured that the industry could withstand heavy wage increases, as profitable districts subsidised the weaker ones and unprofitable pits were kept in business. Vastly changed circumstances, therefore, not only made it more possible for wage advances to be conceded but also more desirable on the Government's part. Without the war it is unlikely that the miners would have had as great an increase in their earning power as they achieved in those six years and neither would it have been achieved as easily, because the Government, albeit grudgingly, did to some extent hold ideas that later became formalised as the Military Participation Ratio.

On the issue of nationalisation the M.P.R. theory can be almost dismissed out of hand. The finger only has to be pointed at the statement made by Prime Minister Churchill in October 1943 in which he ruled out the possibility of nationalisation being introduced in wartime.<sup>17</sup> However, if one were to ask the question, "Did the war play a significant part in the eventual introduction of nationalisation?", the answer must be

in the affirmative, and rather than discuss it in the light of the M.P.R. it is more pertinent to examine it in the light of Professor Arthur Marwick's ideas of Test - Dissolution - Transformation.

Professor Marwick's view, is a modification of Marx's that war puts a nation to the test and passes extreme judgement on social systems that have outlived their vitality. Marwick agrees that war is a testing challenge to a society but that it may lead neither to total dissolution nor to complete transformation, but, depending on the length of the war and the seriousness of the challenge, to some intermediate stage.<sup>18</sup> Whilst Marwick discusses these views in relation to the nation as a whole they can also be applied to an institution or 'facet of a society', and they do most certainly apply to the coal industry.

The war proved to be the supreme test of the efficiency of the coal industry. For years the national spotlight had focused on the industrial relations of the industry, and despite these being fraught with conflict the necessary coal was produced for the needs of the economy. The onset of war meant a switching of the spotlight. Already by 1939 there had been a calming down of the atmosphere in the industrial relations sphere, now the test was as to whether the industry could respond to the rapid increase in the demand for coal. The answer was not long in coming. The industry was

exposed as being in a severe state of debilitation it was run down, using obsolete equipment and in need of total revamping. Whilst the war may not have brought the industry into a state of dissolution it certainly brought about a stress which could not be withstood. Output fell to record low levels and a long way short of the demand required. The test of war provided an essential argument in favour of re-organising the industry - the technical case for nationalisation as opposed to the political arguments, and these were ensconced in the Reid Report of 1944.<sup>19</sup> Whilst in the early years of the war the owners fought against any Government intervention there is no doubt that for many nationalisation could not now be avoided. Without the test of war the industry may have lumbered along in its privately owned state with more and more of the smaller companies going to the wall and an increase in monopolies nationalising ruthlessly and souring industrial relations even further. Also it has to be remembered that although the experience of war provided the important technical arguments for nationalisation it could not have been carried out without the right political preconditions, i.e. the return of a Labour Government in June 1945.

Whether or not nationalisation amounted to a transformation is another matter. Transformation was probably more apparent than real and as such the

experience of the wartime coal industry again fits into the Marwick thesis very well. Nationalisation did not bring forward the type of positive response from the workers in the industry that was hopefully expected by the Labour Government, for, despite the fact that it had been heralded as the saviour of the industry, the panacea to end all evils, for over thirty years, it had been an abstract demand and proposals were not adequately worked out. Disillusion soon set in, and again rank and file miners felt they were being led by a leadership whose commitment was to a broad ideal which meant that they tended to neglect bread and butter issues. Thus the problem of maintaining unity within the union, that was emerging in the years before the outbreak of war and that continued throughout the war, was to remain after the war.

Nationalisation was to fail to bring about a radical change in most miners' attitudes towards the industry in which they worked. Writing about the industry in the early years of nationalisation Ferdinand Zweig, a sociologist noted that he was continually struck by the fact what the past was deeply ingrained on miners minds. It was, he reckoned the most important problem of the mines.<sup>20</sup> This too, was largely the problem of the war years and the answer to those who claimed that the response of the miners to the crisis of war was unpatriotic. No industry had a worse record of industrial

relations in the thirty years before the war, and not many communities were as impoverished as those in the mining areas. The manifest failure of the industry to respond to the test of increasing its output as necessitated by the war, exposed its problems to endless critical inspection and in so doing could not fail to reopen the scars inflicted in the past, thus adding, to the problems of the industry. 'Great changes mental and moral', were necessary prerequisites for an improved performance in the industry, according to W H B Court.<sup>21</sup> Such changes, on the miners part at least were made impossible by the fact that they were continually forced on the defensive as the failure to produce adequate supplies of coal became the most troublesome issue for the wartime government on the domestic front.

The obsession that coalminers had with their own working environment, an obsession that seemed to dominate to the exclusion of issues of national importance is very clearly reflected in the works of B. L. Coombes, a working miner who came to prominence just before the war years, and is quoted quite extensively in this thesis. The documentary style of writing with the stress on the social role as observer of the writer had been popular in the 1930's and continued to be so into the 1940's, as a number of genuine working-class descriptive writers appeared. The most notable of these was Bert Coombes.<sup>22</sup> He was a miner from the small village of Resolven in the



Neath Valley, who had worked in the pits since his arrival in South Wales from Herefordshire before the First World War. His first book, an autobiographical account of his life, 'These Poor Hands'<sup>23</sup> remains his most famous and most widely read work, but during the Second World War he had two other short works published, 'Those Clouded Hills', in 1944, and 'Miners' Day' in 1945. They are largely about wartime conditions of working in the colliery and are almost exclusively about pit matters, only those events that impinged upon a miners work are discussed and wider aspects of the war and details of events are conspicuous by their absence.

Coombes' books reveal an obsession on his part with the minutiae that a skilled miner has to know to survive underground, and they dwell upon the technicalities of coalmining. Yet at the same time as they tell of this enclosed world of the coalminers, and of their narrow existence hemmed in by severe economic pressures, he also presents a wide vision for humanity as a whole in the post-war world. Like many of the union leaders he was involved in the plans and discussions for reconstruction. A keen proponent of the Beveridge Plan he urged the formation of a reforming, if not revolutionary, Labour Government after the war.

Coombes' fame, through writing, led to his becoming involved nationally in the discussions regarding the

future structure of Britain in the post-war years, on radio and in newspapers, and during 1945 his 'Plan for Britain' was published in Picture Post.<sup>24</sup> Whilst his fellow miners may have nodded agreement with him, it is doubtful whether much of what he wrote was considered achievable. Most men and women were concerned simply with their own future security and fear of post-war depression rather than the prospect of building a brave new world. Most men limited their horizon to the achievement of economic security in a hospitable environment. The vision was a local one.<sup>25</sup>

In South Wales they dreamed of Ammanford, Ystalyfera, Resolven, Aberdare, Bargoed, Abertillery... the list is endless, yet behind all those dreams was the fear of a return to pre-war depression, which in particular areas, such as the Amman Valley<sup>26</sup> for example seemed very much on the agenda. The experiences of pre-war days still dominated people's outlooks, particularly miners, rather than war time ones themselves. Yet these unchanging attitudes remained in a world that was changing very much. It is true that the work process, a significant influencing factor over attitudes, deteriorated considerably,<sup>27</sup> but in the out-of-work world, war wrought a considerable amount of changes, some quite revolutionary in nature.

Perhaps the most dramatic change affecting a miners social life involved their womenfolk. South Wales

had been a traditionally matriachal society. The mother was the figurehead of the family, holding it together at times of crisis. She was the constant factor in any homestead, there to see her man and children off to work in the morning, there to receive him when he returned at the end of his shift, The location of many light industries and armaments factories in South Wales, which was seen as a relatively safe region in which to situate the essentials of war production, brought a wave of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs into the area suitable for women who had no previous experience of work out of their own homes.<sup>28</sup> Many of the remoter valleys of the coalfield saw little of this change as the establishment of factories was localised, in places such as Merthyr or near to Bridgend and Pontypool where the two major armaments factories were, but the impact was nevertheless significant. By the end of the war, 50% of munitions production was in the hands of women.<sup>29</sup>

The effects upon the women involved may have been liberating, but as will be seen,<sup>30</sup> the menfolk were not necessarily charmed by the results. Many of the women, untrained and possessing no skills, were receiving wages, approaching those of many miners. As well as this being a blow to manly pride it also helped to reinforce the impression amongst miners that the rest of the population regarded them as second class citizens,

and that they certainly failed to understand that the miners job required exceptional skills and effort.

The introduction of light industry into the region did have some beneficial side-effects. The strongly held beliefs that Welsh workers could not adapt themselves to the type of work required in these factories were demonstrated to be false.<sup>31</sup> Thus the case for new industries to be introduced into places where the main staple industries were being run-down, was enhanced. However the effects that the existence of these factories had upon the morale of the mining workforce were detrimental. Many miners would clearly have loved to have worked in these factories as opposed to their traditional occupation, and indeed many had experienced such work in both England and Wales, but the labour shortage in the mines led to measures being taken to prevent men leaving the coal industry for work elsewhere and to the recall of many ex-miners from other industries. Thus a substantial percentage of miners were resentful of being tied to their industry and of being denied the alternatives of a more conducive work environment.

This introduction of the light industries into South Wales in wartime was the beginnings of a trend which gathered a greater momentum in the post-war years. For South Wales, it was the beginnings of a diversification of industry and a switch from a

dependence on two or three staple industries, such as coal and tinsplate making, as a backbone of the economy. At the time, the beginnings of this transformation were not seen so clearly.<sup>32</sup>

This changing pattern of industrial production was perhaps the most significant long-term contribution that the war made to both the economic structure of South Wales and to social patterns, but in the short-term too, for most of the duration of the war there were very important changes in the economy and social life. These were affected in some areas by the movement of groups of people from outside of South Wales into communities. There was an about face in the fortunes of the South Wales economy in the immediate years before the war because of the rearmament programmes and as soon as the war began the drive to increase production continued at a rapid pace. This meant a vast increase in employment opportunities and consequently a significant decline in unemployment figures in an area with whose name, unemployment was almost synonymous. With the exception of the period between June 1940 and March 1941, the months after the Fall of France,<sup>33</sup> the spectre that had haunted thousand of families in South Wales for a generation, was removed. Yet the benefits that might have accrued from such a situation were substantially

minimised. For many, along with the advantage of secure employment were allied the disadvantages of permanent attachment to a particular industry, declining standards of safety in the work place, speed-up of production, longer-hours and then, although in receipt of increased wages, less opportunities for spending. In addition, whilst war may have removed the spectre of unemployment it brought about many more. Most families had relations or friends fighting in the armed services and the tension this brought to people is beyond measure. To some extent South Wales was remoter from the range of Nazi bombing raids hence the location of many war based industries. Whilst the region never suffered the constant nightly bombings endured by the east coast of Britain, London and other major cities, it did not escape entirely and the fear of attack was never far from people's minds. Apart from isolated bombs from stray planes, the coalfield itself was most fortunate in escaping bombs. Those attacks made on South Wales were aimed at the coastal cities, Newport, Cardiff and Swansea, which was by far the worse affected.<sup>34</sup> Swansea was close enough to the coalfield for the total destruction of its central area to affect miners' directly.<sup>35</sup> Area No. 1 of the SWMF held their Council meetings there and as a consequence of the bombing were forced to move their headquarters to Ammanford. Swansea

was the town to which many of those in the Swansea and Neath valleys, and in the area to its north and west, travelled for a major shopping trip or special entertainments, so although geographically remote these areas were still close to the more horrific realities of war.

War, brought other by-products, of which the most publicised are the periodic, enforced influxes of population into the area. Apart from numbers of people coming into the area to work in the new industries there were three 'types of people who under normal circumstance may never have ventured into the region, - the evacuees, the Bevin Boys and the American G.I.'s.

South Wales was an area of declining population because of the mass exodus caused by the depression. It was a region almost devoid of new blood since the great population explosions of the late nineteenth century. The first intake of population and by far the most substantial were the evacuees. These were welcomed into the valleys and there received with humanity and compassion,<sup>36</sup> and whilst there was no hostility to these first victims of the war, there was a degree of disgruntlement aroused by various aspects of the evacuee scheme. The poverty of many of the evacuees appalled many, reinforcing views of the inequalities caused by the prevailing political system

whilst two features of the scheme particularly were taken up for criticism by the political left. Firstly, the inadequacy of allowances made to evacuee families<sup>37</sup> and secondly that ordinary working class families in South Wales bore the brunt of the burden of providing hospitality for the visitors, despite the predominantly small sized nature of the houses, whilst large public houses, for example, with ample and empty rooms were overlooked.<sup>38</sup> Many of the evacuees did not stay long enough to make a great impact upon communities, where they did the custom of English women having no scruples at entering public houses was perhaps the most firm impression made.<sup>39</sup> Rather than change any attitudes, this episode did much to reinforce existing views about the nature of society.

The stationing of American G.I.'s in several places had much the same effect as that of the evacuees, a reinforcement of views that the local population was being unfairly treated. The effect was strongest on the young men, many of whom would clearly have preferred being in uniform to working in the pits. The presence of these brash soldiers in and around their villages was an affront to their manhood, which took further indignities when it became apparent that these soldiers had more appeal to some of the local female population than they had. The



comparatively well off G.I.'s not only had the advantages of being 'different', but wore uniforms and had more money. It is not surprising that there were clashes between the local boys and the interlopers.

The third group of newcomers to the area<sup>were</sup>/those unfortunate men and youths who when called-up had been allotted to work in the mines rather than join a particular section of the armed services.<sup>40</sup> Their journey to the collieries was a most unwilling one and their contribution to increasing output insignificant. They were received in South Wales with sympathy but again their very presence was seen as another indignity hurled on the heads of Welsh miners. Once more the government disregarded the fact that coalmining required a skill developed through time and experience.

The Second World War was the agent of both retrograde and progressive change throughout the world, but in South Wales, at least, there was one important element of society over which it wrought no change - that was the attitude felt by the miner towards the industry in which he worked and to those who directed, it, whether it be a coalowner, manager or government department. The attitude was forged in the grime and the grind of the coalface and was hardened by the social and economic deprivations of the communities in which the mines were situated,

especially in the two decades before the outbreak of war. To say that the war did not change this attitude is not to say that it had no effects upon it. The effects, were, despite increased wages and a stress on the miners role as being one of national importance, to bolster their previously-held attitudes. At the root of the miners problem was the incapacity of the industry to produce the much needed output for the war effort. In the glare of the national spotlight focusing on the problem, the accusing finger of blame always appeared to place responsibility for the deficiencies on to the miner and his fellows. To the miner, it seemed that the opinion of everyone else was that he was to be treated as a second class citizen. His skills were worthy of no acclaim and any greater efforts that he might make were in no way rewarded because the overall production was always inadequate to meet needs. Whilst their patriotism was rarely questioned, it did appear to them that they were the one section of the population to be stigmatised as not pulling their weight sufficiently. Morale in the mines, low before the war, remained low throughout as the grievances created in the inter-war years remained uppermost in men's minds. These grievances were, indeed, added to during the Second World War.

FOOTNOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. See Alun Lewis - Selected Poetry and Prose ed. Ian Hamilton (London, 1966).
2. In preparation is a book entitled The South Wales Miners 1926-1974 by Hywel Francis and David Smith.
3. A. Marwick Britain In A Century of Total War (London, 1968) p. 9.
4. Margot Heinemann The Adventurers (London, 1961).  
The early chapters of this book are set in the mythical 'Mid-Wales' coalfield at the time of the apprentice boys strikes during the war.
5. Those Clouded Hills (London, 1944) and Miners' Day (London, 1945).
6. W. H. B. Court Coal (HMSO, 1951).
7. Angus Calder, The People's War (London, 1969) pp. 497-512.
8. David Smith 'The Rebuilding of the SWMF, 1927-1939: A Trade Union In It's Society' (University of Wales, Ph.D. 1976) p. 37.
9. Cited in R. A. Leeson. Strikes : A Live History 1887-1971 (London, 1973) p. 145.
10. D. Smith, op. cit. pp. 411-12.
11. Cited in Leeson, op. cit. p. 148.
12. D. Smith, op. cit. p. 432-435.
13. See below, Section II, Chapter V.
14. Paul Addison, The Road to 1945, (London, 1973) p.

15. S. Andrews, Military Organisation and Society-  
(London, 1953) pp. 26-7.
16. See below, Section II Chapter V. p. 507
17. Ibid., p. 494
18. Marwick, op. cit. p. 13.
19. See below, Section III Chapter II p. 644.
20. F. Zweig, Men In The Pits (London, 1947) p. 11.
21. Court, op. cit., p. 26.
22. This is the opinion of Angus Calder, op. cit.  
p. 594. For a full discussion of Coombes'  
importance see David Smith 'Underground Man :  
B. L. Coombes, 'Mine Writer' in Anglo-Welsh Review,  
Winter 1974.
23. Published by Victor Gollanz in 1939 and reissued  
in 1974.
24. Beata Lipman 'Bart Coombes' Planet 23 Summer 1974,  
p. 18.
25. This assessment is backed by Susan Briggs, "For  
some intellectuals from the very beginning, they  
had had dreams of Europe. For most people, however,  
they were dreams not even of Britain, but of Exeter,  
Leeds, or Selkirk ..... and particular streets  
and particular people in them ..... localised  
dreams centring on particular jobs, homes, towns,  
villages".  
Susan Briggs Keep Smiling Through : The Home Front,  
1939-45 (London, 1975) p. 223.

26. See below, Section II, Chapter IV. pp. 401-407.
27. See below, Section I, Chapter III. pp. 184-190.
28. In his essay on Merthyr in the Twentieth Century, J. W. England considers that the greatest social change of that century in Merthyr was the emancipation of women and that it was the employment given to them by the war that did most to bring it about.  
  
J. W. England 'Merthyr in the Twentieth Century' included in Merthyr Politics ed. Glanmor Williams, (Cardiff 1965), p. 94.
29. Western Mail, 9 May 1945.
30. See below, Section II, Chapter III. p. 367.
31. England, op. cit., p. 93.
32. To many, such as J. W. England it is only in retrospect that this factor could be seen.  
  
"Looking back we can see that during the years 1939-45 an industrial pattern was imposed on South Wales which prepared the way for economic and social life of today". Ibid,.
33. See below, Section I, Chapter II. pp. 80-88.
34. Detailed information concerning the bombing of Swansea can be found on file in the Library at the University College of Swansea.
35. The main bombing of Swansea took place on three successive nights in February 1941. Eight hundred bombs were dropped and 227 people killed. There

was a square mile of devastation and the whole of the shopping centre was destroyed. Western Mail, 9 May 1945.

36. A moving account of the arrival of evacuees in South Wales can be found at the South Wales Miners Library in the tape bank collected by the SSRC Project on the South Wales Coalfield. Mavis Llewellyn interviewed by Hywel Francis.
37. Daily Worker, 12 November. 1940.
38. Ibid., 16, 21 November. 1940.
39. See Tapes of Alfred Beams and Reg Fine interviewed by Hywel Francis, at South Wales Miners Library.
40. See below, Section I, Chapter III. pp. 159-164.

SECTION I

WELSH COAL PRODUCTION AND THE WAR

CHAPTER IEARLY DAYS

The announcement of the war met with little surprise in Britain. There was a notable absence of the hysteria that had characterised 1914.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the population may even have accepted the final coming of war with a slight sense of relief. That appears to have been the typical response throughout South Wales.

- 'Swansea - General reaction of relief that the 'war of nerves' was over.
- Ebbw Vale - Little surprise. The council held an emergency meeting and appointed a food controller.
- Pontypridd - Declaration received with absolute calm. The organisation of the A.R.P. is regarded as being thoroughly efficient.
- Abertillery - News received with calmness and resignation. The gravity of the news was realised but the general feeling was that the announcement was inevitable'.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Welsh coal trade the signs of resignation may not have been so loud, for, ironically, the outbreak of war offered a greater possibility of economic security. Rearmament in the months before war began



had already indicated the promise of increased demand and more prosperous trading, so the declaration of war could be seen as ensuring a genuine revival in the industry. Welsh industry as a whole had been recovering momentum in the early months of 1939 and the benefits were becoming apparent to both owners and workers. Increased work meant greater profits for the owners and jobs for the thousands of unemployed workers. Throughout 1939 there was a steady decline in unemployment figures, and by August 1939 they were down 55,000 on the previous August. Unemployment of miners, for instance, was halved.<sup>3</sup>

Recovery from the slump had been slower in South Wales than most other parts of the country but it had picked up in the early months of 1939.<sup>4</sup> By August 1939 it was being claimed that no other coalfield in the country had had such a marked expansion of production as South Wales<sup>5</sup> whilst four months into the war a new industrial era was being heralded for Wales.<sup>6</sup> Due to the impetus stemming from regular production in the staple industries, coal, steel, and tin, plus an influx of secondary industries into the area, prosperity was returning. Wales for so long regarded as a social burden had become a potential haven of hope. "Not since the last war", wrote the editor of Western Mail, "has there been such a prospect of maximum

employment, increasing output, high wages and reasonable profits".<sup>7</sup>

South Wales was benefiting from the outbreak of war because it had become a strategical centre for the location of industry and population away from the areas that would most likely take the brunt of the first enemy onslaughts. The promise of future prosperity was reflected in the reports of Chambers of Commerce and of colliery companies, although there was a recognition that it was based on the misfortunes of others:-

'Whilst Merthyr does not want to benefit from the war as such, we cannot be blamed for hoping that the obvious dangers to London and the Midlands would persuade industrialists to transfer to Merthyr'.

(Mr. J. McKenzie, president of Merthyr Chamber of Trade and Commerce).<sup>8</sup>

'Activities at the collieries have been growing and without saying anything of the merits or demerits of the war, that is surely one thing we have to be thankful for'.

(Mr. C. H. Davies, chairman, Abertillery Chamber of Commerce).<sup>9</sup>

New opportunities in the coal trade, allied with the gravity of the war situation made all engaged in

the coal industry earnest in their endeavours. New markets were available because the military situation on the continent meant that certain foreign coalfields were unable to supply. It looked as if regular working of all pits to full capacity could be achieved. A period of quiescence arrived for the industrial relations of the industry. In the immediate aftermath of the declaration of war the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales reported 'some indications of a desire to drop minor differences in the settlement of outstanding disputes in the coal industry ..... a period of comparative calm'.<sup>10</sup>

In the months that followed the miners' union pressed for increased wages to keep pace with the cost of living<sup>11</sup> called for mining to be made a totally reserved occupation,<sup>12</sup> and attacked the owners for not opening up new seams of coal quickly enough,<sup>13</sup> but generally there was a new atmosphere of co-operation.

The demand for coal maintained an upwards trend. In November a trade agreement with Italy<sup>14</sup> was an added stimulus followed in December, by a contract with Spain,<sup>15</sup> but the greatest boost of all, and one that put a real stress on the capacity of the Welsh industry to produce sufficient quantities of coal, was the massive requirement of the French as they strove to defend themselves against potential German invasion.

The demand for Welsh coal which had begun to

increase rapidly in the months just prior to the start of the war accelerated after March 1940. It was then that the French Prime Minister, Daladier, had asked of his British counterpart, Neville Chamberlain, that his country's requirements should be given priority. French stocks needed to be rebuilt with British imports, because their own were already seriously eroded, whilst, in addition to the immediate needs of their Summer campaign, they were beginning to think in terms of coal supplies for their munitions production in the Winter of 1940-1. The British Government decided that the French should receive exports of British coal amounting to 1,250,000 tons in each month from January to April 1940 and 1,500,000 tons a month from May. These figures were over double the monthly average tonnage exported in 1938, which was 638,000.<sup>16</sup>

In the light of this massively increased demand the editor of the Western Mail was prompted to devote one of his editorials to the 'extraordinary opportunity arising out of the development of the coal trade'. With competition from Germany and Poland eliminated he believed that the other countries experiencing a shortage of supplies would be driven to buy British, and whilst he could understand that feelings of scepticism might be prevalent about the new prospects in a region where the meaning of prosperity and full employment was almost forgotten, he was convinced that

if the facts were intelligently considered the South Wales coal trade was about to experience its greatest drive for coal production since the previous war.<sup>17</sup>

The hopes of the editor were to be fulfilled over the next three months for the situation in the collieries was such that their output was increasingly short of the required demand. Unemployment continued to fall rapidly so that the June figure in South Wales, 67,847 was the lowest since the statistic was first recorded in 1920.<sup>18</sup> The month of June, however, was also that month in which all those doubtful about the 'new prospects' found their scepticism justified. The additional demand for extra production to meet French needs followed upon one of the greatest spurts in the coalfield's production, which had been intrain since the outbreak of the war, but even so output was not meeting the demand, for in early March the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners' Association announced that the output from Welsh collieries had been sold out for the two months that followed.<sup>19</sup> Yet as the plight of the Allies on the continent worsened, appeals for more and more coal increased, particularly after Hitler's invasion of Belgium and Holland.

In the face of such a demand the miners found themselves at the receiving end of persistent urges for increased output from Government and the Press. Typical, was a speech made at Swansea in May by Ernest Bevin who

had recently been appointed the Minister of Labour and National Service. He called upon the workers of the country to forget about the quarrels with their employers if they wanted to shorten the war and win it without too much loss of life. His speech was complimented by the Editor of the Western Mail, who suggested to workers in industry that it was their 'elementary duty in the time of dire crisis to put forth greater effort and to call a truce to normal grievances and to cease haggling about irksome but necessary changes in their employment'.<sup>20</sup>

The effects of these appeals cannot of course be quantified, but, as far as obtaining an industrial truce was concerned, they were, to some extent, counter productive, for old scars were re-opened and an opportunity was presented for recriminations to be made concerning what were considered to be previous management short-comings. The issue of pit closures was revived. The bones of the issue were stated by a reporter from the Daily Mail when he claimed that if the Government's demand for an expansion of the export trade were to be met, mines that had been closed in the recent past should be considered for service. In South Wales alone nearly a hundred mines had been rendered idle in the previous ten years.<sup>21</sup> Yet at this time of crisis mines were still being closed,<sup>22</sup> and this provoked James Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelli at

the time, to appeal to the newly created Coal Production Committee in the following manner;

'It is to us in West Wales an amazing commentary upon the lack of foresight shown by the authorities that at a time when increased production of coal is so vital collieries in West Wales are being closed. It is said that these collieries have become uneconomic. We are entitled to say - uneconomic to whom? I venture to say that the losses incurred in working these so-called uneconomic pits are trivial compared to the loss the nation sustains in losing the output of these collieries.<sup>23</sup>

J. L. Hodson, writing a series in the Western Mail told his readers that he was bemused by the fact that at a time when the French and South American markets were clamouring for coal there were 12,000 Welsh colliers in the army, 7,000 out of work in the Rhondda alone and, above all, that at the Cymmer Colliery at Porth there were ten million tons of unworked coal.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst the expressions of James Griffiths and J. L. Hodson had undoubted validity, it is difficult not to agree with the miners agent for SWMP No. 4 Area, W. H. May who thought that in the immediate circumstances their protests were somewhat irrelevant. It was the

wrong time to re-open pits he maintained. In his area, for example, he did not believe that there was any pit which had been closed for the past ten years that would be in a position to produce coal within twelve months, and even if that was the case, much valuable time and labour would be expended in preparatory work.<sup>25</sup>

The maximum production of coal was also impeded by a shortage of manpower. This might seem hard to reconcile, given the unemployment figures which were estimated at 13,000 out-of-work miners in South Wales in March.<sup>26</sup> It was not however, the right type of miner that was out of a job. The unemployed were not evenly distributed, a large percentage being in the Rhondda, whilst many were older men, not fit for working at the face or, workless for years, would be unused to techniques of mechanisation. The heart of the problem lay in the fact that many young workers who would be most efficient at the face had been called up into the armed forces, or were liable to be so. It was, above all, because of successive call-up that problems of output were accentuated. It was estimated that at a time when orders seemed as if they would keep the pits going for months in South Wales, 20% of the miners were liable to be called up for military service. Addressing the Annual Delegate Conference of



the SWMF in April 1940, Arthur Horner challenged the Government to decide whether they required coal more than they required miners in the armed forces. To him it was obvious that the process of gradual extraction of manpower from the mines would have the effect of reducing output.<sup>27</sup>

Such charges as those made by Horner and others were eventually answered by the Coal Production Council when they produced a report in early May that stated that the British coalfields required an extra 50,000 men if the estimated demand of home and exports markets was to be met. Amongst their recommendations were proposals that recruitment of colliery workers into the services should be stopped, that the drift of miners away from the pits to other firms and Government work should be prevented, that experienced workmen should return from the forces to the mines and that unemployed miners should be rehabilitated by work in the mines.<sup>28</sup>

By the time these recommendations were made, however, the situation on the Continent was becoming desperate as Hitler's invasion of the Low Countries was becoming more imminent each day. Solutions that would lead to the required increase in production over a long term perspective such as the recall of men from the forces and the re-opening of pits were somewhat invalidated since production had to be

accelerated immediately. The burden, inevitably, fell on the miner at the point of production; only his extra efforts would deliver the goods.

In France production had been effectively increased by the extension of the working day,<sup>29</sup> but this tactic received little support from British miners although it was mooted in the South Wales press by one miners' agent, W. H. May.<sup>30</sup> The Secretary of State in charge of the Mines, D. R. Grenfell, a former miner of twenty-three years experience underground, told a Special Conference of the SWMF, however, that considering the injurious effect of long hours of work in such an arduous occupation as mining he would oppose extending hours until all other methods had been tried and failed.<sup>32</sup>

The major proposals to be discussed, then, were those to reduce holidays and to introduce an extra shift on Sunday nights. The negotiations of these issues, however, took such time that when the agreements were made, events rendered them irrelevant. This in turn led to bitter recriminations being made against the miners' leaders for protracting the negotiations. The Western Mail again called for a truce between the workmen and the employers on all controversial industrial questions for the period of the war.<sup>32</sup>

The responsibility for conciliation was not one-sided however, and repeated accusations in the press of

miners' absenteeism<sup>33</sup> did not help to pacify relations between the two sides of the industry. Indeed they served only to exacerbate the resentment of miners which had already been fired by an awareness that they had suddenly been transformed into a national asset after years in the economic wilderness.

The response of the vast majority of miners in the months of this particular crisis was largely irreproachable : the output of saleable coal and the individual output per man employed were both the higher in April to June 1940 than for any other quarter during the war years.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, these months are amongst the most quiescent in the history of industrial relations in the coal industry, as reports from the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales indicate.

'The grave news from overseas has united all parties in industry in grim determination to do everything possible to enable the government to continue the war effectively. Realisation of the seriousness of the situation has raised, rather than depressed the morale of the workers.'<sup>35</sup>

'A real effort is being made to comply with the Government's demand for increased production. There is a complete absence of strikes'.<sup>36</sup>

In some quarters the ready co-operation of the SWMF had not been expected, given the fact that it was led by a Communist President, Arthur Horner, with several members of its executive also Communists. On his re-election to the Presidency in April 1940 Horner had rebuffed those critics who were doubtful as to whether he would obey the majority decisions of the SWMF by claiming that he would offer his resignation if he could not carry out the wishes of his members.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the months of the production drive he urged that the maximum should be done to assist in the raising of coal production. He did this, he said, despite any opinion that he may have had of the Government.<sup>38</sup>

Whilst individual miners seemed to have responded spontaneously to the demands of the crisis, it remains true that, at official level, formal agreements upon ways and means of improving production were only slowly devised. On the one hand the miners recognised the urgent need for coal and were prepared to work for it thus presenting an outward veneer of co-operation, but on the other hand the crisis in no way removed the past resentments against, and mistrust of, the owners and the Government. Indeed resentment was probably increased by the fact that in the last analysis the responsibility for increasing production was made out to be the miners' alone. The mistrust produced a wary

attitude to acceptance of any measures proposed by the owners because of the fear that they would take advantage of the wartime emergency to erode traditional customs. Concessions made during the war might never be regained afterwards. It was also perhaps unfortunate that some proposals put forward, such as lengthening the working day, reducing holidays and working an extra Sunday shift, had all provoked vigorous union campaigns right up until the outbreak of the war. Hence in the same week that the Germans steamrollered into France, the Powell Duffryn Combine sent the following motion to the SWMF EC concerning a proposed extra Sunday shift.

'In view of the constant fight the Federation was making to abolish Sunday work, this combine refuses to ~~maintain~~ <sup>maintain</sup> Sunday coal-filling by colliers and will use every means at its command to stop it.'<sup>39</sup>

Despite this assertion, however, in the middle of June, only a few days before the capitulation of France, a coalfield conference unanimously accepted an extra Sunday shift.<sup>40</sup> This followed long and detailed discussions on the Conciliation Board where in addition to accepting the extra shift, the union negotiators promised that stints and restrictive

practices would not be practised by their members. This was in exchange for a further advance along the road to a settlement of the question of non-unionism.<sup>41</sup>

The union rank and file, however, did not adhere to the conference mandate wholeheartedly. Only in the Ebbw Vale area at the Marine No. 1, Marine No. 2 and Waunlwyd collieries was there a near 100% attendance on the first Sunday that the agreement was put into operation, whilst many isolated pits did not work at all, notably in Ammanford, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, the Dulais Valley and Glyncoirwg.<sup>42</sup>

A similar saga was played out over the even more contentious issue of giving up various holidays. This began initially when the MFGB, in conjunction with the Mines Department, sent out a circular calling for the one-day holiday on the Easter Monday to be given up. On this occasion the SWMF EC opposed the suggestion but urged all their members to resume work immediately after the holidays.<sup>43</sup>

The idea of giving up holidays was then taken up by the coalowners in the region, who proposed that the annual May Day holiday should be given up and taken as a second day at Whitsun. This proposal was backed by the SWMF EC and supported by a majority vote in the coalfield.<sup>44</sup> In between the time of this vote and the actual holiday there was, of course,

a dramatic worsening in the war situation which led the Government to declare that the Whitsun holiday would be cancelled. The coalowners, thereupon, issued a statement that the collieries would be open for work Whit Monday and the following Tuesday.<sup>45</sup> A special SWMF EC meeting was hurriedly called at which three different proposals were debated; one that the Government declaration be accepted: one that the two-day holiday should be taken and the other that only Whit Monday should be taken as a holiday. The vote went in favour of supporting the Government declaration,<sup>46</sup> but in the coalfield there was open defiance of this decision. Two lodges at least, Glamorgan, Llwynypia and Cambrian, Clydach Vale specifically decided not to follow the executive lead<sup>47</sup> whilst at most others the men for the most part decided to stay away from work. There was an estimated 30% turnout. The worst area for absenteeism was the Amman Valley.<sup>48</sup>

This mass absence cannot be explained by alleging, as the Western Mail was wont to do, that the miners did not care about the war or recognise the seriousness of the situation. Production figures alone counteract that. The joint loss of both the May Day holiday and the Whit holiday probably had something to do with their attitude, and a second factor may have been the effectiveness of the SWMF's

own propaganda in rejecting an offer from the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association that the men should forgo their annual two-weeks holiday that July. A statement had been released to the press in the week before Whit, which presented two arguments - one, that the miners ought not to be deprived of their holiday whilst increased output could be secured by engaging the unemployed and opening idle collieries, and two, that the increased mechanisation and 'speeding up' imposed such a strain on the men that it was desirable for them to have holidays.<sup>49</sup> This argument, specifically aimed to oppose the cancellation of two weeks holiday in July was probably received by most miners as a general one to preserve all holidays.

Following the low turnout for work on Whit Monday it is not surprising that the lodges overwhelmingly backed their executive in rejecting requests to forgo the annual holiday.<sup>50</sup> One of the first direct consequences of the Fall of France, however, on the coalfield was the reversal of that point of view. On 6 July the SWMF EC agreed with the Owners that the six days holiday provided for in the holidays with Pay Agreement should not be taken in 1940.<sup>51</sup>

The months from the outbreak of the war up until June 1940 were ones in which the drive for increased coal production totally preoccupied the industry. All



debates and disputes revolved around this topic. They were months of hyper-activity, urgency, endeavour, stress and strain in the coalfield. More men were being employed, more coal per man was being produced. Then suddenly, with the capitulation of France all this came to a stop. The Welsh coal trade was cut off from its prime market.

On June 15th 1940 at a special conference of the SWMF measures for increased production worked out by the Conciliation Board were unanimously accepted.<sup>52</sup> A few days later France was out of the war, the demand for extra coal was gone and new disasters were foreseen. On 25 June a Daily Herald reporter wrote, -

'Wales has been severely hit by the French capitulation. Between 80% and 90% of its coal trade has come to a standstill.

'France First' has been the watchword in Wales for coal supplies since the war started. Other markets were neglected so that our Ally could be supplied. Wales is paying dearly for its loyalty'.<sup>53</sup>

The circle of fortune had now turned a full cycle and far from the realisation of a prosperous new era the South Wales coalfield was about to witness in the words of Arthur Horner - 'circumstances as grave as it had ever faced'.<sup>54</sup> With the success of the Nazi invasion of the Low Countries and France, Marshall

Pétain's signing of the armistice and the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk, the tentacles of the World War began to reach out in a more concrete sense to the coalfield. Whilst the incessant bombings of the civilian population were to be avoided, South Wales was still to suffer the 'indirect consequence of the Blitzkreig'.<sup>55</sup> The 'bubble' of war prosperity burst.<sup>56</sup> Collieries closed down wholesale and back to the unemployment queues trudged the colliers. Scarcely had the vision of greater economic security emerged than it had been brutally smashed. The Fall of France and the entrance of Italy into the War as Hitler's Ally meant that the South Wales coaltrade lost its two major export markets with the consequence that by the end of the first week of July 1940 forty-three pits were wholly idle and nine more partly idle in the coalfield,<sup>57</sup> Many more closures were to follow in the ensuing six months. At a time when the British people faced its gravest threat for centuries from an invading force, 95,774 men, women and boys collected their dole in South Wales alone in November 1940.<sup>58</sup> The ghosts of the depression revisited the coalfield accompanied by the usual poverty, hardship and indignity, along now with the additional stresses and strains created by war.

1. Calder, op. cit., p. 38.
2. Western Mail, 4 September 1939.
3. Monthly unemployment figures from Western Mail,  
4 April, 9 May, 6 June, 1 July, 9 July, 1 August.
4. Ibid., 30 June 1939.
5. Ibid., 12 August 1939.
6. Ibid., 16 January 1940.
7. Ibid., 15 January 1940.
8. Ibid., 19 October 1939.
9. Ibid., 17 October 1939.
10. LAB 10/365 Weekly Report of Industrial Relations  
Officer for South Wales, 9 September 1939.  
See below
11. Section II Chapter II pp. 368-371.
12. News Chronicle, 20 November 1939.
13. Daily Herald, 22 November 1939.
14. LAB 10/365 Weekly Report of Industrial Relations  
Officer for South Wales, 15 November 1939.
15. Ibid., 9 December 1939.
16. Court, op. cit., p. 83.
17. Western Mail, 18 March 1940.
18. Ibid., 9 July 1940.
19. Manchester Guardian, 2 March 1940.
20. Western Mail, 20 May 1940.
21. Daily Mail, 8 April 1940.
22. Rhos, Tirbach and Pantyffynon, See Section I  
Chapter II p.83-84.

23. News Chronicle, 8 April 1940.
24. Western Mail, 26 April 1940.
25. Ibid., 15 June 1940.
26. Ibid., 20 March 1940.
27. SWMF President's Address, 1940. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes, 25 April 1940.
28. Western Mail, 2 May 1940.
29. Court op. cit., p. 74.
30. Western Mail, 15 June 1940. W. H. May was in fact reprimanded for expressing this view publicly by the SWMF EC after they had received protests from the Lady Windsor and Markham Lodges.
31. Minutes of Special Conference of the SWMF, 15 June 1940.
32. Western Mail, 10 May 1940.
33. e.g. Western Mail, 14 June 1940 and Minutes of the Representatives of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners on the Conciliation Board, 10 June 1940, where it was suggested that in retaliation for miners' absenteeism approaches should be made to the Regional Traffic Commissioner regarding the facilities which were made available for taking colliery work people away from their work, e.g. excursions by charabanc to the seaside using necessary petrol.
34. See below, Appendix II Table III p. 703.

35. LAB 10/366 Weekly Report of Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 1 June 1939.
36. Ibid., 8 June 1940.
37. Western Mail, 27 April 1940.
38. Ibid., 30 May 1940.
39. News Chronicle, 6 May 1940.
40. Western Mail, 17 June 1940.
41. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 3 June 1940.
42. Western Mail, 18 June 1940.
43. SWMF EC Minutes, 19 March 1940.
44. Ibid., 19 April 1940. The coalfield vote in support of the proposal was 70,750 in favour to 59,200 against.
45. Western Mail, 11 May 1940.
46. SWMF EC Minutes, 11 May 1940.
47. Western Mail, 13 May 1940.
48. Ibid., 14 May 1940.
49. Ibid., 8 May 1940.
50. Ibid., 22 May 1940.
51. SWMF EC Minutes, 6 July 1940.
52. Minutes of Special Conference of the SWMF, 15 June 1940.
53. Daily Herald, 25 June 1940.
54. Aberdare Leader, 21 September 1940.
55. Court, op. cit., p. 83.
56. New Leader, 21 December 1940.
57. Court, op. cit., p. 83.
58. Western Mail, 16 December 1940.

CHAPTER IITHE EFFECTS OF THE FALL OF FRANCE ON THE WELSH  
COAL TRADE

As the victory of the German Forces in France was becoming increasingly evident Benito Mussolini who had kept Italy neutral since the beginning of the war chose finally to commit his forces to the fray and Italian troops were ordered into the South Eastern corner of France. In South Wales this decision was met by a spontaneous reaction. Angry crowds gathered around Italian owned cafes in Swansea and Cardiff and at one demonstration outside a cafe in Grangetown, Cardiff, police were called in to disperse the protesters. In Neath all Italian owned restaurants were closed down and in Swansea all Italians of military age were rounded up.<sup>1</sup> Far greater problems were to pose themselves, of a very different nature however, throughout South Wales as a direct result of Mussolini's decision in the following months.

Italy was the second largest market for Welsh coal, after France. Total exports there in 1938 had been 1,129,687 tons and in the first four months of 1940 they were at a rate of roughly 1,750,000 tons per annum.<sup>2</sup> This market was removed at one fell swoop and others also suffered for the Board of Trade issued an order<sup>3</sup> prohibiting the export of all goods to markets

affected by Italy's entry into the war. This included Greece, Switzerland and Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> Since the beginning of the war South Wales had been gaining ground in these markets and in the first four months of 1940 exports to them had totalled 159,551 tons as compared with 71,285 tons twelve months previously in the corresponding period.<sup>5</sup>

Future exports to Switzerland were ruled out in any case as they had become impossible given the German occupation of the railways of Holland and France, and trade with Greece would be impeded by minefields and the Italian navy.

Earlier in the year the German occupation of Denmark and Norway had closed those markets and others in the Baltic Sea, representing 2.5% of the South Wales trade.<sup>6</sup> With all this taken into account therefore, Mussolini's decision to side with Hitler was a devastatingly severe blow to the Welsh coal trade. It was decimated. Only one European market remained, France, and to there of course exports were enormous. 489,305 tons were exported in April alone.<sup>7</sup> Yet within days of the loss of the Italian market the French Government had collapsed and signed an armistice. Not only was this major market lost but one and a half million tons of exports that were in transit had to be sent back to the Bristol Channel ports.<sup>8</sup>

The following figures indicate clearly the extent of the losses incurred by the South Wales market which amounted to more than 60%.

|                               | Markets<br>Lost   | Markets<br>Closed | TOTAL             | Markets<br>Remaining |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Exports<br>April-June<br>1939 | June 30th<br>1940 | June 30th<br>1940 | June 30th<br>1940 | June 30th<br>1940    |
| 4,014,000                     | 1,853,000         | 671,000           | 2,524,000         | 1,490,000            |

These losses culminating with the Fall of France, as Professor Court has said, brought about a revolution in the British coal trade. In early June 1940 the British coal trade had been told that a 10% rise in production was required by the end of the month, but so great was the change in circumstances by the middle of June that the coal trade was informed that it would be demand which would fall short of production by 10%.<sup>10</sup>

In simple terms this loss of markets meant that output had now to be reduced to meet the demand, and because it was the Northumberland and Durham coalfield and the South Wales coalfield that were organised to meet the needs of the French market it was there that the reduction in production had its most severe impact.

Within South Wales itself there was an unevenness in the extent of the impact. The demand for some types



of coal was not affected, for some types there was a reduction in demand and for some there were no outlets for sales at all. In the first weeks following the French catastrophe the anthracite district was hardly affected as the Canadian market remained open until the October, and even during the period when the anthracite district was seriously affected pits that produced the highest quality coal remained open.<sup>11</sup> Pits in the Swansea steam coal area were unaffected too, as it was estimated that with the exception of 9,000 tons of duff coals weekly, the output could be disposed of locally provided that the neighbouring industry continued to operate at full production levels.<sup>12</sup>

Initially, the problem of unsaleable coal in South Wales was confined to the steam and bituminous coalfield areas, where it was anticipated that 95% of the output would be unsaleable weekly, a total of 187,630 tons.<sup>13</sup> The problem was accentuated by the return of some French exports and the 381,906 tons of coal held at collieries as stocks.<sup>14</sup>

In the first three weeks after the French capitulation, coal production fell in the South Wales district by over 200,000 tons, the bulk of it being a reduction in steam and bituminous coal mined.<sup>15</sup> This situation prompted the Coalowners to move into a continuous debate in these weeks on proposed solutions

for overcoming the crisis. In addition to the catastrophic loss of markets they were also concerned with averting what would be for them an even greater catastrophe - the Government control of the industry which might follow if the owners failed to take effective measures to meet the problems arising. This is what Sir Evan Williams, Chairman of both the South Wales and the national Coalowner's Associations told his fellow representatives.

'It is natural for the primary thought of each company to be their financial position, but in the present circumstances a much broader view has to be taken. The labour side is extremely important and if there is irregular working in the pits some scheme for distribution of trade in order to secure an equalisation of employment would be imperative. The constitution of the present Government makes it imperative that such a scheme is evolved by the industry if nationalisation of the industry is to be prevented. Bearing in mind the experience of the last war it is probable that in the event of there being any form of Government control being instituted it would be very difficult to have it removed at the end of hostilities.'

16

By 11th July a special sub-committee on the Trade Position in the South Wales Coalfield was ready to make several concrete proposals briefly outlined below.

- a) Available trade should be divided and allocated so as to spread employment equally and equitably amongst the collieries in the coalfield.
- b) The number of days within each fortnightly period which the undertaking of each owner should work should be specified, or alternatively the maximum output to be raised by each owner during this period should be determined.

The Anthracite wrea was excluded under this proposal as it could expect full working to continue until October.

- c) There should be a maximum levy of 6d. a ton upon all coal sold.
- d) The Government should be asked to sanction an all-round increase in prices because of the general increase in costs due to short-time working and a reduction in output of over 50% due to loss of trade which meant that overhead charges were proportionately higher.
- e) The Government should take the necessary measures to ensure that the laying down of stocks by railways and other public utilities should be pursued to the full extent. This, because, since

the capitulation of France, consumers were taking less interest in building up their stocks and the railways were actually drawing upon their reserves.<sup>17</sup>

These proposals were aimed at retaining as much of the South Wales trade as had existed and that what there was, was to be shared equally within the coalfield. The application for price increases and the levy were designed to compensate for financial losses.

Allied to the proposals above, were two others. One was to try and extend trade to new markets such as Argentina, Brazil, Spain, Portugal and Uruguay, supplies to which had been limited on account of the French demands. The other was to seek the co-operation of the other British coalowners to get a larger share of the home market for South Wales.<sup>18</sup> It was maintained that this second proposition would become feasible if the Coalowners Central Organisation, the MAGB, would decide that Saturday work be eliminated in every coalfield and that all orders should be pooled and shared. This scheme had the full backing of the SWMF who in their turn attempted to win the support of their central organisation, the MFGB. Ness Edwards, M.P., proposed a motion on behalf of the SWMF at an MFGB conference that called for all

existing units to be kept in production, all manpower allocated to the industry to be maintained and a fair distribution of orders between one coalfield and another during the national emergency.<sup>19</sup>

Edwards urged that if the best efforts were to be made in the interests of the nation, individual coalfield interests had to be subordinated to those of the nation. He went on to ask the conference what the psychological effect would be on the morale of the nation if large numbers of miners were unable to work at all.<sup>20</sup>

Despite Ness Edwards' oratory, the motion was remitted to the MFGB EC. The response to it was particularly lukewarm in Yorkshire and in the Midlands both amongst the men and the owners, and this produced bitter recriminations between the coalfields,<sup>21</sup> allowing an unfamiliar united front to develop in South Wales between the owners and the union.

In a response to allegations from the SWMF that nothing had been done about their proposals, D. R. Grenfell claimed that they had been thoroughly investigated but the Mines Department had come up against problems they could not eliminate or overcome.<sup>22</sup> He did not expand upon this vague statement but when reporting to his fellow coalowners, Sir Evan Williams gave the major reason as being that the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin,

had decided that all surplus employees must be released for the army and munitions industries and that it was uneconomical to have collieries working except upon a basis of full-time.<sup>23</sup>

D. R. Grenfell, however, put forward his own proposals and whilst addressing a meeting at Cardiff, he announced a three point plan:-

- a) A levy on coal production to secure a fund for keeping in working condition the pits left idly by the collapse of the continental market.
- b) The transfer of unemployed miners from the export districts.
- c) Relaxation of the Order forbidding idle miners from taking up other work.<sup>24</sup>

The SWMF criticised these proposals because they limited their horizons simply to dealing with the unemployed miners and idle pits in a status quo situation, they did not extend to easing the situation by considering ways and means of creating more work within the industry itself by extending trade. They maintained that markets could be extended to South America and the United States if something was done about the high coal export prices charged due to high war risks insurance which resulted in heavy freight-age charges.<sup>25</sup>

The editor of the Western Mail was also forthright

in his criticism. "If the hopes raised by Mr. Grenfell's appointment are to be fulfilled", he wrote "something more effective than a fund for keeping in a workable condition pits left idle by the collapse will be required".<sup>26</sup>

Grenfell's weakness was that he did not have the power to deal with the situation; he was often overruled by the Minister of Labour, Also he was caught in a dilemma between deciding upon measures that might provide long-term solutions to the problems of the coal industry and those that might prove most effective in the immediate situation.

The long term solutions proposed by the miners' leaders and many of Grenfell's fellow Labour Party members, such as S. O. Davies, compounded the dilemma for they aroused the fears of the coalowners and other members of the Coalition Government at a time when Grenfell's policy was to work for the total co-operation of all parties in the industry in the national interest.

S. O. Davies stated the case for the militants in the House of Commons:-

'I cannot possibly believe that conditions in our coalfields will be improved unless my hon. friend (Grenfell) is determined upon a complete reorganisation of coal production and distribution and has a central authority with real authority, so

that the whole activities of our coalfields shall be co-ordinated and directed by one body. Unless this is done the competition that exists between coalfield and coalfield will continue ....."<sup>27</sup>

S. O. Davies was hinting here at Government control of the industry and this was partly achieved when Dual Control was introduced in 1942 but at this time in 1940 the Government seemed keen to evade taking such an important step and preferred to fall back on short-term solutions.

Whilst the debating continued the crisis was becoming progressively worse. Unemployment was on the increase and expected to rise even further in South Wales as the closure of the Canadian anthracite market became more imminent, and a new problem was beginning to emerge in the form of transport difficulties. These provided Grenfell with a defence against his critics. There was not an unwillingness to share trade, he told them, but due to a shortage of rolling stock the carrying capacity of the railways was inadequate to transport the coal to distant markets.<sup>28</sup>

A solution to the coal industry's crisis brought on by the Fall of France from within the industry itself was not forthcoming due to the non-co-operation of coalowners and unions in the other coalfields, the lack of positive direction from the Government and the



onset of the transport crisis with the result that, eventually, expedients had to be sought for utilising the unemployed mineworkers outside the industry.

#### THE TRANSPORT CRISIS

It was in September 1940 that the truly devastating nature of the crisis became apparent and that developments had made the demands for a greater share of the inland coal market somewhat superfluous. It was emerging that South Wales was not only cut off from the export markets, but from the inland markets too. The output from the South Wales collieries was not being removed from the pit-heads and hence production was being curtailed. Unemployment was mounting and with the imminence of the closure of the Canadian anthracite market, a sharp escalation was expected. The search for alternative markets for the South Wales coal industry began to recline into the background as the spectre of large scale unemployment loomed on the horizon.

In the process of preparing a memorandum on how the inland trade of the South Wales coal industry could be extended officials of the SWMF were, in their own words, brought face to face with the tragedy of a position where the South Wales collieries were being "choked" with their own output because the coal was not being taken away. Further they highlighted the

irony that South Wales had enough coal ready to meet the needs of London, the south-east and the south-west of England but due to the problems of limited railway facilities, too high freight rates and the curtailing of coastal shipping it could not be delivered.<sup>29</sup>

In those areas of England there was indeed such a coal shortage that the possibility of rationing was under consideration. This paradoxical situation was spotlighted by both the national and local press. Coal shortages in Brighton and Surrey elicited concern for the plight of unemployed miners.<sup>30</sup> If demand was there and production could meet it, then only the railways could be to blame. In the Neath Valley an official of one combine complained that only one of their five collieries was working, making 75% of their workforce, 2,500 men unemployed. This, he claimed, was directly attributable to the failure of the railway companies to effect transport clearance owing to appalling congestion.<sup>31</sup> Another observer quoted cases of coal being held up for over three months, instancing one trainload which had been in the sidings since August, labelled for a Flintshire consumer still awaiting clearance in December.<sup>32</sup> Further west, at a meeting of the Llanelli Rural District Council, Mr. Edgar Lewis emphasised how traffic delays were affecting the position of trade

in the Gwendraeth Valley. There were, in the district, he said 6,000 wagons loaded with coal - all ready labelled - which could not be taken to their destination because of congestion on the railways.<sup>33</sup> One of the chief problems was that thousands of wagons were full of coal that had been intended for the French and Italian markets but had no usage in Britain.<sup>34</sup>

The situation was at its worst in November, December, and January and was described at one SWMF special conference as a virtual blockade of the coalfield.<sup>35</sup> The area west of Port Talbot, including the Neath, Swansea, Gwendraeth and Amman Valleys was most affected. There railway sidings were choked with stationery wagons full of anthracite awaiting delivery. By this time the fundamental problem facing the industry, according to Arthur Horner, was no longer the question of the loss of French trade but had become that of the inability to deal with the programme contracted for to meet the inland trades.<sup>36</sup>

The 'blockade' was at its worst around Christmas 1940, when it was claimed by a managing director of the Amalgamated Anthracite Company that there was a complete embargo east of Newport and north of Llandovery.<sup>37</sup>

Not only the coal industry was affected. Many

factories in the Llanelli area found that whilst their production had not been interfered with greatly, they had extreme difficulty in despatching finished articles and their stocks were accumulating.<sup>38</sup>

In response to this state of affairs the SWMF began to organise a campaign to arouse the population to the dangers of elimination which confronted them and to bring pressure upon the Government to face up to its responsibilities in South Wales.<sup>39</sup> It was hoped to hold meetings not only in South Wales itself, but also in places such as London and the south coast towns where coal was being rationed to explain that coal was available to meet their needs if a means could be found to convey it from the pits. The campaign of mass meetings was described by Arthur Horner as a protest against the South Wales coalfield being allowed to fall into ruin.<sup>40</sup> It got off the ground in the Rhondda area where the SWMF Area No. 4 EC established seven local committees to organise the campaign around the crisis.<sup>41</sup>

It was out of this crisis that a revival in the campaign for nationalisation of the coal industry was rekindled, spearheaded by the Communist Party and miners' leaders, especially Horner.<sup>42</sup> This was despite the appeals in the popular press for an industrial truce. Throughout its coverage during the crisis months the Daily Worker, chiefly through Idris Cox,

the South Wales Organiser of the Communist Party, continually argued the case that it was the inefficiency of capitalist control that was preventing a proper organisation of the industry in time of crisis.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of commentators, however, were of the opinion that the illogicalities of the situation derived from the pressure of unprecedented factors on the country as a whole. They took a similar view to that expressed by George Hall, M.P. for Aberdare, at a meeting in Trecynon. Commenting on the loss of trade with Italy and France he said:-

'No provision could wholly have protected us from the devastating effects of such losses. They must be regarded as amongst the incalculable hazards of war and as unforeseen contingencies created by Hitler's initial success.'

'Even the transport delays which have accentuated the depression are due to an undisclosed extent to the unprecedented demands on the railways for direct military services of a very wide character and also to temporary dislocation caused by raids'.<sup>44</sup>

There were several wartime measures necessitated by the French collapse and Nazi air-raids that had an effect on freight transportation. Freight carried on the east coast railways was largely diverted to western routes, sea-freight was restricted by the

withdrawal of Royal Navy destroyers from convoy duties,<sup>45</sup> and delivery by road was restricted because of the withdrawal of men and lorries for military services. The Mines Secretary D. R. Grenfell estimated that coal carried coastwise from South Wales to ports on the south and south-west coast was cut by at least 50%. He told Churchill on 8th August that he could not see this loss being transferred to the railways as they already had heavy demands placed upon them.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, to aggravate the situation there was a shortage of wagons to carry the coal from the pitheads because of an accumulation of those containing French-bound coal at the docks.

Criticism of the railways, would, in the circumstances, seem to be misplaced and Charles Hambro, Chairman of the Great Western Railway Company, was emphatic that his company bore no responsibility for the difficulties of internal coal transport. Indeed, he maintained in the spring of 1941, as the crisis was easing, that despite the blackout, diverted routes, air-raid interruptions, staff shortage and an increase in general traffic such as munitions and civilian evacuees, the amount of coal being carried from South Wales to England was more than in peacetime.<sup>47</sup> The coal transport problem was made worse by another factor in South Wales - a bottle neck that existed

at the Severn Tunnel. It was suggested by the SWMF EC to the Government that this could be avoided if unloading facilities for small boats were made available on the Bristol side of the Channel, but this was not acted upon.<sup>48</sup> The bottleneck was only broken eventually in the new year of 1941 by the stopping of maintenance work usually carried out on Sundays and opening the tunnel on those days for coal traffic only. A second measure was to reduce passenger traffic between London and South Wales, thus increasing the capacity for coal-freight.<sup>49</sup>

The Severn Tunnel issue was another which re-opened old scars at this time of national crisis. Four years before the war there had been a heated public discussion on a proposal to build a bridge across the Severn. According to Idris Cox the local authorities of Wales were in favour of the scheme but opposition from the Great Western Railway had killed the scheme. They had feared a drop in railway profits. In an angry article in the Daily Worker he wrote:-

'The chickens have now come home to roost, but it is the people of London and the miners who have to pay the price.....'<sup>50</sup>

The reopening of old scars was, perhaps, not the most constructive thing to do at this time, but the onset of large scale unemployment had already reopened

the deepest wound of all. Furthermore, although the Government and those in authority could, in the main, quite fairly attribute the crisis to the catastrophic effects of war, there does seem to have been an air of inertia about their actions at times. Two instances spring to mind. Firstly, Grenfell the Secretary responsible for the Mines foresaw a transport crisis in early August, 1940<sup>51</sup> two months before such a crisis became generally apparent. Very little seems to have been done to try and avert this, although in fairness it could be argued that little could be done. The second case concerned the Severn Tunnel bottleneck. An SWMF conference on 7th November, 1940 was making recommendations as to how this could be alleviated, yet the Government took no decisive action until the New Year.

Given the fact that Britain was indeed undergoing the most serious invasion attempt for nearly one hundred and fifty years, it could be argued that such oversights in Government policy making were not of too serious proportions. Nevertheless, the morale of a population, embittered by unemployment and pit closures could only have been detrimentally affected by the additional complication of the transport crisis.



UNEMPLOYMENT AND PIT CLOSURESUNEMPLOYMENT FIGURES IN SOUTH WALES JUNE 1940 - FEB. 1941<sup>52</sup>

| MONTH      | INCREASE | DECREASE | TOTAL  |
|------------|----------|----------|--------|
| June 1940  |          | 11,862   | 67,847 |
| July 1940  | 12,731   |          | 80,578 |
| Aug. 1940  |          | 5,108    | 75,470 |
| Sept. 1940 | 1,897    |          | 77,367 |
| Oct. 1940  | 7,449    |          | 84,816 |
| Nov. 1940  | 10,958   |          | 95,774 |
| Dec. 1940  |          | 7,472    | 88,302 |
| Jan. 1941  |          | 8,920    | 79,382 |
| Feb. 1941  |          | 9,598    | 69,784 |

The table above represents a statistical analysis of the level of unemployment throughout South Wales during the months of the trade and transport crisis. The increase in unemployed in the months of July, September, October and November 1940 can be considered to be mainly miners. However, the decrease evident in December, January and February does not necessarily mean that all those previously made unemployed returned to the pit. Many men may have found alternative work outside Wales or even have joined the army.

As they stand, the statistics are rather stark without any explanation. As David Smith has remarked about the unemployment figures of the 1930's., they

are 'except in their gravity, eloquently silent as to the nature of the problem' and they are often 'a substitute for the knowledge we really seek'.<sup>53</sup> The unemployment was not spread evenly throughout the coalfield. Monmouthshire for instance, hardly felt the effects of the trade and transport crisis, as Arthur Horner told a meeting of the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee:-

'The Monmouthshire collieries have hardly lost a shift since the Fall of France and there are many collieries that are two hundred to four hundred men short'.<sup>54</sup>

It was particular areas and particular communities that suffered the greatest impact. The West Wales anthracite coalfield and the Aberdare and Rhondda Valleys in the Steam Coal region were the hardest hit of all. Ammanford, was a typical example of a town severely affected. Councillor Frank Davies speaking at the 'People's Convention in London on January 11th 1941 told over two thousand assembled delegates:-

'I have come from Ammanford in South Wales .... in an orbit of five miles we have at least three thousand miners unemployed'.<sup>55</sup>

The unevenness of the impact led to attempts to introduce work-sharing throughout the coalfield, and the failure to operate such schemes provoked anger in

towns such as Ammanford. Idris Cox in the Daily Worker<sup>56</sup> claimed that with a reduction of 25% in the effective operation of pits in South Wales, an average working week of four days for all miners was potentially possible as an alternative to having some working full time, others on stop and others on four and less days. He blamed what he termed "the smash and grab" policy of the competing combines for being responsible for preventing work-sharing. To blame the combines alone, however, was not the whole story. For example a work sharing scheme to operate within just the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine proposed by the Saron lodge was not taken up by the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee.<sup>57</sup> So there were examples within the anthracite area of pits, such as Seven Sisters, that remained unaffected by the crisis<sup>58</sup> whilst in the Ammanford region only one pit out of six worked because of the second grade coal they produced.<sup>59</sup>

The majority of pits to close immediately following upon the French disasters were in the dry steam coal areas which provided the duff coals for France for which there was no demand in Britain. Those collieries within the Ocean and Cory Combines were described by Arthur Horner as being in a 'particularly dreadful plight'.<sup>60</sup> It was estimated

that there were between five and six thousand men out of work in them, whilst in the larger Powell Duffryn combine pit closures had necessitated between seven and eight thousand men being made workless.<sup>61</sup>

In the Rhondda Valley only four out of eighteen pits were working to full capacity.<sup>62</sup> The other region badly hit at first was that around Aberdare and Merthyr, where such collieries as Tower Pit, Nantmelyn, Navigation, Deep Duffryn, Abercynon and the Plymouth Colliery, Merthyr, were all closed.<sup>63</sup>

In the anthracite area, 8,000 tons of coal was being laid to ground weekly from July 1940<sup>64</sup> but because of the needs of the Canadian market there was a delayed reaction in terms of closures and unemployment. Indeed, in August, all except one of the collieries in the area, Glanamman, took only one of their annual week's holiday, foregoing the rest in the interests of coal production.<sup>65</sup>

It was in the beginning of September that the anthracite area began to feel the effects, but the first pits to suffer, Pantyffynon, Rhos and Tirbach could be considered special cases.<sup>66</sup> Tirbach colliery in Ystalyfera had only reopened on June 7th 1940 after having been closed in the previous February.<sup>67</sup> The colliery was one that had faced geological difficulties and had only worked

intermittently over a long period, although it was claimed that there were fifty of sixty years of unworked coal still in the pit.<sup>68</sup> It had been restarted in June only after an investigation. At Rhos colliery the one hundred and fifty workmen had been working on day to day contracts since the previous March when the pit had been threatened with closure. This was also the case for eighty men in one district at Pantyffynon.<sup>69</sup>

The economic future of several anthracite pits had therefore been shaky before the Fall of France. At a meeting of the Amalgamated Anthracite Committee in March 1940 it was estimated that ten collieries in the combine, at the least, were on the list for closure by the company.<sup>70</sup> Then, the combines' effective opposition to closures had eventually led to the reopening of Tirbach and the operation of day to day contracts at Rhos. After the Fall of France there was no real possibility of preventing closures, and Tirbach and Rhos collieries were never to work again after the crisis.

The major calamity did not descend on the anthracite area until the end of September, although it had been foreseen a long time in advance. Since the loss of the French market the Amalgamated Anthracite Company had been compelled to undercut

their selling prices and the best anthracite coal had been sold at third-rate prices. The company had lost £51,000 in August alone due to this factor.<sup>71</sup> It was obvious therefore that the loss of the Canadian market would entail pit closures and consequent mass unemployment.

The loss of the Canadian market was a seasonal occurrence, coinciding with the freezing up of the St. Lawrence River and it was not an unusual event for men employed at collieries supplying the Canadian market to suffer such seasonal unemployment. The loss of all the other major export markets, however, plus the fast developing transport crisis meant that the numbers of men affected would be far, far greater, than in an average year. Also given the additional burden of wartime circumstances the consequences were likely to be far more severe.

In expectation of the lay-offs, tripartite meetings, had been held concerning the Secretary of the Mines, D. R. Grenfell, directors of the Amalgamated Anthracite Company and representatives of workmen in the hope of finding some remedy to help minimise the numbers of men involved. Despite this, however, the company's directors announced on September 25th that due to the curtailment of orders from Canada their output would have to be reduced from 320,000 tons

to 210,000 tons, which would necessitate a withdrawal of at least 5,000 men from the collieries.<sup>72</sup> Two weeks later the company announced that 6,800 men had been given their notices and eleven pits had been closed down completely.<sup>73</sup> More closures followed in the November and December.<sup>74</sup>

Smaller companies in the area were also affected. The Glanamman Anthracite Company had to close its pit in mid-November<sup>75</sup> and pits in the Swansea steam coal district were also closed.<sup>76</sup> By early December it was estimated that over 7,000 out of 17,000 Amalgamated Anthracite workmen were unemployed and in the western coalfield area, overall, a community of 250,000 people, 10,000 men out of a mining workforce of 24,000 found no work in the pits.<sup>77</sup>

December was the worst month of all. At an SWMF special conference on December 7th it was maintained that forty pits in South Wales were closed and 50,000 men were either out of work or on short-time working.<sup>78</sup>

In the week before Christmas not more than seven of the thirty three Amalgamated Anthracite Company collieries worked,<sup>79</sup> which meant that over 12,000 men in the Combine were laid off. This was the peak of the unemployment figures and to some extent there was a deliberate underproduction in the anticipation

that it would enable the company to start at least two more collieries working full-time the following week.<sup>80</sup>

After Christmas the situation began to ease, and during the second week of January the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales reported nineteen AAC collieries at work, an improvement of a dozen since Christmas week.<sup>81</sup> This was chiefly due to the beginning of a gradual clearance of the railway lines.<sup>82</sup> The disentanglement of the transport problems more or less brought the steam coal areas back into production. Full working was reported in the Aberdare Valley after a long period of three days a week working.<sup>83</sup>

The reopening of pits took more time in the anthracite area, as the Canadian market did not become available once more until the St. Lawrence unfroze in late March. Even then not all the pits reopened and in early April Sir William Jenkins, M.P. for Neath, tabled a question in the House of Commons asking why pits remained closed at Gwaun-cae-Gurwen in his constituency.<sup>84</sup> There were, in fact, eight A.A.C. collieries idle at this time - Llandebie, East and Maerdy pits, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, Wernos, Saron, Jubilee, Pantyffynon and Glynneath.<sup>85</sup>

East pit, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, was not reopened



until mid-July and was only operated with 80% of its previous workforce.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, overall in the South Wales area, according to SWMF President Arthur Horner, in June 1941 there were still between four and five thousand miners idle.<sup>87</sup> Only Rhos and Tirbach collieries were never to open again following this crisis, but many of those that did reopen, such as East Pit, only did so on a depleted basis.<sup>88</sup>

#### ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM

It was clearly embarrassing for the Government to have in existence an army of unemployed miners during one of the greatest security crises in British history. Alternative and essential work should be found to involve these men, but at first the Government found itself entangled in the mesh of its own legislation. Before any scheme could be implemented an act passed in the very different circumstances of May 1940 had to be repealed. Then, at a time when every muscle and nerve was being stretched to boost coal production it had been decided to stop recruitment of colliery workers into the armed services and also to prevent a drift of colliers away from the mines to other firms and government works. This act paralysed miners in their state of unemployment as they were not allowed to search for alternative work because of it. The SWMF led a campaign to get these men freed and to be allowed to enter another industry.

The problem was exacerbated somewhat because it appeared<sup>89</sup> that men from the border were brought down to work in munitions factories in Wales whilst the locally unemployed miners were not allowed to take the jobs.<sup>90</sup>

Eventually, Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour, announced the proposed lifting of these restrictions towards the end of September.<sup>91</sup> According to Bevin's biographer, Alan Bullock, however, he did so against his better judgement, persuaded by miners' leaders and M.P's. Later in the war it was a decision he bitterly regretted when the shortage of mineworkers became the most intractable problem of labour supply.<sup>92</sup> Certainly, once they had tasted other more congenial employment many miners felt no desire ever to return to the mines again.<sup>93</sup> To some extent Horner had forseen this problem, for in a speech that he had made at Trecynon calling for the miners to be freed so that they would be able to work elsewhere he also suggested that other arrangements 'must be made for them to return to the coal industry if they are required'.<sup>94</sup> Soon afterwards, however, he was arguing that the young men should be kept in the industry. At a joint meeting of the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine directors and workmen's representatives he argued

strongly for the importance of keeping collieries open on a part-time basis so that young men could be kept in the industry and be prevented from moving on to alternative employment or the armed forces.<sup>95</sup>

Once the problem of the miners being tied to their industry had been cleared up, the table was clear to discuss proposals about how the unemployment situation was to be alleviated. These, broadly fall into two categories, those that coincided with a particular ideological outlook and those that were purely pragmatic. In the first category came proposals based on the belief that Government intervention directly in the coal industry was necessary in both financial terms and organisational terms.

1) PROPOSALS INVOLVING DIRECT GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

Arthur Horner, the SWMF President and several other members of the SWMF executive were also members of the Communist Party whilst several other EC members, who were in the Labour Party had, sympathies that lay in that direction. It was not unusual therefore, to find that on many aspects of policy there was a great similarity between that of the SWMF executive and the Communist Party. The Communist Party were of course opposed to the participation of

Britain in the war, a very difficult policy to maintain during the period following the Fall of France and the Battle of Britain. In this period they tended to concentrate their criticisms on Government policies on the Home Front. Their criticisms were certainly not of an abstract nature as Ianto Evans a Communist Party member on the SWMF EC explained in the Daily Worker<sup>96</sup> in an article calling for the formulation of an immediate programme to deal with the crisis in South Wales:

'To say, although it is perfectly true, that there is no solution so long as capitalism exists, butters no bread, nor parsnips, for the miners here and now'.

Of course it was easier to formulate a programme for action from a position of commentary than it was to put decisions into practice at ground level.

The SWMF had initially proposed direct Government assistance to enable British coal to compete in the United States and South American markets,<sup>97</sup> at a time when increased trade would have meant more employment, but as the unemployment problem began to emerge in its enormity, outstripping all discussions on further trade openings, the SWMF began to press the Government to buy all the coal and to concentrate on how to relieve the unemployed.

Their policy on this differed only in one aspect from that of the Communist Party. The Communist Party criticised the SWMF for being content with leaving everything in the hands of the MFGB and thereby allowing the problems to be handled at one step removed from actuality. They themselves were intensely active in campaigning around their programme, mounting a campaign of public meetings and distributing over 30,000 leaflets.

The proposals put forward by both the SWMF and the Communist Party included a Government subsidy to keep the pits open and to sell coal at reduced prices to domestic consumers, thereby expanding the home market; no compulsory transference of miners outside South Wales but their absorption in South Wales pits and industries; a five day week of seven hours a day; abolition of overtime and the absorption of the unemployed on the construction of shelters and tunnels for air-raid protection.<sup>98</sup>

Such a scheme would have involved a massive injection of capital into the industry which was grounds for Government indifference but far more likely they wished at that stage to steer clear of the political controversy that might arise from a commitment of Government aid to the industry, aware of the hostility that would be aroused amongst the coalowners.<sup>99</sup>

The advantages of the scheme were that a larger work force could have been kept in the mines, disruption of local communities would have been much less, and transference of labour minimised. This was becoming a really contentious issue in South Wales, especially as it seemed that if outside labour was prevented from coming into the country there would have been plenty of work for the unemployed in Wales.<sup>100</sup> Arthur Horner argued for instance that as the Fall of France and its consequent effects had meant a measure of unemployment in the industry, it was only right that South Wales miners should have preferential treatment for work in Government undertakings in South Wales.<sup>101</sup>

It would seem that the Government hardly contemplated the measures proposed by the SWMF and they fell back on the short-term measures of military call-up of miners and transference of labour. Given the extreme gravity of the threat to Britain's security in these months when the potential imminence of the Nazi takeover in Britain was at its most likely stage, it is hardly surprising that they chose to put into operation schemes that would, hopefully, mobilise more men and more munitions. In the long term, of course, they may be considered to have been counter-productive. In the previous spring when extra coal production had been demanded the miners

had been expected to work more manshifts, now in the autumn when production had been curtailed the miner was expected to leave his village, leave his home and family and go elsewhere for work. It should not be surprising, then, if many miners who had previously borne the brunt of the industrial depression of the 30's viewed those in authority with more than a slight degree of cynicism.

ii) THE MILITARY CALL-UP SCHEME

It was supremely ironic that within two months of having declared the mining industry a totally reserved occupation<sup>102</sup> Ernest Bevin was mooting the possibility of raising the age of reservation for the mining industry. The Mines Department opposed this initially and in August they persuaded Bevin to postpone his decision for a month.<sup>103</sup> In September, however, Bevin announced in the House of Commons that he was taking steps to call-up into military service substantial numbers of miners from the lower age groups, and that he was entering into discussions on the matter with the MFGB and representatives of the coalowners.<sup>104</sup> A proposed scheme was agreed to by all sides, but it met opposition in South Wales. All the SWMF representatives on the MFGB executive voted against acceptance of the scheme.<sup>105</sup>

The South Wales representatives were insistent

that a solution could have been arrived at within the industry and, further, considered the scheme to amount to discrimination against unemployed miners. The scheme entailed the call-up of unemployed miners under the age of 30 who had been out of employment for over six weeks. Tribunals were to be set up in all the coalfields to assess manpower needs and to estimate the extent that young men in each coalfield could be called up for military service.<sup>106</sup> In practice only miners in the South Wales and Durham coalfields would be affected. In the other coalfields which supplied the internal markets, the demand for coal, for the most part, exceeded the capacity of the local miners, and it could be fairly forecast that the tribunals would adjudge that there very few men under 30 could be spared the industry. In South Wales and Durham however, the major victims of the loss of the export markets and the transport crisis, thousands of men had been out of work since June and a large majority of those under the age of 30 would lose their reserved worker status under this scheme.

The immediate response of the SWMF was to demand that recruitment of men should apply evenly throughout the industry.<sup>107</sup> Discontent was rife and the cudgels of opposition were taken up by an assortment of organisations. Amongst the most vociferous were the Glyn Neath Free Church Council who sent protest letters



to the local press and the SWMF EC. They protested against the undemocratic nature of the scheme and unjust discrimination against the unemployed miners of South Wales and Durham.<sup>108</sup> The SWMF received many similar objections from its own constituent organisations and when the Area No. 2 which covered the Neath and Afan valleys, proposed a special conference<sup>be</sup>/called to discuss the matter,<sup>109</sup> they readily agreed.<sup>110</sup>

The Conference was held on December 6th 1940 and it unanimously opposed the scheme and backed an EC motion that criticised the scheme for discriminating against the youth and manpower of the industry.<sup>111</sup>

The SWMF attempted to win the support of the South Wales Coalowners for this policy but they refused to join with the workmen in condemning the scheme.<sup>112</sup> They had previously joined with the SWMF in calling for a more equitable distribution of the inland markets,<sup>113</sup> but as Michael Foot<sup>114</sup> has pointed out, their decision in this case was not all that surprising as the scheme would act as a powerful weapon in the hands of the coalowners who wanted to deal with troublesome miners.

Support from the coalowners against the recruitment of miners into the army did materialise later, however, when it began to emerge in the early

spring of 1941 that a distinct manpower shortage was developing once more. In a memorandum submitted to one of the tribunals set up under the scheme, Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the Coalowners in South Wales stressed the importance of not agreeing to the withdrawal of any more men, as some collieries were in a position of wanting labour.<sup>115</sup> Events in the South Wales coal industry had, indeed, swung through a massive circle in the year between the spring of 1940 and that of 1941.<sup>116</sup> The scheme was eventually dropped completely when this was recognised with the application of the Essential Works Order (Coalmining) in May 1941.<sup>117</sup>

iii) TRANSFERENCE OF LABOUR TO OTHER COALFIELDS AND OTHER WORKS

As soon as it began to become clear that there was to be a huge number of men unemployed in South Wales a variety of proposals were suggested as to how these men could be absorbed in the interests of wartime needs. One of the earliest put forward came from the Regional Commissioner, Colonel G. T. Bruce, who asked the SWMF EC to encourage its unemployed members to volunteer for trench digging to make any possible landing ground for parachutists unusable.<sup>118</sup> The SWMF recommended this, but as there was no remuneration involved the scheme does not seem to have met with much of a response. Two other schemes,

on a much larger scale, that were widely discussed met with a not much better response. These were proposals to transfer men to other coalfields and to London to clear up debris caused by the bombing.

D. R. Grenfell had proposed the transfer of unemployed miners in the export districts to other areas as part of his 3-point plan expounded in early September.<sup>119</sup> He had entered into negotiations with the relevant parties involved. At first attempts were made to see if arrangements could be made within the South Wales coalfield itself before any prospect of transfer on a wider scale was breached.<sup>120</sup> Some collieries in the Monmouthshire steam coal area were in need of extra labour. For the anthracite miners of the west problems were posed by even this limited degree of transfer. Traditions and customs in Monmouthshire differed widely from those in the west and more importantly the work process on the harder anthracite coal was totally different from that on bituminous coal.

Transfer to other coalfields in Britain presented even greater problems not the least of which was that of the differing wage rates between areas. The SWMF EC decided that no transfer should be effected until consultation had taken place with representatives of the workmen in other districts about this. They opposed the idea that a man should work for wages

prevalent in their new places of work, if they were lower than that which they had been previously been paid.<sup>121</sup> Idris Cox, explained some of the complications.<sup>122</sup>

'Miners wage rates in Bristol, Somerset and the Forest of Dean coalfields are much lower than in South Wales, but the transferred miners will be offered 3/6 a day 'lodging allowance' and fares once a month to visit their families. It will cost them more than that to keep two houses going and it is most unlikely that Welsh miners will consent to work at less wages than they would receive at home. And even if they received the same rates as in South Wales they would not agree, while miners in these coalfields are getting less'.

The MFGB however, urged the SWMF to consider requests for men to volunteer for work in the Kent coalfield<sup>123</sup> and D.R. Grenfell addressing a coalfield delegate conference made a similar plea.<sup>124</sup> SWMF officials agreed to discuss conditions for work in other coalfields with Grenfell<sup>125</sup> but this time opposition came from union officials in the Kent coalfield which was to receive the transferred miners and no agreement was made.<sup>126</sup> Apart from the failure to obtain acceptable working conditions there was

also a strong feeling in union quarters that such schemes were being used as temporary palliatives and that the question of fundamental importance, the recovery of the industry was being abandoned, hence the repeated calls at this time from the miners leaders for the Government to nationalise the industry immediately.<sup>127</sup>

At the same SWMF EC meeting as the transference of men to other coalfields was rejected so was the idea of sending a force of miners to London to assist in debris clearance, and for quite similar reasons.<sup>128</sup>

Debris clearance was a widely advocated scheme in the press.<sup>129</sup> The Western Mail suggested that there was no one better fitted for such work than a miner and considered that such a scheme would be responded to enthusiastically by the 'scores of men wandering the mining towns and villages aimlessly in enforced idleness'.<sup>130</sup> The Daily Mail's Cardiff correspondent was equally convinced of the response, 'Having spent a lifetime tunnelling through earth or debris and shoring up where danger threatens, if Whitehall sends them an S.O.S. Dai Jones and his pals from the Rhondda would be on the job in hours.'<sup>131</sup>

The Daily Express<sup>132</sup> went one step further and initiated its own scheme. After having undertaken a series of interviews in the Rhondda their reporter

discovered that most unemployed miners were eager to be in London shovelling rubble. 'Clearing wreckage, that's my ticket!' was a typical response elicited. The Express actually took a miner John Henry Lowe, to London where they accomodated him in the Grand Palace Hotel. He returned after a short time to his home town, Trealaw and was to recruit a batch of men for the salvaging squad.<sup>133</sup> The articles written were of a patronising nature, treating John Lowe as if he were some primitive tribesman being introduced into the modern world. Whether they had any success in recruiting is doubtful, for one thing, the Express cannot have had a particularly large circulation amongst miners. Their campaign mentioned nothing about rates of pay and if anything the descriptions of life in the Grand Palace Hotel probably induced more antagonism from miners than co-operation, for they illustrated how few concessions to the war effort the clientele of such hotels were making. Furthermore, miners' resentment at persistently being described as 'useful' at this critical period after years on the industrial scrap heap were probably induced.

In any case, there was no great exodus to London and in some quarters there was extremely forthright opposition. Perhaps the most vehement voice to be heard was that of Councillor Sidney Jones



of Cross Hands who told the Llanelli Rural District Council that he was 'Strongly against sending miners to do the dirty work of Londoners whilst the latter came into the district to take away work that might have been given to miners.'<sup>134</sup>

Other oponents were slightly more restrained than Councillor Jones. One such was the SEMF EC General Secretary, Oliver Harris, He told the press that miners would go to London if there was no compulsion about the scheme and if a fair wage and good accomodation was offered.<sup>135</sup> This never materialised and instead the Government used soldiers to clear up the debris against the protests of the SWMF EC who demanded that this work should be performed by civilians at trade union rates.<sup>136</sup>

Despite the rejection of these two proposed transfer schemes, there was still a large degree of transference organised through the Labour Exchanges and it was this, above all, that created bad feeling. The fact that men had to leave their homes and families to find work was cause enough for hostility, but anomalies and an element of coercion over the transference created greater bitterness. For instance eighty colliers who had worked at Rhos Colliery were ordered away, within a week of their workplace closing down, to work at Bristol, Avonmouth and Llansamlet. If they refused to go, they were

told, their Unemployment Benefit would be stopped.<sup>138</sup>  
The Gwaun-cae-Gurwen lodges reported the case to the SWMF EC of twenty-five local men recruited to build an aerodrome in the South West of England. After a fortnight they had returned home after living in conditions described as like 'nothing but a damned concentration camp'. Their accomodation was unheated, beds were damp and the food was inedible.

If offered one of these jobs it was impossible for a man to refuse to take it because of an amendment made to the Unemployed Insurance Act in the early days of the war. Formerly it was possible for a man to refuse to undertake work in any trade but his own if he had been unemployed for a short period of time and had reasonable prospects of obtaining work again in his occupation. The wartime amendment laid down that the period during which a refusal was operative was only fourteen days. After that the safeguards about wages could be discarded if the new employment could be described as work of 'national importance'. This was described in the New Leader, the weekly paper of the I.L.P., as being a disguised form of industrial transference<sup>139</sup> except that it operated with an added evil of a form of compulsion. It was, however, only the newspapers on the far left wing of British politics that recorded



critical stories concerning transference. The New Leader told of men approaching the age of sixty who were given the choice of taking outdoor heavy work in North Wales or losing their dole,<sup>140</sup> whilst the Daily Worker<sup>141</sup> claimed that there were many men working on Government building sites as general labourers who were no better off than if they were unemployed. The men had been guaranteed a thirty hour week, but to get this they had had to present themselves for work, seven days a week.

It is difficult to ascertain how widespread these harsh examples of transference were but there can be little doubt concerning its general unpopularity. In his auto-biographical documentary, Miner's Day, Bert Coombes, attacked the idea<sup>142</sup> that there was such a thing as voluntary transfer. He wrote:-

'The miners were idle and the men were called to the exchanges to be told that work was available on airfields and in various outdoor jobs. Theoretically, they signed their willingness to go, but when the dole is your only subsistence, and you sense a threat, even to that, there is not much freedom of choice'.

Transference had an adverse psychological effect on the miners concerned. It also had a damaging effect on village life in an area dependent on the

industry for economic survival. The extent of migration from the villages is hard to estimate but if statements made by delegates to Ammanford Trades Council are correct the figures were high. Frank Davies the representative from Saron Colliery mentioned that out of 316 men who worked there before it had closed only between forty and fifty were left in the area, and John Harris from Pantyffynon lodge estimated that only 100 men out of a workforce of 500 were left there.<sup>143</sup> The effects of this degree of extraction from a community and particularly on the family life of that community is incalculable.

Whilst transference helped to ease the unemployment figures it did nothing of course to ease the problems of the communities that could not provide jobs for their inhabitants. There were many pleas for the government to pay some attention to this. A typical one came from the editor of the Llanelly Star:<sup>-144</sup>

'The coal-mining industry seems to be fated to be the orphan of every storm. And the South Wales coalfield always gets its worst. Our dependence on the export market renders us the victims of every international crisis ..... The men rendered idle now are to be transferred to the other coal mining areas or to other industries.

But this leaves untouched the problem of the stricken communities. Ammanford looks like being very badly hit. The Government is surely under obligation to do something for communities like these. They are the casualties of war'.

The West Wales towns and villages were in fact doubly hit because the other staple industry of the area, the tin-plate was also faced with closures. This was partly due to the opening of the steel works in Ebbw Vale,<sup>145</sup> but also because in January 1941 the Ministry of Supply had given instructions that the tonnage of steel allocated for the manufacture of tinplate was to be considerably reduced. In practice this decision meant that all manufacture of tinplate for export had to cease, for due to the existing steel position the tinplate trade had been able to operate at about 6% capacity.<sup>146</sup> Ammanford was one town seriously affected by this decision, as, too, was Ystalyfera which had suffered through the closure of Tirbach Colliery. Arising out of this decision local councils began to agitate strongly for new industries to be brought into the area.<sup>147</sup> It was not surprising that in these months a town like Ammanford had a strong People's Vigilance Committee, for here the

suffering caused by the dislocation of trade was as intense as it was familiar; the memories of past industrial conflict and a class analysis of society were never far below the surface despite being covered by a thin veneer of patriotic exhortation. Nevertheless, the protest demonstrations that had characterised the 1930's were almost totally absent from the scene in 1940. Throughout the whole coalfield there was only one of any real size. This took place in December 1940 in the Rhondda Valley and was organised by the Ferndale, Maerdy and Tylorstown lodges to ventilate alleged grievances suffered by the local unemployed. The marches had three major complaints:-

- a) Men who had found work on their own initiative could not take it up because the local Labour Exchanges wouldn't give them a green card, the official introduction to a prospective employer.
- b) Unemployed miners who were sent away on Government jobs were not being given satisfactory billeting and on their return were being refused unemployment benefit and assistance.
- c) Work in South Wales was being given to men from other areas instead of to the local unemployed.<sup>148</sup>

These issues had been discussed on the SWMF EC who had delegated a deputation to meet the local

Divisional Controller of the Ministry of Labour,<sup>149</sup> but the march proceeded on 2nd December. Two columns of protesters came from Maerdy and Tylorstown and converged on Ferndale where a mass meeting of over a thousand people was held. Delegates were appointed to meet the area officer of the Ministry of Labour.<sup>150</sup>

The complaint concerning the "green cards" was soon met, Ernest Bevin responding to W. H. Mainwaring the local M.P. that in the special circumstances of South Wales men who had travelled a considerable distance to seek work and were promised employment would be given introduction cards.<sup>151</sup>

It is difficult to assess whether the demonstration had had any influence in determining Bevin's decision, but at this time it represented a unique display of public displeasure, most protests either being channelled through official means or into the People's Vigilance Movement.

#### THE LONG TERM EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

In the years following the Fall of France the coal industry was dominated by one factor - it was failing to achieve adequate production to meet wartime needs, and the most direct cause seemed to be the declining output per manshift amongst mineworkers. As the war went on the crisis deepened to the extent that coal production in 1945 was

between 30 and 40 million tons below the pre-war level. The problem began to have effect on a widespread basis in the winter of early 1945, which was particularly harsh. It was the opinion of Margot Heinneman, a Labour Research worker at this time, that the severe shortage had taken until 1945 to be most seriously felt because of two lucky accidents, exceptionally mild winters in previous years and the building up of stocks after the Fall of France.<sup>152</sup> There is truth in this statement, of course, but in discussing the wartime coal shortage it would appear that far from easing the problems, the events surrounding the Fall of France were more important in actually creating them. Firstly, the traumatic events adversely affected the morale of the workforce and secondly they prompted a serious drainage of manpower from the industry.

1) The Morale of the Work Force

The morale of the workforce cannot, of course, be measured in any statistical sense, but it is a factor that has great influence upon productivity. A report prepared by Mass Observation in 1942 on 'People in Production', considered that a major force militating towards a decline in British war production was low morale.<sup>153</sup> This must inevitably have been true of the miners in South Wales following

upon their experiences in these months, and indeed a House of Commons Select Committee on Expenditure stated this in a report:

'The consequent psychological effect on the miners of the absence of any measure to meet the sudden change in demand was deplorable, as at one moment they were urged to produce as much as possible and the next they found themselves without work'.<sup>154</sup>

In his book, Miners' Day Bert Coombes of Resolven in the Neath Valley gives a personal account and assessment of miners experiences at the time:

'I recall it was bitter weather and most of the men had worked for years in a warm temperature - under the earth's shelter. What it meant to some of them to be suddenly sent from home and out to work in the snow can be imagined. Usually the wife has learned how to ward off any little illnesses which beset her man. They missed that care and many of them had unreasonable lodgings, so the toll of sickness was considerable'.

'The summer came, the men were acclimatised, and they were able to work longer hours and increase their wages. Some prepared

new homes, some had even moved their families. Then came a complete reversal, coal was urgently needed and all men with mining experience must return to the mines. As a few months before they were not patriotic unless they went away from the mining districts, now they were ferretted out and told they were not patriotic unless they retraced their steps to the place they had been and retraced them hurriedly'.

'Is it any wonder that these miners felt they were Aunt Sallies to be shot at by any muddling official'.<sup>155</sup>

Not only was morale reduced amongst the miners but many were also very angry at what they considered to be an inequality of sacrifice. It was the belief of men like Ned Gittins of Bedlinog who wrote to the Merthyr Express<sup>156</sup> on the subject that during the two very different types of crisis before and after the Fall of France the Government had asked the miners to sacrifice whilst the coalowners were asked to sacrifice nothing. Before the Fall of France, when an additional 30,000 tons of coal per annum were required the miners were told to sacrifice by working weekends, by foregoing



holidays and by ending absenteeism. Afterwards they were thrown out of work or put on short-time and expected to move to Kent or the Forest of Dean. At the same time the Government assisted the coalowners by increasing the price of coal by 1/9 a ton.

Thus when considering absenteeism, go-slows, strikes and the general decline in production in the years remaining of the war after the Fall of France it is necessary to remember the psychological experience through which the miners had passed in those months, June 1940 to March 1941.

11) The Manpower Shortage

The 'ferretting out' of miners from other industries, referred to by Bert Coombes, above, began in the spring of 1941 when it was beginning to become clear that a drastic reversal from the situation of a few months previous was taking place. On February 24th 1941 a joint statement was issued by the SWMF and the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association calling for a reversal of Government policy on the recruitment of miners into the armed forces and other industries. Although there were still 8,000 miners out of work at this time they felt that because the demand for inland coal was increasing and that the general outlook of the industry was showing a real improvement it would be folly not to check the drain in manpower.<sup>157</sup>

Three weeks later Arthur Horner told the press that there were many collieries in South Wales which the owners wished to open but that there were not miners to work in them.<sup>158</sup> Discussions were going on at this time which eventually led to the application of the Essential Works Order (Coalmining Industry) in May, but in the early stages there were major disagreements and complications. The SWMF demand was for the return of miners to the pits from the services and other industries<sup>159</sup> whilst the Government's initial argument was that the work of miners in factories was of a higher priority than their return to the pits.<sup>160</sup>

Recalling miners was not a straightforward matter anyway. In some villages, such as Saron and Pantyffynon, up to seventy-five per cent of the mining workforce had moved out of the area<sup>161</sup> and not all these men could be traced and found. It was estimated that at<sup>162</sup> least ten thousand miners had been absorbed in munitions factories since the Fall of France and the new employers were unwilling to release the men, which was an added difficulty.<sup>163</sup>

In the anthracite area there were added complications concerning the operation of the seniority rule. It was the custom that the last man into the pit was the first man out when it came

to laying-off men. The men, put out of work by the events following the Fall of France were recalled<sup>164</sup> according to this rule. Those who had been employed at the pits the longest were recalled first. Normally if one did not return according to rule one would forfeit one's privilege. However, because of the uncertain and complex nature of the situation at this time it was decided that men recalled to the pits under the seniority rule who did not desire to return would not have their position under the rule prejudiced in the future.<sup>165</sup>

Altogether, in the period between 1st July 1940 and 31st January 1941 a total of 24,127 colliers, day wagemen and boys left the coal industry in South Wales.<sup>166</sup> Although there had been some immigration into the industry to help minimise these losses a large proportion of new recruits had been<sup>new</sup> entrants from school who needed to be trained. The figures in the Appendix<sup>I</sup> at the end of the thesis<sup>167</sup> give a breakdown of migration from the industry and of the destination to which the men went. The figure already quoted, 24,127, does not actually indicate the total number of men who may be regarded as having left their normal field of labour, they merely indicate those who were in employment at the time they left. Therefore, the

numbers of migrants were even greater if unemployed miners who had left the area had been included in the survey. Migration was at its peak during September, October and November 1940. At this time a great deal of publicity was being given to the fact that the mining industry would have to release more men to the forces. This probably gave rise to sense of instability amongst the men, some of whom went into the Army rather than await conscription.<sup>168</sup>

By February 1941, there were only 101,526 men employed in the coalfields as compared with 126,957 in the early part of 1938.<sup>169</sup> Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association estimated that at that time there was a minimum demand of 5,600 men required to carry out the work of the collieries efficiently, and if transport difficulties were removed 9,500.<sup>170</sup> Yet the chairman of the National Service Tribunal had recently suggested that 2,000 men should be withdrawn from the industry for the Forces,<sup>171</sup> hence the demands of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association for the reversal of the Government policy of recruiting miners. What made the shortage more serious was that it was particularly men employed underground and in age groups most important to production that were lacking most.<sup>172</sup>

From this point on, until the end of the war, the shortage of manpower and the consequent decline in output plagues the coal industry, not only in South Wales, but throughout Britain, and the ensuing history is one of endless attempts to discover a remedy for the problems - The Essential Works Order, The Greene Award, Dual Control, The Porter Award, and eventually, after the war, nationalisation. The events surrounding the Fall of France were crucial to the understanding of the acceleration of the forces leading to that nationalisation.

1. Western Mail 11 June 1940
2. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowner's Memorandum on the War and the South Wales Coalfield, 25 June 1940.
3. Export of Goods (Control) Order No. 16.
4. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners memorandum on the War and the South Wales Coalfield, 25 June 1940.
5. Ibid.,
6. Ibid.,
7. Ibid.,
8. General Minutes of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association, 8 July 1940.
9. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Memorandum on the War and the South Wales Coalfield, 25 June 1940.
10. Court, op. cit., p. 82.
11. Interview with Chris Evans, Compensation Secretary, Seven Sisters Lodge, 9 February 1973. He said that the Seven Sisters colliery worked throughout this period.
12. Report of South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Trade Committee on the 'Trade Position in the South Wales Coalfield, 5 July 1940.
13. Ibid.,

14. Ibid.,

15. OUTPUT OF SOUTH WALES DISTRICT JUNE/JULY 1940

| WEEK ENDED | STEAM AND BITUMINOUS | SWANSEA INDUSTRIAL | ANTHRACITE | DISTRICT |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------|----------|
| 22nd June  | 629,679              | 62,821             | 120,109    | 812,609  |
| 29th June  | 542,166              | 58,415             | 117,812    | 718,393  |
| 6th July   | 410,330              | 56,484             | 114,337    | 581,151  |

Addendum to the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Memorandum on war and the South Wales coalfield, 25 June 1940.

16. General Minutes of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association, 8 July 1940.

17. Report of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Sub-Committee on the trade position in the South Wales Coalfield, 11 July 1940.

18. Report of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Trade Committee, 5 July 1940.

19. MFGB Conference Minutes, 16 July 1940.

20. Western Mail, 17 July 1940.

21. The Welsh Nationalist Party tried to capitalise upon this and the following paragraphs can be found in one of their wartime pamphlets, 'Transference Must Stop' by Wynne Samuel, July 1943. 'A well-known dictum proclaims that truth is the first casualty of war. Experience can teach Wales

an adapted version - 'The first casualty of an English war is Welsh trade'.

'The last war reduced the number of employed Welsh miners from 250,000 to 120,000. Again in this war Welsh trade has already suffered. With the entry of Italy into the war and the Fall of France, Wales lost valuable coal markets. Pits closed down and Welsh miners became unemployable'.

'In order to alleviate the position the Welsh miners asked the English miners (not the capitalists) to share the 'home market'.

The English miners refused, forgetting that in 1920 when the English miners were in need the Welsh miners made a contribution of 3/6 per head per shift to help miners across the border'.

22. Western Mail, 13 December 1940.
23. General Minutes of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association 14 October 1940.
24. Western Mail, 10 September 1940.
25. Ibid., 11 November 1940.
26. Ibid., 10 September 1940.
27. Vol. 365 H.C. Debs. 5 September 1940.
28. South Wales Voice, 14 September 1940.
29. Western Mail, 8 November 1940.



30. The following two extracts from the Daily Mail were typical, 'We read with uneasiness that Brighton is short of coal. If this is so we would like to know the reason why? South Wales, too, wants to know the answer, for 20,000 able-bodied men, all anxious to keep the home fires burning will shortly be 'on the dole'. - 17 October 1940.

The following three facts appeared in an article on 2nd November 1940.

1. 'Coal deliveries in Brighton were restricted yesterday by the fuel controllers to no more than 5 cwts. for each consumer every fortnight.
2. County districts in Surrey are now rationed down to no more than 1 cwt. a week per household, merchants explain, 'We can't give you more because railways cannot carry coal away from the mines'.
3. Five South Wales pits closed down yesterday throwing thousands of miners, out of work and others have been put on short time because railways cannot carry coal away from the mines'.

31. Western Mail, 8 November 1940.
32. Daily Herald, 8 December 1940.
33. Llanelli Star, 16 November 1940.
34. Daily Mail, 5 November 1940.
35. Western Mail, 7 December 1940.

36. Western Mail, 15 November 1940.
37. Ibid., 21 December 1940.
38. Ibid., 7 December 1940.
39. SWMF Special Conference Minutes 7 December 1940.
40. Western Mail, 18 December 1940.
41. Daily Worker 18 December 1940.
42. For example in a speech quoted in the Western Mail 18 December 1940.
43. Daily Worker, 14 September 1940.
44. Western Mail, 9 December 1940.
45. H. Pelling, 'Britain and the Second World War' (London 1970) p. 93.
46. PREM 4 - 9/1 Memorandum on Rail Coal Storage.
47. Western Mail, 13 March 1941.
48. Ibid., 8 November 1940.
49. Court op. cit., p. 97.
50. Daily Worker, 14 September 1940.
51. See above p. 71
52. Figures from the 'Western Mail' reports, 9 July 1940, 6 August 1940, 3 September, 16 October 1940, 12 November 1940, 9 January 1941, 6 February 1941 and 8 March 1941.
53. David Smith, 'What Does History Know of Nail-Biting?' Llafur, Volume 1, No. 2 1973.
54. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 24 March 1941.
55. 'The People Speak' Official Report of the People's Convention.

56. Daily Worker, 14 September 1940.
57. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 21 September 1941.
58. See above p. 64
59. Western Mail, 26 September 1940.
60. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 14 September 1940.
61. Daily Worker, 11 November 1940.
62. Ibid., 18 November 1940.
63. Aberdare Leader 14 December 1940.
64. Report of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Sub-Committee on the Trade Position in the South Wales Coalfield, 11 July 1940.
65. South Wales Voice, 10 August 1940.
66. Rhos closed on 31 August 1940 and Pantyffynon and Tirbach two weeks later.
67. South Wales Voice 3 February 1940.
68. Ibid., 7 April 1940.
69. Amman Valley Chronicle 7 March 1940.
70. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 23 March 1940.
71. Ibid., 14 September 1940.
72. Western Mail, 26 September 1940.
73. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 14 October 1940. The pits involved were as follows: The figures in brackets refer to the

number of men employed at each pit.

New Dynant (270), East Pit, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen (800), Maerdy Pit, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen (670), Llandebie (500), Pantyffynon (560) Rhos (350), Great Mountain (950), Wernos (500), Pontyclun (120) Saron (340), and Rhydgau (500).

At other collieries a quota of men were withdrawn; Pentremawr (180), Cross Hands (80), Aberpergwm & Rock Collieries, Glynneath (600).

74. South Wales Voice 16 November 1940 quotes the case of Gelliceidrim colliery with 270 men.
75. Ibid., 16 November 1940.
76. Ibid., 19 October 1940. The closure of Clydach Merthyr colliery (670) men is quoted.
77. Western Mail, 14 December 1940.
78. Daily Worker, 9 December 1940.
79. Daily Herald, 27 December 1940.
80. South Wales Voice 28 December 1940.
81. LAB 10/367 Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 11 January 1941.
82. Daily Herald 30 December 1940.
83. Western Mail, 20 February 1941.
84. Ibid., 9 April 1941.
85. Memo to the Secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association from the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Company. This is included in his report on 'Factors Likely to Militate against Maximum Production' April 1941.

86. South Wales Voice 19 July 1941.
87. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee  
Minutes 21 June 1941.
88. Jim Phillips a member of the Ammanford Lodge  
Committee in 1940-1 stated in an interview  
on 5.2.73. that to his knowledge Pantyffynon  
and Saron collieries were run on a skeleton  
basis throughout the war years.
89. SWMF EC Minutes, 9 September 1940. The motion  
passed read as follows, 'That we inform the  
owners that in places where it is known the  
collieries will not be working for an  
indefinite period the men should be released  
temporarily for work in other industries  
with the right to return to collieries when  
they are again in operation'.
90. SWMF EC Minutes, 15 October 1940.
91. Western Mail, 20 September 1940.
92. Alan Bullock, 'The Life and Times of Ernest  
Bevin Vol. II' (London 1967) p. 29.
93. This statement is supported by evidence that has  
emerged from tape-recordings made by the SSRC  
Project on the South Wales Coalfield, which  
are now housed at the South Wales Miners  
Library 1971-74. Here are two examples:-

Will 'Box' Thomas interviewed by Hywel Francis and David Smith 21.5.73. Tape No. 79.

'At this time (the Fall of France) quite a number of men went out of the collieries althgether and chose a better life which they didn't mind telling you about whenever they came home. The first thing they ever did was to take advantage and get away from it all and re-establish their lives around London, Birmingham and Manchester'.

John Evans (Maerdy) interviewed by H. Francis 13.6.73. Tape No. 84.

'At the time of the Fall of France I left the pit and went to work in Birmingham. I saw a big difference going to work in a factory to what the mines were. If we had a little bit of education, then I would never have stopped in the mines. If I hadn't been directed back because they were short of miners at that period. I would never have come back here. I would have stayed in Birmingham ..... It wasn't a question of liking Birmingham, it was a different job. I could go to work there in clean clothes, I could wear a clean shirt the particular job I had'.

94. Aberdare Leader 21 September 1940.

95. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 17 October 1940.
96. Daily Worker, 23 September 1940.
97. See above p. 69
98. Daily Worker, 11 November 1940.
99. See above p. 65
100. SWMF EC Memorandum to Special Conference of the SWMF 9 November 1940.
101. Western Mail 23 December 1940.
102. See above Section I Chapter I, p. 48
103. Western Mail, 19 August 1940.
104. Ibid., 19 September 1940.
105. SWMF EC Minutes 22 October 1940.
106. Western Mail, 28 November 1940.
107. Ibid., 11 November 1940.
108. SWMF EC Minutes 12 November 1940. Aberdare Leader, 16 November 1940. Glynneath was a village particularly badly affected. All five local collieries, Aberpergwm, Rock, Rhydygau, Cwmgwrach and Rhigos, employing a total of 5,250 men were closed by the end of October - Aberdare Leader 26 October 1940.
109. SWMF EC Minutes 19 November 1940.
110. Ibid., 3 December 1940.
111. Ibid., 6 December 1940.
112. Minutes of a meeting of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association, Representatives

- on the South Wales Joint Conciliation Board,  
16 December 1940.
113. See above p.67
114. Michael Foot, Aneurin Bevan Vol. I (pub.  
London 1960) p. 356.
115. Meeting of the Monmouthshire and South Wales  
Coalowners Association, Representatives on  
the South Wales Joint Conciliation Board,  
10 February 1941.
116. See below Section I, Chapter III, pp. 132-136.
117. See Section I Chapter III p.152
118. SWMF EC Minutes 20 July 1940.
119. See above p.69
120. Western Mail 2 October 1940.
121. Ianto Evans, SWMF EC Member in the Daily  
Worker 23 September 1941.
122. Daily Worker 14 September 1940.
123. SWMF EC Minutes 2 November 1940.
124. Minutes of SWMF Special Conference 9 November 1940.
125. SWMF EC Minutes 12 November 1940.
126. Daily Herald 21 November 1940.
127. e. g. MFGB EC 21 November 1940, Daily Herald  
22 November 1940.
128. Western Mail, 21 November 1940.
129. It was also the subject of a film made by the  
Ministry of Information called 'Dai Jones'



which was not released, however, until March 1941. A miner for thirty years, Dai was unemployed following the Fall of France. He went to London. There was an air-raid and he joined the rescue work, saving a child - 'Dai's depression vanished with his effort. Here was vital war work for him to do and the rescue squad welcomed a valued recruit'. Review, South Wales Voice 22 March 1941.

- 130. Western Mail 23 October 1940.
- 131. Daily Mail 19 October 1940.
- 132. Daily Express 22 October 1940.
- 133. Ibid., 5 October 1940.
- 134. Llanelli Star 16 November 1940.
- 135. Daily Mail 19 October 1940.
- 136. SWMP EC Minutes, 26 November 1940.
- 137. Daily Worker, 23 September 1940.
- 138. Ibid., 19 December 1940.
- 139. New Leader, 19 December 1940.
- 140. Ibid.,
- 141. Daily Worker, 8 January 1941.
- 142. B. L. Coombes, Miners Day p. 82.
- 143. Amman Valley Chronicle, 10 April 1941.
- 144. Llanelli Star, 5 October 1940.
- 145. In M.P. Fogarty Prospects of the Industrial Areas of Great Britain (London 1945) p. 115 the author writes:

'In the last months before the outbreak of the war the new strip mill at Ebbw Vale came into full operation. The new mill represented a revolution in British methods of sheet and tinsplate manufacture and threatened to render obsolete a large part of the existing equipment in the Western sector and throw a high proportion of workers in the tinsplate and allied industries out of work'.

146. Western Mail 28 January 1941.
147. e.g. Councillor Maldwyn Jones letter to the South Wales Voice 16 November 1940 and the debate on Ammanford Trades Council reported in the Amman Valley Chronicle 10 April 1941.
148. SWMF EC Minutes 26 November 1940. Western Mail 3 December 1940.
149. SWMF EC Minutes, 26 November 1940.
150. Daily Worker 6 December 1940.
151. Western Mail 6 January 1941.
152. Margot Heinnemann, Britain's Coal (London 1944) p.22.
153. Mass Observation pamphlet 'People in Production - an enquiry into British War Production' (London 1942) p. 45 and p. 264-5.
154. R. Page Arnot 'The Miners in Crisis and War' (London 1961) p. 308.

155. B. L. Coombes Miners Day p.82-3
156. Merthyr Express 23 November 1940.
157. Western Mail, 25 February 1941.
158. Ibid., 12 March 1941.
159. LAB 10/367 Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 15 March 1941.
160. Western Mail 12 March 1941.
161. See above p. 105
162. Daily Herald, 16 January 1941.
163. Ammanford Lodge Minutes, 13 February 1941.  
This problem was raised at a Special Area No. 1 SWMF meeting by the representatives of the Maerdy Lodge, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen. It was reported to the Ammanford Lodge by their delegate, J. H. Thomas.
164. For a fuller explanation of the seniority rule and the struggle for its retention see Llafur Vol. I No. 2 1973 'The Anthracite Strikes and Disturbances of 1925' by Hywel Francis.
165. SWMF EC Minutes 13 May 1941.
166. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum for Joint Meeting with the Secretary for Mines on 24 February 1941 on 'The Migration of Labour from South Wales Mines'.

167. See Appendix I p. 701.
168. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners  
Association Memorandum for Joint Meeting  
with the Secretary For Mines on 24 February  
1941 on 'The Migration of Labour from South  
Wales Mines'.
169. Ibid.,
170. Ibid.,
171. Ibid.,
172. Ibid.,

## CHAPTER III

THE WARTIME DECLINE IN COAL OUTPUTA. The Nature of the Problem

On May 28th 1941 those thousands of miners who had been without employment in the previous winter and particularly those in parts of the anthracite district who had not yet been re-employed were astounded by a statement made by the Secretary of State for the Mines to the House of Commons. Grenfell told his audience that the rate of output at that time was insufficient to meet the needs of the country. Weekly production was at least one thousand tons below the national weekly consumption.<sup>1</sup>

Not only those who had suffered the recent miseries of unemployment articulated their amazement. The leader writer in the Economist<sup>2</sup> was equally as astounded and asked 'How could this be?' in the light of what seemed to be two compelling factors:-

- a) For years the public had been told that the coal industry's capacity to produce coal appreciably exceeded the demand, and,
- b) Preparation had been made early in the war to supply, not only domestic needs, but those of France and other continental countries as well. Would it not have been correct to assume that when these continental markets had been closed twelve months previously there should be no difficulty in

producing sufficient coal for domestic needs?

However pertinent these comments may have been there was to be no doubting the truth of Grenfell's statement. Even more startlingly true is the fact that in May 1945 the Ministry of Fuel and Power would be looking back four years to May 1941 to a period when British coal production was at a comparative high point. This, because the annual British production fell each year throughout the war, presenting a phenomenon which W. H. B. Court has termed as 'One of the most remarkable features of the economic history of the war'.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenon was common to all British coalfields, but it was particularly accentuated in South Wales where in 1944 the coal output was down by almost 13 million tons as compared with that in 1939. This amount from one coalfield accounted for approximately one quarter of the national decline.<sup>4</sup> In 1943 the annual production figure for the South Wales coalfield was the lowest recorded for over sixty years<sup>5</sup> and the following year nearly three million tons less were produced.<sup>6</sup>

Traditionally it was accepted that output figures in the coal industry usually reflected, more or less, the demand for coal and fluctuations in output were usually due to variations in the export trade. For the

period of the war, however, with the exception of the latter months of 1940 and the early ones of 1941, decline in production was due to factors other than those associated with trade conditions. What was unusual about the wartime decline, therefore, was that it occurred at a time when demand was increasing.

The direct causes of the decline are fairly clear - the shortage of men working in the pits and, the one which was to be subject to the most fastidious scrutiny, the decline in output of coal per person per annum.

1) Manpower Decline

In South Wales in 1944 18,617 less men were employed in the mines compared with 1939. This decline, however, takes a different form to that concerning output. With the output decline there is a fairly consistently gradual drop each year, with manpower there are in fact only two very significant drops, that between 1938 and 1939 and that between 1940 and 1941. There were just over 5,000 more men working at the end of 1938 than at the end of 1939, and this can be accounted for by the period of considerable unrestricted recruitment into the armed services in the months before and just after the start of the war. The major drop is that between 1940 and 1941 which has been

referred to in the previous chapter. 16,404 less men worked in the industry in 1941 as compared with 1940, 90% of the wartime decline, accounted for largely by the migration of men from the industry as a direct result of the Fall of France.<sup>8</sup>

Everyone associated with the industry recognised the direct relationship between the decline in manpower and that in output. Shortly after Grenfell's announcement, and in response to it, the SWMF held a conference and passed the following resolution:

'This conference .... declares .... that one of the principal causes for the shortage of coal is the depletion of manpower in the industry and calls for the cessation of calling of mineworkers to the Armed Forces; the immediate placing of unemployed miners in work; the right of miners engaged in other occupations to return to the industry and for the recall of miners from the Armed Forces'.<sup>9</sup>

In just over twelve months events had turned a full circle, similar resolutions having been passed by the union during the period of the 1940 production drive. Arthur Horner was insistent that extra coal



could not be produced by the manpower as it then existed and re-opened the campaign to get miners recalled from the forces.<sup>10</sup> The mineowners were of a similar opinion. A report in June 1941 on factors militating against maximum production stated that the majority of companies had remarked that the main factor was the shortage of experienced colliery workers owing to large numbers having left the industry for other industries and the armed forces.<sup>11</sup>

11) The Decline in Output of Individual Miners.

The fall in manpower was clearly a significant factor in the output decline but the statistic that corresponds in an almost parallel manner with the decline in output is the decline in productivity of each person working in the pits. The average output per man per annum was reduced by 69.98 tons by 1944 as compared with 1939, and there had been a fairly steady decline each year.<sup>12</sup> To give a clearer picture of what this meant at pit level, the Western Mail<sup>13</sup> gave the comparative production figures of what they termed as a 'typical' colliery.

| WEEK-ENDING     | MEN EMPLOYED | PRODUCTION |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| April 20th 1940 | 1,037        | 9,272 tons |
| June 15th 1940  | 1,110        | 9,803 tons |
| Sept. 11th 1943 | 940          | 5,222 tons |

The manpower in this colliery was down by one-fifth, but the output in this three year span was down by nearly fifty per cent.

It is not necessarily correct, however, to talk in terms of 'typical' collieries. A Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum reported widespread discrepancies in the output per person between colliery and colliery,<sup>14</sup> and on a general level there was a very clear distinction between rates of production in the anthracite district and those in other areas of the coalfields. This was noted specifically by the Ministry of Fuel and Power:-

'The Anthracite District of the coalfield calls for special mention .... the average standard of production is so low compared with that of the remainder of the coalfield that the inclusion of the anthracite figures tend to give a misleading impression of the standard of production in the coalfield as a whole'.<sup>15</sup>

The decline in anthracite coal production during the period of the war was almost fifty per cent, just over five million tons being produced in 1939 whilst only a slight excess over two and half million tons were produced in 1945.<sup>16</sup> It would seem that it was the low average output per manshift that was the crucial factor in determining this situation. The Ministry of Fuel and Power report quoted figures from the week ending 28 October 1944 as evidence. That week the average output per manshift in the anthracite district was 13.34 cwts. This compared with an average of 18.60 cwts. for the remainder of the coalfield and a coalfield average of 17.68 cwts.<sup>17</sup>

This quite substantial difference between productions was not a wartime phenomenon, but one of longstanding duration. However, the Ministry of Fuel and Power felt unable to offer a single explanation as to why it was so, especially as production at some anthracite pits compared favourably with those in the remainder of the coalfield. This was highlighted at a meeting of the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee which discussed the problem in October 1944.<sup>18</sup> Here it was pointed out that one pit in the anthracite region, Abercrave, which had recently been taken over by a private company had an

average production per man per day of 21.5 cwts., which was nearly 4 cwts., above the coalfield average. Within the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine itself the best average production, at Carway, was 16.98 cwts., per man, just below the coalfield average. Several pits, however, had average productions of below 10 cwts., per man per day - Cwmgorse (6.39 cwts.,) Ynyscedwyn (9.0 cwts.,) Cwmlllynfell (9.49 cwts.,) Pantyffynon (3.87 cwts.,) Trimsaran (9.80 cwts.,) Ystalyfera (7.24 cwts.,) On the other hand, some pits in the steam coal area had outputs of over 30 cwts., per man per day.

The Ministry of Fuel and Power report considered that there were several possible reasons for the situation in the anthracite area<sup>19</sup> - geological conditions were more difficult, progress in the mechanisation of the coalfield operations were slower than in the rest of the coalfield, most of the collieries were being worked by slants and drifts from the surface, the average size of the mines was smaller than in the rest of the coalfield, and the proportion of faceworkers, the actual coal getters, was lower in the anthracite area than in the rest of the coalfield (38.16 as compared with 43.58).

This last factor is an important one to bear in mind as it means that there were a greater proportion

of men working in the pits who were not directly involved in the productive process which, of course, reduces the average production of all workers. This taken into consideration, however, it was still true that faceworkers in the anthracite district produced less than those in the other areas, 39.5 cwts. per shift as compared with 46 cwts., in the rest of the coalfield.<sup>20</sup>.

The exceptional situation in regard to coal production that existed in the anthracite region clearly affected the statistics on production for the whole of South Wales but it cannot be used as an explanation for production also fell quite significantly in the rest of South Wales. The situation in the anthracite district was an accentuation of what was a general phenomenon throughout all of Britain's coalfields, and the issue of the decline in output per individual will be discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter. Here factors related far more directly to the course of the war will be examined as part of the explanation of the general trend of decline in output.

#### External Factors Influencing the Decline of Wartime Coal Output.

As a generalisation it is quite true to say that there was an annual decline in coal output throughout the war, but these figures tend to hide seasonal

fluctuations. If quarter yearly figures are examined it will be seen that the decline was not steady for each month or quarter, there were fluctuations. There was a tendency for the output to respond to a particular event, a Government proposal or measure concerning the industry, or an event of significance affecting the course of the war. At the times of holidays output fluctuated; production in the week before was usually above average, in the week afterwards it was below. During most years production in the final quarter was usually up on the previous two quarters.

During the period January 1939 to December 1943, it will be found that there are six quarters of a year where coal production is significantly up on the previous quarter if the national production figures are examined.<sup>21</sup>

The first period with such an increase is that between October and December 1939, the first three months of the war. Largely responsible for this was a substantial increase in the output per men employed. This increase can be explained as the result of the initial response to the outbreak of the war. The figures of total output and the average output per man in the industry in these first three months are only surpassed in one other quarter, that between April and June 1940. These were the months

of the major production drive stimulated by the needs of France. June 1940, of course, was the month when France fell and although output fell as a result of the loss of overseas markets, it was still maintained at quite a high level. In these months the miners were working more hours than ever before, but according to an investigation carried out at that time, 'it does not seem to have been appreciated that the increased output after Dunkirk may have been caused as much, or more, by the energy with which workers worked during normal hours, as by the mere accretion of hours or extra hours'.<sup>22</sup> The sapping of energy from the workforce at this time probably had a profound and detrimental effect on production during the rest of the war and this has to be borne in mind when assessing the reasons for the subsequent decline.

Production continued to decline in the early months of 1941, but it was arrested for the second half of the year. Several factors were behind this:-

- a) The Essential Works Order had been applied to the industry in May which meant an end to the drainage of labour from the industry and indeed an increase in manpower as some men returned from other industries.
- b) The shock of Grenfell's statement on the state of coal production in May produced a rally at the coalface.

c) The German invasion of Russia. Apart from jolting public concern, this event brought the weight of the Communist Party behind the war effort. In most parts of the country, of course, this meant nothing, but in South Wales it was of some significance. The Communist Party had by no means hindered production before June 1941, but now they were to become forthright protagonists of production drives. Given their degree of influence in the SWMF EC and the miners lodge positions that they held throughout the coalfield their new attitude was influential. All the other quarters that showed an increase over the previous quarters were final quarters, indeed, with the exception of the winter of 1940 production in every other year showed an increase in the final quarter of the year over the previous one. The most likely explanation of this is that the workforce were aware of the need to build up stocks in the winter when domestic consumption was at its peak. The only quarterly figures available for the South Wales coalfield, those for 1943, illustrate that South Wales reflects the national trend, production in the October to December period of that year being up on both the April to June and the July to September quarters.<sup>23</sup>



The influence of events on fluctuations in output is probably best illustrated by examining trends in 1944. Output was particularly low in the January and February of that year. In the week ending February 5th only 80% of the target set for the coalfield production was reached, the lowest percentage up to that date. At the time it was felt that the figure reflected the dissatisfaction the miners had over the Porter award of January 22nd.<sup>24</sup>

Production continued to decline throughout 1944, even after the strike which took place over the Porter Award in March, until the D-Day landings in Normandy in June. In his monthly report for June the Regional Controller reported that output was consistently higher since the invasion.<sup>25</sup> In the week after the invasion the Aberdare Leader reported that four pits in the Aberdare valley Bwllfa, Rhigos, Abergorki and Werfa Dare had smashed their output targets while most others had reported a 'substantial' improvement. The management of one colliery was quoted as saying that absenteeism was lower than it had been for some time and concluded by asserting that the opening of the long expected Second Front had found a response amongst the great majority of workers.<sup>26</sup> This immediate response was maintained over the next few months and the SWMF EC released

figures which showed a rise in output in South Wales of over 50,000 tons from the start of August<sup>27</sup> up to the end of October. This was despite a small decline in manpower.

During this period an interesting note emerges in relation to the partiality of the press. Although the Western Mail did accredit the fact that there was a rise in productivity immediately after the Normandy invasion, when it came to report output figures for the last two quarters of 1944 they headed the article both times with the slogan 'Coal Output Down Again',<sup>28</sup> The comparison the paper used was with the corresponding period twelve months previously, but they made no acknowledgement of the fact that there had been a continual increase since June of the year. This was a point of important psychological significance. The miners felt that they were never praised for the task that they were fulfilling, they felt that they were being permanently criticised and this probably affected their performance. David Grenfell M.P. who had had responsibility for the mines in the early period of the war claimed in one speech to the House of Commons that the government had not given one word of official praise to the miners for their service during the war.<sup>29</sup> The point was reiterated by the secretary of Glyncastle Lodge, Resolven, one William J. Jones.

He claimed that his pit had produced over 100 tons above their suggested target every week from October 1943 to February 1944 and that the men who worked there had received no appreciation for this at all. He felt angry that whilst low productivity was the continual source of debate in the press, those who produced above the average received no publicity at all.<sup>30</sup>

The Normandy landings found a response on the coal front but not all events on the war front found a similar response, indeed it was believed that many successes by the allied armies produced more complacency on the domestic front. Arthur Horner<sup>31</sup> was of this opinion after the repeated successes of the Russians over the Germans in 1942 and the Minister of Fuel and Power, Gwilym Lloyd-George saw events in Italy in 1943 having a similar effect. He wrote a memorandum to the Cabinet on the causes of the decline in output. One major factor he suggested was:

'The lack of psychological incentive and a sense of urgency due to the apparent successes of the allies in the last twelve months and the apparent approach of the end of the war. This is indicated by a further decline since the fall of Mussolini'.<sup>32</sup>

Arthur Horner believed that in fact there was a connection between successes abroad and an increase

in militancy on the home front. At the time of increasing unrest in the South Wales coalfield in the latter half of 1943 he told the coalowners:-

'There is a growth of feeling that the home war is becoming more important than the other war. With the departure of the fear of invasion of this country there are people beginning to believe that it is more important to set about preparing for the struggle at home after the war, than see the war through'.<sup>33</sup>

#### Holidays and Production

Production figures fluctuated around holiday times and the reasons for this were the source of some debate. The trend roughly was that the weeks immediately before and after usually had below average productions, whilst very often the penultimate week before a holiday had an above average production. This fluctuation according to a writer in the Western Mail<sup>34</sup> demonstrated the selfishness of the miners and their disregard for the war effort. The week ending July 25th 1942 produced the best production figure of the year, the reason being, it was suggested, that the following pay-day was the last one before the annual six-day holiday and hence the miners were assuring that their pay packet would be as well filled as possible. In the following week

production dropped by over 60,000 tons and absenteeism increased. This indicated to the writer that the miners were more concerned about their holidays than about the war. Figures for the week they returned to work were down nearly 100,000 tons on that for the week ending July 25th, and this it was stated, showed that work after the holidays was resumed in a casual manner.

Miners, of course, challenged the allegations. First, it could not really be considered unnatural to try and get a little extra cash in preparation for the only long holiday the men had in the year and secondly, as a collier from Cwm near Ebbw Vale pointed out to the Western Mail<sup>35</sup> correspondent there were quite practical explanations for the decline in output in the weeks either side of the holiday break:-

- a) The decrease in the week prior to the holiday would largely be due to the fact that the miners would have to use part of their time securing their work places for the holiday period and,
- b) In the week after the holiday there could be some difficulty in getting their places into condition again.

#### The Demand for Coal

What made the decline in coal output such a drastic phenomenon was that it was taking place at a time when the demand for coal was ever increasing. From the end of 1940, the all time low for demand

during the war, demand presented an upwards spiral.

From the middle of 1941, war production in the factories finally slipped into top gear and<sup>they</sup>/began to work at maximum efficiency.<sup>36</sup> At the same time Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union meant that there was a new ally in need of coal, especially as both German offensive and Russian defensive measures had meant the destruction of so much of the Russian coalfields. The crucial military campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy meant that a high rate of demand was maintained and their success with the resultant liberation of Italy also meant that a further new market had to be accounted for. There was no more vital commodity than coal.

Military operations in the final stages of the war were dependent on fuel supplies. Before the Second Front was opened the South Wales miners were told - 'YOU HOLD THE KEY TO EUROPE'.<sup>37</sup> Indeed shortly after the invasion had begun in June 1944, Arthur Horner had told a meeting in Cardiff that if the strikes over the Porter Award earlier that year had continued for any longer, such was the coal shortage in Britain at the time, that it might have been impossible to stage the invasion of Normandy.<sup>38</sup>

The consequence of the Normandy invasion was, of course, the ultimate liberation of France and

Belgium and this entailed additional responsibilities and hence the problems for the British coal trade grew. The French and Belgian coal industries had been denuded by the Germans of important materials and the position since liberation was made much worse than under German occupation because of the havoc wrought by the Germans during their retreat.<sup>39</sup>

Arthur Hörner believed that it was vitally important to restore British coal stocks to meet the demand arising from the continent, 'the question of coal supply', he asserted 'lies at the root of the problem of restoring the industrial and social structure of the continent'.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from the demands arising out of the war effort for industry and the allies' needs there was also the domestic situation in Britain itself to be considered. Every year the miners had been urged to build up stocks for the winter in case of severe weather conditions. Fortunately most wartime winters had been mild, the exception was the last one of the war. In early 1945 there was a genuine fear that the war would be prolonged because of the harsh weather conditions. Over a week's supply of coal was estimated to have been lost in January 1945 due to workers being unable to get to work and by some pits being closed down. South Wales was the

worst hit area and snow stopped nearly all movement in the locality.<sup>41</sup>

Such was the seriousness of the problem, declining output at the same time as the increased demand, that most bodies closely connected with the coal industry were prompted to investigate the nature of the problems in great detail and to make proposals as to possible remedies.<sup>42</sup> Most of these investigations centred on the manpower shortage and the decline in output per man.

B. The Manpower Shortage

The considerable loss of manpower consequent upon the Fall of France was never remotely made up, although the further decline was arrested between May 1941 and the early months of 1943 following the introduction of the Essential Works Order (Coalmining) and a slow decline that set in once more from the Spring of 1943 was stemmed at the end of the year with the introduction of the Bevin Boy Scheme.<sup>43</sup>

In its report of 1946 the Ministry of Fuel and Power were of the clear opinion that the greatest single factor operating against efficient production throughout the war was the severe loss of experienced workmen from the mining industry to the armament industries and the armed forces in the years 1939 and 1941. The adverse effect upon the



organisation of the industry had been so great that all subsequent measures adopted for the abnormal recruitment of men into the industry had been inadequate to remedy the position.<sup>44</sup>

The first real measure to stem the decline of manpower after the Fall of France was the application of the Essential Works (Coalmining Industry) Order in May 1941. This had the effect of restricting migration from the industry. Shortly afterwards in June, it was officially announced that the calling up of miners into the armed forces would stop.<sup>45</sup> This decision came as a direct result of D. R. Grenfell's statement in the House of Commons on the drastic fuel shortage.<sup>46</sup> At the same time it was decided that although some miners were to be recalled back into the industry from the forces, these were not to include skilled colliers. This decision provoked much criticism. One correspondent to the Western Mail accused the government of failing to appreciate the importance of the utmost use of manpower in the war effort. 'From the point of view of a strategical and planned war economy', he stated 'surely it would be better to allow industry to have its full quota of skilled miners, even if the training programme of 70,000 members of the armed forces has to be reorganised and readjusted'.<sup>47</sup>

In July 1941 it was decided that there was to be a compulsory registration of ex-coalminers who had been employed in the industry since 1935, at the employment exchanges. This move had been necessary because of the lack of response to the 'back-to-the-pit' appeals that had been made.<sup>48</sup>

Despite these measures there was not significant increase in manpower that could have helped alleviate the production problem. On August 14 1941, Arthur Horner stated that in his opinion the South Wales coalfield was still short of 10,000<sup>men</sup> if it were to be functioning to its maximum productive capacity.<sup>49</sup> By September 1941 it was estimated that the manpower of the coalfield, five months after the introduction of the E.W.O. had increased by only 1%.<sup>50</sup> This was partly because Welsh miners were still being transferred to the Midlands coalfield. The Ministry of Fuel and Power attributed this to the fact that although only 3,900 ex-Welsh miners had reported at labour exchanges in South Wales, the response in the Midlands had been even less and the manpower shortage there was considered to be more acute than in South Wales.<sup>51</sup>

One factor that particularly aggravated the situation was that neither the men returning to the industry nor those newly recruited directly replaced

those that had left. The shortage was most pronounced in specific categories. A large number of those returning were surfacemen, whilst the main priority for extra manpower was amongst underground workers.<sup>52</sup> When Horner had talked of the need for 10,000 men, he had considered that 7,500 of them should be underground workers. Because the depletion of manpower was in the main from the collier grade, a report from an SWMF sub-committee on decline of output stresses that the depletion must be seen in qualitative as well as quantitative terms, and continued to make the following assessment of many of the new recruits into the industry - 'They are the cast-offs of the industry, who through no fault of their own are much less than 100% efficient men today'.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, one of the colliery companies, John Vipond & Co., claimed that production at their colliery had decreased partly because of the men who had replaced those that had joined up.<sup>54</sup>

The South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of 1946 emphasised that although over a period, emigration was almost balanced by recruitment, the immigration figures represented men of active age with long experience, whereas the figures for immigration mainly represented persons of little

or no coalmining experience.<sup>55</sup>

A second category of workmen in which there was a particular shortage was that of boys. Before the war had begun it had been becoming increasingly difficult to attract boys into the industry, as potential recruits were discouraged by their parents who desired their children to work in more secure occupations with more regular wages and attractive conditions. According to Evan Williams, General Secretary of the SWMF in 1941, recruitment problems had increased since the war had begun, due to the rival attractions presented by the R.A.F. to enterprising boys and good opportunities being available in the various war factories.<sup>56</sup> In December 1942 the Ministry of Fuel and Power announced that there was a need for at least a further 15,000 men, aged between 18 and 25, in the coal industry.<sup>57</sup>

During 1942, two further measures were adopted in the effort to try and increase the manpower. In response to a report from the Parliamentary Select Committee on National Expenditure which attacked the Government for lack of foresight at the time of the Fall of France when too many men were allowed to leave the industry,<sup>58</sup> it was decided in May that 7,000 miners should be brought back to the pits from the forces and an additional 4,000 should be

recalled from industry and Civil Defence.<sup>59</sup>

Later in the year, in September it was decided that all young men under the age of 25 who were eligible for military service should be given the option of volunteering for underground work instead.<sup>60</sup>

Despite these measures the decline in manpower continued and according to the Regional Controller the wastage of manpower, the number of men leaving the industry through sickness and other causes, exceeded the number of entrants into the industry in the first three months of 1943 by just under a thousand.<sup>61</sup> His reports throughout 1943 indicated a continuing downward trend,<sup>62</sup> the problem being accentuated because of the large proportion of skilled workers amongst those leaving the industry.<sup>63</sup>

That manpower declined despite the recall of miners from the armed forces and from industry helps illustrate the unhealthy state of the workforce in the industry. Perhaps the most damning indictment of conditions in the industry was delivered by those thousands of young men between the ages of 18 and 25, who given the choice of conscription into the Army or the Mines, almost to a man chose the Army, despite all attempts to bill opting for work in the mines as a patriotic act. The optant scheme as a remedy for the manpower

problem, was an abject failure.

There were essentially two schools of thought on the manpower production problem, the solution of a conservative press voicing the owners' views or of a radical miners' union. The Government was caught between both, giving credence to neither, opting for schemes that were so totally ineffective that their net result was to create dissatisfaction amongst all sections of the industry. The conservative view, for which colliery owners, managers<sup>64</sup> and the Western Mail<sup>65</sup> were most vociferous in South Wales, was that the production required must be met by the available manpower. Therefore, absenteeism must be eliminated and the working day extended, as had been the case in the First World War. There was a tendency to overlook the fact that such measures had provoked extensive industrial unrest in that war.

The SWMF considered it to be totally beyond the capacity of the manpower of the industry to produce anything like the quantities of coal required<sup>66</sup> and were insistent that only the recall of men from the armed forces would be at all effective. They received articulate support for this view in the columns of the Western Mail from the diarist John Pennant, who made use of the articles he was

commissioned to write to urge the Government to bring back miners from the services.

'During one of the most critical periods of this war Mr. Churchill in a memorable phrase appealed to America, 'Give us the tools and we will finish the Job.' In face of the present critical situation of coal output the industry can only turn to the Prime Minister and say, 'Give us the tools and we'll finish the job'.

'For it comes to this, if the government is to tackle the problem squarely it can no longer afford the luxury of making a scapegoat of the public or the industry or even successive Fuel ministers for the coal production muddle.

There must be a realistic admission at long last that the Government's own policy in the matter of manpower in the nation's chief industry lacked foresight .... The solution is in the Government's own hands. Young, virile miners should be brought back from the services and other industries regardless of the brasshats and bureaucratic 'it can't be done'.<sup>67</sup>

Sensitive to the pressure groups that opposed

extension of the working day on the one hand and recall of ex-miners from the army on the other, the Government avoided the logic of both schemes and proceeded in July 1943 to announce what it considered to be the most drastic and controversial step of all - the conscription of one in ten of every man called-up into the mines using a ballot to determine the names.<sup>68</sup> Young men from all walks of life were to become colliers. To meet the needs of this scheme a training centre was opened at Oakdale Colliery in Monmouthshire and the ballottees began their training on January 18 1944<sup>69</sup> and the first batch went down the pits on February 26.<sup>70</sup>

The Bevin Boy Scheme received a great deal of publicity at the time of its introduction and of all the issues in the coal industry in this war it has perhaps received the most publicity since - largely because a number of the ballottees have felt compelled to write about their experiences.<sup>71</sup> It was perhaps the most irrelevant and futile measure that the coal industry had to tolerate in these years and certainly provided the most irksomely unnecessary experience that the majority of those unfortunate enough to be ballottees were likely to tolerate in their lives. In terms of improving



coal production the returns were negligible, if not even detrimental. It brought its fair share of additional friction into an already troubled industry and it blazoned the light of extra publicity on a production problem of which all concerned with the industry and the general public were already keenly aware.

Right from the start the scheme met with criticism, not least of course from those chosen to be Bevin Boys. Several potential ballotees were sent to prison for refusing to go down the pit (although they would quite willingly have fought in the forces), and in March 1944 there were large strikes in Tyneside and around Huddersfield following the conscription of some shipyard apprentices. This strike extended to the shipyards at Barry where 38 boys struck in sympathy with the Tyneside boys and also in protest against one of their members being drafted to coalmining employment.<sup>72</sup>

There was scepticism right at the start as to whether production would be increased by the measure. One correspondent to the Aberdare Leader<sup>73</sup> suggested that it was more likely that production would be reduced as the Coal Mines Act at that time demanded than an inexperienced worker at the coal face must be under the care of an experienced one, who must not have in his charge more than one

inexperienced person. The responsibility for teaching and safeguarding his inexperienced mate would most likely handicap the coal-getting ability of the experienced miner.

Arthur Watkins, Secretary of the Powell Duffryn Combine Committee warned that the impact of the Bevin Boys should not be overestimated, as they could hardly be equated with the skilled men they were replacing<sup>74</sup> and Bert Coombes<sup>75</sup> too, felt they could have little influence on output figures. If the industry failed to attract local boys it could hardly be expected that boys from other areas would find it so. They would find both working and living conditions hard. He foresaw two major problems developing. Firstly, that if the boys recognised that they were only in the pit for a short period of time and saw no future in mining they would probably take little interest in learning the craft. If a boy had the attitude of not wanting to learn and help he would become a hindrance and a danger to the men he had to work with.

Secondly, the fact that they were forced labour would not be conducive to their increasing production as their morale would be low. This latter point was equally relevant to those thousands of miners recalled from other industries who had

been reluctant to change their work.

Undoubtedly, the morale of the Bevin Boys was low. There is evidence that absenteeism rates increased markedly in pits where they worked.<sup>76</sup> One ex-Bevin boy has written that the first information new arrivals received from other trainees was which local doctors were softest about issuing medical certificates and information on the best ways of jiggery-pokery was always passed around.<sup>77</sup>

There was indeed one strike that involved the Bevin Boys at their training centre at Oakdale in September 1944. The dispute centred around holidays and charges at the hostel where they lived. 159 'boys' struck and the conciliation officer had to intervene as the Centre Manager experienced difficulty in handling the trainees. The Regional Industrial Relations Officer concluded that the strike had been fermented by four ringleaders whose aim was to attract as much publicity as possible and to try and organise on a national basis.<sup>78</sup> To dismiss the dispute as the work solely of political agitators was most likely unjust for a reading of 'Bevin Boy' by David Day leaves one with a firm belief that there were legitimate sources of discontent. With the

exception of one colliery, Elliot's<sup>79</sup> where seven colliers refused to allow Bevin Boys to work with them, it seems as if they were accepted fairly fraternally into most pits. There was, however, debate about how useful they were in assisting production. At a meeting of the SWMF EC in May 1944 members opinion was divided<sup>80</sup> but the Regional Fuel Controller claimed in June that after 1,228 recruits had started to work in Welsh pits, 94% were proving to be satisfactory.<sup>81</sup>

In quantitative terms the Bevin Boys scheme did increase the manpower of the coal industry. By March 1945 there were 4,783 Bevin Boys in South Wales<sup>82</sup> but in qualitative terms they added little, through no fault of their own, it should be added, and it is unlikely that production increased because of them. Passing his verdict on the scheme when addressing the annual SWMF conference in April 1945 Arthur Horner claimed that it had been nonsense to expect that trainees sent to the mines for the first time could have compensated for the loss of skilled miners who had left the industry for reasons of ill-health, accident and old age.<sup>83</sup> This seems to have been very much the consensus view of the scheme. It was generally thought to have been misconceived and was a poor substitute for a firm policy on meeting the needs of manpower in the

industry. The scheme provided a fake boost in the manpower figures in the months between December 1943 and March 1945. In the last months of the war wastage began once more to exceed the numbers of men coming into the industry. In the month of May 1945 alone, the number of wage-earners dropped by over 1,000.<sup>84</sup> One problem that had not been solved in wartime was to become a running sore in the post-war world as well.

C. Factors Militating Against the Efficient Working of Manpower.

From April 1941 manpower marginally increased in the South Wales coalfield during the rest of the war years, but output continued to fall. The relevant statistic explaining this development is that concerning the decline in output of each man employed. As the war progressed it would appear that the efficiency of miners was being gradually reduced. The root cause could undoubtedly be attributed to war weariness and fatigue. This seemed to be agreed by both sides of the industry. At one meeting of the Joint Conciliation Board Sir Evan Williams, Chairman of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners said that he considered that the nature of production in wartime had changed from more or less normal largely as a result of the 'accompaniments of the war upon the individual mentality'.<sup>85</sup>

The shortage of colliers, the decline in the qualitative ability of the workforce and the fact that large numbers of that workforce were working in the industry against their will are three points discussed above that can be considered as militating against efficient production. There were many more, especially given that the manpower of the industry was well below that necessary for the productive

needs of the country. That manpower was under a greater mental and physical pressure in wartime than would be usual in peacetime.

1) Average Age of the Workforce

One very important result of the exodus of men from the mines in the early years of the war was that it directly affected the average age of the workforce. It had been the younger and stronger elements that left the industry and in addition to that, many of the men brought back into the industry were fairly old and had not worked in the pits for some time. These facts are best illustrated in statistical form:

AVERAGE AGE OF EMPLOYEES IN SOUTH WALES COALFIELD

| AGE GROUP | 1935   | 1944   |
|-----------|--------|--------|
| 14 - 21   | 19.77% | 14.14% |
| 21 - 41   | 46.78% | 41.62% |
| 41 - 61   | 29.44% | 35.89% |
| Over 61   | 4.01%  | 8.35%  |

The key statistic is that the percentage of workmen employed below the age of 41 decreased in the years 1935-1944 by 10.79% of the total of employees, with a corresponding increase in the

number of persons over the age of 41 occurring in consequence.<sup>86</sup>

Although wartime developments were largely responsible for this it should also be noted that the trend in this direction had already begun in the 1930's largely as a result of the declining number of young apprentices.<sup>87</sup>

ii) The Health of the Workforce

An ageing workforce was more susceptible to illness and particularly to fatigue, which in itself tends to bring on illnesses. The factors inducing fatigue will be discussed in Section II Chapter II, in relation to the absenteeism problem, but it is also relevant to discuss its effects on miners at the point of production.

A memorandum from the Ministry of Fuel and Power to the Cabinet in November 1943 considered that by this stage of the war fatigue was having its effects on the best and most effective workers. The men were unaccustomed to such a long period of uninterrupted work and wartime conditions such as the blackout and rationing which aggravated the problem.<sup>88</sup> Although the older miners were considered to be the steadiest workers it was generally felt that they found the going hard.<sup>89</sup> It was also a widespread opinion that the personnel of the industry had faced the war with



a lower standard of health than had been the case in the previous war due to the harsh experiences of the depression years.<sup>90</sup>

The SWMF was insistent that inadequate health was the most potent reason for the fatigue and work strain felt by their members, and a large proportion of the responsibility could be attributed to deficiencies in their diet. The change in food supply due to rationing, said the union, had a 'detrimental physical effect' on the miners.<sup>91</sup>

Almost as soon as the war began the union started to campaign for greater rations for workers in heavy industries. At the instigation of the Seven Sisters lodge the matter was discussed at the Executive Council meeting on 5 December 1939, where it was decided that W. J. Saddler, the Vice President should raise the issue at the South Wales Food Consumers Council to which he was a delegate.<sup>92</sup> This was done and the matter was then raised with the Government.<sup>93</sup> Lack of response lead to a discussion at an SWMF special conference in February 1940, where a resolution was passed protesting at the delay in providing extra rations and criticising the ordinary rations allowed as being inadequate for the maintenance of the physical strength necessary in an industry which called for the expenditure of more than the normal amount of physical energy. The resolution

warned of the possible injurious effects that could result including increased illness and the consequential inability of workers to continue in regular employment.<sup>94</sup>

Extra rations were not forthcoming but as lodges continued to send resolutions on the matter to the SWMF EC<sup>95</sup> the union continued to press the Government, whose response was usually in the negative.<sup>96</sup>

Persistent badgering, however, eventually paid off. In February 1941, the North Celynen lodge wrote to the SWMF EC pressing them to urge upon the Ministry of Food that miners should have larger rations of cheese and meat. The E.C. decided that specific complaints should be taken by Alderman Saddler to the Food Council.<sup>97</sup> Discontent was rife and constant complaints were made that the supply of food in hotels and restaurants appeared to be ample to meet the needs of those people who could afford to eat in those establishments.

Oliver Harris told the press, - 'The physical and psychological effects of these anomalies are serious. There is a growing feeling in the mining areas that they are not getting a fair deal.'<sup>98</sup>

The protest campaign, this time, was checked by a promise from the Food Minister, Lord Woolton, that he would give the demands a sympathetic consideration,<sup>99</sup>

and eventually by his offer of an extra cheese ration.<sup>100</sup>

In his book, The People's War Angus Calder considers that the miners were insulted as much as they were placated by the offer because cheese was not one of the miners most favourite foods.<sup>101</sup> This is a debateable point since the miners themselves had asked for extra cheese, and, furthermore many claim that it is very much favoured underground because it retains its flavour. The absence of meat in the extra allocations was more likely to have been the cause of dissatisfaction with the award. Idwal Penhallurick, an SWMF EC member remembers attending a meeting at Ammanford and asking of an official from the Ministry of Fuel and Power as to whether he thought that the members were 'mice or men'.<sup>102</sup>

The issue of miners' food continued to be a source of discontent throughout the war, fired by periodic reports in the press about its shortcomings. One report in the Daily Express by Trevor Evans maintained that most miners in South Wales still had dry bread for one of their meals of the day<sup>103</sup> and in an article entitled 'The Miner Must Have More Food' the Daily Herald described typical examples of what three South Wales miners had in their 'Tommy-Boxes'. One had four slices of bread and margarine with beetroot. 'We don't get enough to eat now', he said

'even after our wives and children have gone short for us'. Another had bread and lettuce and called for more meat, cheese and butter to put on the bread. One young miner had bread with a scraping of margarine with one small slice of cheese to keep him going from 7 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. His aunt who had brought him up was, he said, starving herself to keep him fed.<sup>104</sup>

Within South Wales a thorough report was made by the Merthyr and Dowlais Grocers' Association which was submitted to the Ministeries of Food and Fuel and Power. Their main conclusion was that there was a great discrepancy between the food facilities offered to mineworkers in comparison with other manual workers and even workers in sedentary occupations. They claimed that the wives and mothers of colliery workers found it almost impossible to provide adequate sustenance for their menfolk, and that it was common practice for them to sacrifice their own meagre rations in order to enable the men to work at all.<sup>105</sup>

The report was largely compiled by a Mr. D. W. Woods and stated that 84% of housewives said that their husbands were not getting enough nourishment and 94% claimed that their family rations had to be shared with the breadwinner. 6% stated that their menfolk had lost time from causes that could be traced to shortage of certain essential foods. The point was

made that whereas workers in most other industries were provided with certain facilities where they could have excellent meals without interfering with their weekly rations, miners were confined to their weekly rations plus a half pound of cheese, and buns and pies of doubtful nutritive value.<sup>106</sup>

Canteens were gradually being introduced into the coalfield but they were not necessarily the answer. Miners could not have a meal mid-shift and most wished to get home as soon as they had finished work. Many had to travel for an hour's journey or more. Thus, many of the canteens that existed were not used to their full extent. Dr. Ivor J. Davies, a consultant at Cardiff Royal Infirmary made a survey of canteens in use and criticised the miners for not making more use of them. He considered the food served to be of a high quality and made the overall conclusion that the health of the miner in South Wales was generally well maintained.<sup>107</sup>

There were, however, few people who worked in the mines who agreed with Dr. Davies. Bert Coombes, who, as a lodge committee man had had special responsibilities for the welfare of men in his pit, was far from satisfied:-

'I am on this canteen committee and know what efforts we have made, yet a cup of tea, or milk sometimes, with a small meat pie is all we can provide. Out of over a hundred

and fifty canteens in South Wales - either working or in the course of construction - only eight can provide a warm and full meal. Within a couple of miles of this place are factories, some run by the R.A.F. and others by private firms and all of them give meals to their workers ..... We have had promises galore but still the miners have a cup of tea and a meat pie, then sleep with their heads on the table until the bus or train is ready to take them to their distant homes ..... You can imagine what a cooked meal in our canteen would mean to the health and morale of these men.

'We tried to institute a method of cooking potatoes so that the men could have a snack of chip potatoes and pie - we thought that would help. The fat allowance was refused. So the men go home hungry and tired, there sometimes to listen to their wives and sisters praising the meals at their canteens and to note that those same wives and sisters have brought home more pay after working in a new job than their menfolk get for work that has taken them years to learn. No wonder that it sounds through the canteen and in all places where the men gather like

a a Greek chorus: 'Something wants altering about this b ... lot, anyway'.  
 'As a special treat out canteen can give, about once every five weeks, a packed cake of the jam roll variety. This is given on a coupon basis to ensure fair distribution. We find slips of paper left on the tables with menus written on them, and at the bottom added, 'this was to be had at the factory yesterday. What's the matter with us?' I cannot answer that. I do not find much the matter with them except possibly that they work too hard and suffer too long. Then over the wireless or in the press they hear Lord Woolton or Major Lloyd-George say that the miners' canteens are well stocked. Obviously, as they can see for themselves someone is telling lies'.<sup>108</sup>

iii) Pneumoconiosis

Addressing the House of Commons in April 1945, James Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelli and a former president of the SWMF, told his audience that pneumoconiosis statistics during the war showed that each year 87 miners in South Wales had died from the disease and 709 had become disabled,

'Perhaps people outside may realise better

what that means when I say that every year we lose the equivalent of a pit in South Wales in this way'.<sup>109</sup>

Pneumoconiosis was the most dreaded miners' disease, caused by coal dust in the lungs eventually congealing into a cemented mass.<sup>110</sup> During the Second World War years there was a massive increase in the number of miners certified as having been totally or partially disabled by the disease. This came about only because public and medical opinion gradually came to accept what miners had been saying for years, that coal dust was a killer.

The incidence of the disease was largely confined to the South Wales coalfield. In the years 1931 to 1948, of 22,000 men certified in Great Britain, over 19,000 came from the South Wales coalfield. The figure is even more significant since only one sixth of British miners worked in South Wales.<sup>111</sup> Within South Wales the incidence of the disease was localised once more. Sufferers were to be found in the hard coal, anthracite region of West Wales, although the introduction of mechanised methods of mining which increased the concentration of dust had begun to make it more prominent in the steam coal areas of the coalfield.

The certification of pneumoconiosis sufferers



and the compensation awarded to them in consequence had been a continual source of friction in the industry for years. Before 1934 it was held that the disease 'silicosis' was caused by silica rock dust, and only those who could prove that they had been working with such rock were eligible to apply for compensation. In 1934 an amendment was made which stated that any underground worker was eligible for compensation if he had silicosis. Only surface workers had to prove they had been handling silica rock. Men could claim compensation only up to three years after having worked in the industry. In April 1939 this period of time was extended to five years.<sup>112</sup>

The SWMF welcomed this extension of time but maintained that they would continue to campaign for a thorough revision of the legislation. They wanted a broadening of the definition of silicosis and the abolition of any limit of time concerning the exposure of the disease after a man had worked in the industry.<sup>113</sup>

In July 1943 more thorough legislation, taking up many of the demands of the SWMF was enacted. The categorisation of the disease was extended for silicosis to that of pneumoconiosis. This was defined as 'fibrosis' of the lungs due to silica dust, or other dust, and including the condition known

as dust reticulation. All men who were employed in the mine now became eligible and it was the first time that a disease due to coal dust itself was legally recognised.<sup>114</sup> Compensation was available if the disease was exposed within five years of working in the industry - a point of contention for the SWMF who wanted this clause completely done away with.<sup>115</sup>

From July 1943 applications for certification and actual certification increased dramatically. P. Hugh Jones and C. M. Fletcher who published a report on the 'Social Consequences of Pneumoconiosis among Coal Miners in South Wales' believe that this was partly due to the particular circumstances of wartime. Many miners welcomed certification as a possible escape route from mining. Otherwise they were tied indefinitely by the Essential Works Order. They could only leave the industry on medical grounds and only if certified as partially disabled were they free to take up less arduous work.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless the massive increase in certificates given, only went to prove the extent of the work force suffering permanent damage to health as a result of working in coalmines.<sup>117</sup> At first the medical panels established were unable to cope with the huge demand for medical examination.

In November 1943 it was claimed by the SWMF that at one West Wales colliery where 1,500 men worked, 129 cases were under examination and 400 more were pending.<sup>118</sup> Twelve months later the waiting list to see the medical board was still far too long for the miners' satisfaction, a wait of between nine months and a year being common before examination.<sup>119</sup> The SWMF took the matter up with the Ministry of Fuel and Power and eventually mobile X-ray beams and additional doctors were brought in to the area to speed up the process.<sup>120</sup> As a result in 1945 4,651 men were certified as being partially disabled and a further 129 as totally disabled.<sup>121</sup>

The statistics and the legislation relating to pneumoconiosis sufferers say little about the depth of emotional feeling aroused around the issue. The bitterness vented most certainly affected attitudes to work. There are thus two ways in which an examination of pneumoconiosis is particularly relevant to the discussion on the reduction of the effectiveness of miners at the point of production. Firstly, the number of certificates awarded for disability between 1943 and 1945, and in the years after the war, provide solid evidence that a significant proportion of miners were physically unfit to be involved in the type of strenuous work

they were doing. Many may have been unaware of the true nature of the disease, but, more damning, it is clear that before 1943 many ill men, unfit for work, had been compelled to struggle on out of economic necessity. In his pamphlet Coal and the Nation Arthur Horner wrote that he considered that the low level of compensation paid to miners was responsible for thousands of men staying at work when they should have been out of the pits years before. He went on,

'If such things were occurring on the Italian Front they would be hailed as marvels of human endurance and suffering. The country would be told it owed them everlasting debts. But because it is the miners who endure and suffer, who cares?'<sup>122</sup>

The theme of this remark by Horner could be echoed by every miner who worked in West Wales in particular, and the resentment and discontent surrounding the Pneumoconiosis compensation debate was likely to erode any one hundred per cent commitment a miner might have towards productivity. During the period 1923-43, the increasing recognition of the prevalence of pneumoconiosis and the difficulties of obtaining compensation and alternative employment created deep unrest and although few strikes in these years could be solely attributed

to this cause it was probably responsible for underlying discontent.<sup>123</sup> The Act of 1943 did little to remove this discontent. The long waiting lists for medical examination was a continual source of irritation for miners and disputes were fairly common concerning measures adopted in collieries to suppress dust.

In October 1943 the Pneumoconiosis Committee of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners asked all their members to ensure that they installed dust suppression equipment,<sup>124</sup> but a year later Mr. T. W. Bowden, Secretary of the Deep Duffryn lodge wrote to the Aberdare Leader<sup>125</sup> claiming that in only one out of the three districts at his colliery was the injection of water into the face carried out. He had been told that a shortage of water pipes was responsible, which he considered an inadequate excuse. He posed the question as to how many other collieries had not used any dust suppression techniques.

The Owners for their part suspected many of the claims made by workmen. They were aware of an increase in labour difficulties on issues with a direct bearing on dust suppression. Throughout the coalfield in the last years of the war men were striking more frequently on the basis that faces had not been infused, roadways not watered and faces

not cut wet.<sup>126</sup> The Owners also found that some workmen refused to use either entirely or to the fullest scope appliances introduced by management for the suppression of dust. In many collieries they alleged that borers employed to make the holes for water infusion tubes refused to bore a reasonable number of holes per shift and that coal cuttermen refused to cut wet either because they claimed it took longer or that a third man was needed on a machine.<sup>127</sup> Commenting on one case at Gelliceidrim Colliery where the borers refused to bore <sup>more</sup> than four holes per shift, Mr. Iestyn Williams, Joint Secretary of the Coalowners Association concluded that 'as far as pneumoconiosis is concerned the man in the pit is not so concerned with the health of his neighbour but with the size of his own pay packet'.<sup>128</sup>

It is difficult to assess the merits or demerits of these disputes now, but what appears to be clear is that the Pneumoconiosis Order of July 1943 far from pacifying the coalfield workers, provoked anger, for it seemed that the sufferers of the dread disease had been cheated for the last twenty or more years. Pneumoconiosis, the ravages it made on individuals and families lives, the bitterness caused by the wranglings over compensation, created a grievance

heartfelt by all members of the mining community. It was a grievance that affected the miners' total commitment to coal production in these years.

iv) Mental Strain

P. Hugh Jones and C. M. Fletcher considered that certification of disability because of the disease generally brought on mental depression for those sufferers.<sup>129</sup> It must not only have been those who had certificates that suffered in this way. Before 1943 all men who knew that they had the disease but could do little about it must have felt the same way. After 1943 the anxiety of waiting for the medical examination must, too, have brought on mental strain. This mental strain affected a man's workrate. Now it is true that nearly every man in a workforce must have worries that provide distraction at work - money problems, family problems, illness, etc. so that in assessing the productivity of a workforce it must be a fairly constant factor. However, in wartime the additional burdens resulting created additional strain, and this was particularly true for those men who had sons, brothers or friends in the armed forces. The lack of knowledge of their whereabouts, fear of what had happened to them was a continual source of worry. Will Arthur, an E.C. member who had responsibility for trying to boost

coal production, believed that this was a factor that was overlooked by almost everybody.

'You must remember this, that a man who had a family in the war, was sometimes rather distracted. I remember talking to a collier and this collier was working down in Tumble, the Great Mountain Colliery ..... We were talking about output... and he was telling me that he had three boys out there, and he was a good collier but sometimes in the pit he would be thinking about his three boys, and he said there must be thousands of miners who have got this kind of obstruction that doesn't allow him to take up the old piecework attitude.... He does a day's work but he hasn't got the additional kind of incentive; his mind is in two places, his mind is in the pit and his mind is in the war. Well, now, he lost two of the three sons see. Now there was a fellow on the executive, Will Phillips from Glanamman. Bill's own son was a pilot in the Air Force and Will and I were talking about output and Will was telling me what his wife's condition was, how worried she was. Will's son was killed



in the Air Force. Will was telling me for months afterwards that he had very little interest in his work, that there was an obstruction, see'.<sup>130</sup>

v) Pit Conditions

Working conditions in collieries during the war affected production in two ways. Materials were harder to come by and of poorer quality making work harder and necessitating an excess of repair work, whilst partly as a result of the first reason, there was a reduction in the proportion of men working at the coalface in relation to workers elsewhere, underground and on the surface. In the last three months of 1944 for instance out of all the manshifts worked in South Wales collieries only 36.88% were worked at the coalface, whereas in the last three months of 1937 this figure had been 45.34%.<sup>131</sup> Hence far less manshifts (just over two million) were actually involved in coal extraction. In the year 1943 and 1944 there was reduction of 1,596 in the number of faceworkers, almost 90% of the total reduction in the labour force that year.<sup>132</sup> The South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of 1946 described in quantitative terms the effect this reduction had on the production figures:-

'It can be shown that, even with the reduced manpower available and the relatively low output of 41.29 cwts. per manshift worked at the coalface obtained in 1944, if the proportion of manshifts at the coalface had remained the same as in 1939, namely 43.33% of all manshifts worked, the output of saleable coal in 1944, would have been 16.3% or 3,680,000 tons greater than that actually obtained in the coalfield.<sup>133</sup> These figures show how serious the loss of coalface workers has been....'

The source of the problem lay in the age of the majority of pits being worked and the increased difficulty of working them. Worsening conditions were aggravated by the deterioration of the equipment used by the men and the shortage of materials for repairs. Repairs were taking up more production time than ever before.

This was a problem that seemed little understood by those critics from outside the industry who blamed the miners for slacking in their efforts, and one angry young miner annoyed by such allegations wrote to the Western Mail with the following defence:-

'..... conditions made by nature in the coalseams will limit output more so than

the most determined efforts of management and miners. It is time people realised that many of our mines in South Wales are very old and others would have been closed down if coal were not so badly needed'.<sup>134</sup>

The South Wales Coalfield Survey Report of 1946 again explained more clearly the nature of the problem,-

'The majority of existing collieries employing more than 250 persons have been in production for 40 years or more and some as long as 100 years. Of the 155 mines of this size now in production, only 11 have been newly opened in the last 25 years. Although most of the older collieries still have considerable reserves of workable coal, it is found that in many of these the productive seams have been largely exploited in the past. On the whole, therefore, physical conditions have probably tended towards decreased productivity.'<sup>135</sup>

Will Paynter, at that time a miners' agent in the Rhymney Valley claimed that the best seams had been worked out or were great distances away from the pit shaft, that repairs were heavier and equipment was scarce and inferior. He declared that output lost for these reasons were one hundred times greater than that lost due to deficiencies for which workmen were responsible.<sup>136</sup> He received support for this

viewpoint from Idris Thomas, a colliery manager from Ystradgynlais who wrote to the press in the following manner, -

'I have spent fifty-one years in coalmines and must say there is a vast difference for the worse in the conduct of work underground'.

'We would produce coal in my early days (up to 1914) under most excellent conditions. There were good roadways, good repairs and good ventilation. There was always a night repairing shift when roadways were cleared, repaired and watered, but today repairs are being carried out also on the coal producing morning and afternoon shifts, - always of a temporary character'.

'All seems to be in a chaotic state nowadays with developments, cleaning and laying of good roadways left from shift to shift, no particular shift being held responsible for anything. The consequence is continual bickering between officials and miners.

'I assure the miners, after 40 years experience as a colliery manager that fully 60% of the blame for the present chaotic conditions is not their fault, but lack of capital outlay and lack of workmen allowed

for repairs, and the unfair rates of pay to repairers in comparison with coalhewers.<sup>137</sup>

The issue of the lack of capital outlay was, of course, a contentious one at this time, but not only the unions and leftwing political parties subscribed to the view, for many other industrialists were critical of the coalowners. One such was W. C. Devereux, the Chairman of High Duty Alloys, who wrote a pamphlet on the 'Post War Reconstruction of Industry in South Wales' in which he expressed the view that the private enterprise controllers of the mining industry had failed to return a sufficiently high proportion of their earnings to improvement of the mines and the development of mining methods.<sup>138</sup>

Many of the colliery companies in their submissions to a South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Memorandum on factors that militated against maximum productivity gave reasons of deteriorating seams, pits nearing exhaustion, shortage of materials and difficulties in obtaining renewals after breakdowns as contributing heavily to the decline in output,<sup>139</sup> and as the war proceeded things became worse, not better. To Will Arthur these factors were the ones most responsible for the decline in output.<sup>140</sup>

According to the New Leader part of the responsibility lay in poor planning decisions made at the time of the Fall of France. With a surplus of

coal (temporary as it turned out) supplies to the mines were cut, especially steel, and manufacturers of mining machinery were forced to go on to other jobs. Only when the coal position had deteriorated disastrously was mining machinery put back fairly high on the list of priorities. Hundreds of thousands of tons of coal, the article claimed, were lost for the lack of a belt, a bar of steel or a spare for a machine.<sup>141</sup>

Shortage of materials became the counter argument in a large number of cases to criticism of miners being apathetic. One miners' leader, however, the lodge secretary at Markham colliery related the two together. He said that the amount of coal lost through a small group of absentees at his colliery was small compared with the loss of output through insufficient and inferior materials, and much of the apathy that did exist was itself the result of the continual breakages that took place and the lack of materials.<sup>142</sup>

Not only was there a shortage of materials, what materials there were, were of an inferior quality. In 'Those Clouded Hills' Bert Coombes described some of the timber that had to be used.

'You see a maze of truck lines shadowed by great piles of timber, hundreds of tons of

timber, varying in length from a yard to the huge thirteen foot posts that we used for special repairing jobs. Each length has its purposes and before the war there were special sorts of timber for different jobs, but now the choice is restricted and very rarely anything but oak arrives. This is tough knotty stuff with an inside heart which rings like steel and often turns the sharp hatchet edge - causing a great deal of bad language. In the restricted spaces of the mine the extra hardness and weight of this timber is a definite hindrance and the miners will be glad to see the softer wood arriving again from abroad. Nor does oak bear the pressure well for it breaks without bending or warning'.<sup>143</sup>

As Coombes' last sentence indicates there were far more breakdowns due to the inferior quality of the equipment and hence a greater time spent on repairs, for which, according to Coombes again, there was inadequate time to carry out properly.<sup>144</sup> The increase in breakdowns and repairs meant that many colliers, the most productive workers, were employed for a large proportion of their time in repair work.<sup>145</sup>

vi) Accidents

Between 1939 and 1943. 6,150,900 tons of coal was lost to production due to accidents, breakdowns

and repairs to machinery - this compares to a loss of 3,442,900 tons because of disputes.<sup>146</sup> This was a factor which wasn't given the publicity which it deserved.

As conditions worsened throughout the war, the accident rate increased. Between 1938 and 1942 the accident rate above and below ground increased from 165 to 229 men per thousand.<sup>147</sup> Conditions were generally worse in South Wales as geologically the strata was more disturbed and hence accident rates were higher than in any of the other coalfields. It was a continual source of anger and bitterness to miners throughout the war that some sections of the press gave the impression that working underground was a soft option compared with fighting in the forces. One such angry miner was Bob Condor who wrote in the New Leader, -

'Accidents are a common occurrence ..... anyone may get killed in a mine, anytime. You never know when the lowering rock may come down to crush you. You may be smothered, gassed, drowned, burned, blasted, run down by a tram, kicked by a horse, killed by dust, minced by cutting picks. All these things have happened often, and will happen again'.<sup>148</sup>

Speaking in a debate on the coal question, Ness



Edwards, M.P. for Caerphilly, made a poignant contribution when he told the story of a collier from his constituency who had returned home from the army after two years, recalled to the mines. On his fifth day back at work at Elliots Colliery, he was killed. 'The Mining Industry' stated Edwards 'was more dangerous to him, than the army'.<sup>149</sup> The most serious accident that occurred in wartime South Wales took place in the Rhigos No. 4 drift at the British Rhondda colliery on July 10 1941. Sixteen men and boys were killed. The Aberdare Leader wrote the following powerful editorial as a comment that also serves to restore a necessary perspective.

'This column, speaking for the people of the Aberdare Valley and Glynneath pays sorrowful tribute to the 16 colliers and collier boys who fighting the battle for more coal in Rhigos No. 4 drift lost their lives when an explosion ripped with terrible ferocity through the workings on Thursday night, July 10 1941.

'The disaster in that level, high on the green hill slopes just where the Neath and Aberdare Valleys meet, reminds us, now, when the British, Soviet and Allied people die from bomb blast for freedom from Nazi chains,

that colliers and collier boys face perils in the bowels of the earth, and sometimes die, or are maimed, nearly every day, year after year, when there are no wars being fought. Blast as terrible as any high explosive bombs is said to have flashed through the workings of Rhigos drift and killed those men and boys. This is something, the miner, by the nature of his calling has to face. This enemy is nature, deep in the ground, sometimes vindictive, always silent, menacing; exacting the price for coal, element of heat and power dug with sweat and strain out of the living, moving earth. Let us, as we hear the collier asked for 'a great spurt now' to give the nation more coal and see him doggedly respond, remember the conditions under which he does it; let us remember the background of the miner, the sweat, the roaring machine at the Conveyor face, the peril overhead and in obscure corners, when he asks for his rights'.<sup>150</sup>

On an occasion such as the disaster on Rhigos No. 4 drift, press and public sympathy oozed out. This editorial, however, does more than ooze sympathy, it places the tragedy in its full context. It does not see the accident as an isolated event. It demonstrates

how accidents and the ever present dangers faced by miners at all times, related to his attitude to the war. The feelings of tension, apprehension and anguish that hung in the air in all communities in the war years because of the knowledge of the dangers faced by oneself, one's family and one's friends - these feelings were always present in mining communities. When the press, the public, the Owners and the Government forgot about the events such as those at Rhigos No. 4 Drift and turned on the miners for their shortcomings in the later war years they were divorcing their complaints from the sort of time-scale that alone explained the contemporary situation.

vii) The Hostility between the Workmen and the Owners and Managers.

Accidents in themselves retarded production but very often the aftermath which sometimes involved haggles over compensation and the apportioning of blame, contributed to the antagonisms that existed within the pit. These did nothing to help production either. The effect of these deep-rooted antagonisms in terms of production can never be tangibly assessed, but they are significant nevertheless.

In an overall study of production in British industry, Mass Observation Survey commented that in

many factories 'the conflict between employers and men was still the predominant conflict'.<sup>151</sup> In the prewar world the mining industry had probably had the bitterest industrial relations of all. The clash of interests between management and the men firmly grounded in historical experience, was not one that was easily eliminated.<sup>152</sup>

If anything the antagonism in the mining industry was inflamed by the constant stress placed on the miners' important role in the war effort. It contrasted to such a great extent with the experience of the mining community in the 1930's. Towards the end of the war the debate on what was to happen in postwar Britain and discussion of a possible 'new order' kept the issue on the boil. For many miners the war years were just an interlude in their campaign for better working conditions, and thus the traditional hostile attitudes to management were barely concealed. This was summed up by one miner who was interviewed by the industrial correspondent of the Daily Mail.

'People are making a lot of fuss about this war, but the miner is at war all his life. He has got to fight nature to get coal and he has got to fight his boss to get a living wage. Now there is talk of a shortage of coal and we have suddenly become important, but as soon as this war is over we shall

have to carry on with our own war where we left off when we became important'.<sup>153</sup>

Wartime experiences, when miners found themselves unemployed, transferred, recalled to the industry, tied to the industry and generally harangued about low output, fuelled the conflict and matters were made worse when the traditional enemy, the owners, appeared to be making little sacrifice. Bert Coombes posed a number of what he considered to be pertinent questions:-

'Have we a right to ask what the owners have sacrificed? ... and what they are holding back for the future? If a colliery is closed down will they be compensated, and to what extent? ... I want to rid mining of its bitterness ... There is blood on the coal, there will always be blood on the coal, but we feel that blood should be shed for the mass who are our own kin, not for the enrichment of a few who have battered on our pains in the past'.<sup>154</sup>

It appeared that the enrichment of the few continued post-haste war or no war. According to a Communist Party pamphlet the profits of the coalowners in the first six months of the war were the highest ever recorded.<sup>155</sup> Whilst profits in the coal industry

marginally declined in each year of the war, they still appeared to be an outrageously high figure to the rank and file coalminer, called upon incessantly to make more effort and sacrifice. The profits for the period 1939-1944 were published by the Ministry of Fuel and Power in response to a question by the M.P. for Llanelli, James Griffiths. They totalled £1,143,200,000.<sup>156</sup>

Yet, the men who made the profits chastised the men who produced the coal for their shortcomings. Ness Edwards, hit a reverberating chord when he told a May Day meeting in Bargoed:-

'The Cardiff Business Club, faint from its lunch-time efforts, has asked miners to work harder and for longer hours. This call for sacrifice comes from a body of men of whom it can be said, 'Never in the history of Wales have so few eaten so much, so often'.<sup>157</sup>

In some collieries relationships between management and men were, of course, worse than in others, and this is the most likely explanation for the conclusion arrived at by Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the Coalowners Association, in one memorandum on declining production, that there were wide discrepancies in the output per person or manshift worked between one colliery and another which could not be justified

by local conditions or facilities available.<sup>158</sup>

One example that could be cited is that of Gelliceidrim colliery. Here the number of strikes recorded were well above the number at most collieries<sup>159</sup> and where production was below the Ministry of Fuel and Power targets expected.<sup>160</sup> It seems that relationships were particularly bad. Twice during 1944 there were court cases concerning incidents of alleged assault between the under-manager and a workman. In one case the undermanager was prosecuting and in the other he was prosecuted.<sup>161</sup>

In the small concerns it was easier for difficulties to be settled at local level where both co-operation and hostility were still face to face, but in the larger, impersonal combines this was more difficult. Relationships as a result often became more strained. In the collieries under the massive Powell Duffryn Combine, which had a reputation of some notoriety before 1939, conditions and relationships between men and managers were so bad that in October 1943, the SWMF EC decided to set up a committee to investigate the harsh treatment meted out to workmen employed in Powell Duffryn pits as compared with that obtaining at other collieries.<sup>162</sup>

A further source of miners' antagonism in these years was what they considered to be biased presentation of propoganda for increased production.

The onus it appeared always seemed to be firmly on the shoulders of the workmen. It seemed to the miners that the owners and the management were never criticised. Within South Wales the source of much of the propaganda was the Western Mail, a newspaper which was thought of as very much the agent of the coalowners.<sup>163</sup> Margot Heinnemann presents factual evidence to back up such beliefs. In South Wales the brothers Lord Camrose and Lord Kemsley of the Berry family which had helped to build up the Cambrian Combine had a strong interest in the Western Mail.<sup>164</sup>

Throughout the war years the newspapers' coverage of mining disputes presented a consistently hostile attitude to the workmen. In December 1944 the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales was moved to comment on the likely impact of inflammatory language used in the newspaper reports.

'Referring to the Western Mail leader of 28 November we think that it is unfortunate that in reviewing two mining disputes in retrospect such provocative phrases as ....' The trouble was .... paltry and ridiculous', 'farcially disconcerting' .... should be used. This kind of criticism does not tend to promote good understanding in industry. The leader led off 'Despairing of trade



union discipline people have ceased to ask where and when the habit of downing tools on the most trivial pretext will end'. Although disputes are often sparked off by trivial or unimportant matters the underlying cause is often one of principle'.<sup>165</sup>

In one leader comment the editor of the Western Mail did pose the question as to whether there was 100% efficiency on the management side. He claimed to be tired of exhorting miners, but soon returned to that policy.<sup>166</sup> The SWMF considered there was inefficiency on the management side and their production officer, Will Arthur, made a statement to the press claiming that neither the Ministry of Fuel and Power nor the coal owners co-operated readily enough with the union.<sup>167</sup>

The letter page of the newspaper was always open, however, to miners representatives and individuals to rebut the statements made by the editor or 'Special Correspondents', though the columns of the newspaper were rarely opened to writers hostile to the paper's policy. The whole question of the impact of newspapers on opinion is a tricky one, nonetheless one can safely assume that the carping of the only South Wales paper with a daily circulation did more harm than good in the cause of stimulating coal production.

viii) The Essential Works (Coalmining Industry)  
Order.

The Essential Works Order applied to the coalmining industry was originally devised as an attempt to solve one aspect of the production problem - the drainage of manpower. In practise, however, it tended to create even greater antagonism to the bureaucracy that was responsible for running the industry and thus worked against the efficiency of the miners. This was chiefly because of the method of dealing with absenteeism associated with the Order.<sup>168</sup>

Men recalled from munition factories, especially because they received lower wages in the mines were particularly affected. This was especially true of the area around Bridgend where a new Royal Ordnance factory was opened, just before the war.<sup>169</sup> Most harshly treated, however, were the two extreme age-groups of workers in the industry - the school leavers and those due for retirement.

Whilst the Ministry of Labour exercised no compulsion on boys leaving school to take up jobs to which they were unsuited, once having taken a job in an establishment controlled by the EWO they were no longer free to change their jobs unless they could convince the local Labour Exchange that they had prospects of a better job.<sup>170</sup> At the other end of

the scale there were many men in their sixties who were subjected to remain in the industry until their last working day by the EWO. There were many men who would have retired or taken up less heavy occupations if they had been allowed to move.<sup>171</sup>

The EWO was very unpopular therefore, and did little to aid industrial relations within the industry. Professor Court considers it to have been a major contributory cause to the upheaval in the industry in the latter years of the war.

'The Order helped stimulate it, by setting men thinking, 'I am kept by law in the mines, why? This could be and was the beginning of a mental debate which had its fruits in the wage disputes in the first half of 1942'.<sup>172</sup>

The EWO also met with the opposition of the colliery managers, who also believed that it militated against maximum production, but for different reasons. They were opposed to it at its reception because of the clause that took away management's right to give notice without the consent of the National Service Officer. This, they maintained struck at the root of what they believed to be an essential principle that the manager was the man responsible for the safe administration of the mine.<sup>173</sup> Within a very short time of its introduction, therefore, they were claiming

that their inability to maintain discipline by quick and effective measures was lowering the production rate and had placed a burden of responsibility on officials that was not theirs to bear at all.<sup>174</sup> Presenting a wartime survey of industrial relations in his Presidential Address to the South Wales Branch of the NACM, Thomas Williams made the following indictment of the effects of the EWO and especially the clause guaranteeing the minimum wage:-

'Indiscipline and indifference to productivity has never been greater, mainly under the influence of the guaranteed wage clause of the EWO ..... it is to be much doubted whether since the establishment of collective bargaining there has been any period when managerial responsibilities had been less respected, the authority of the miners leaders so much flouted, and the obligations of contracts of employment and of agreements so lightly repudiated.'<sup>175</sup>

Thus, the EWO had very few friends and although it was opposed by miners and management from totally different angles, all the opponents were agreed on one thing - it had been detrimental to the prospects of increasing production.

#### ix) Wages

It was a popularly held opinion in many quarters that the most influential factor that had an effect

on the working efficiency of the miner during the war was his wages, especially their low level in relation to those in other industries, particularly munitions.<sup>176</sup> It was a factor to which the Ministry of Fuel and Power paid a great deal of attention<sup>177</sup> and it was acted upon as evidenced by the Greene and Porter wage awards. This factor, however, will be discussed more thoroughly in the chapters on industrial relations in the wartime coal industry.

D. SCHEMES DEvised TO INCREASE WARTIME PRODUCTION.

1) The Concentration of Labour in the productive Collieries.

This scheme was proposed in June 1943 by the Regional Controller<sup>178</sup> with the intention of moving labour out of some of the less productive pits and into those that were producing relatively well and where labour was required. The scheme was never put into practice but is being discussed here to illustrate the type of problems such suggestions came across because they re-opened fears of pit closures.

On the union side throughout the war years it was useful propaganda to recall the policy of pit closures during the 1930's. The need for coal in the 1940's was clear justification of the indictments made against closures in the past. The re-opening of

collieries had been from the earliest days of the war a major policy proposal made by the SWMF.<sup>179</sup> In the west of the coalfield where further closures were<sup>180</sup> made after the Fall of France it remained a poignant issue. People in this area regarded it as farcical that at the same time as government ministers called for more and more production they closed down collieries.<sup>181</sup> In addition to those closed down at the time of the Fall of France, two more were shut in the war years afterwards. One was in the West, Wernos colliery near Ammanford, which was dismantled in 1942. Here there were local protests and it was claimed that fifty years supply of coal remained in the colliery's seams and that it was one of the easiest of collieries to work in the district.<sup>182</sup> The other closure was the Plymouth Colliery, Merthyr. Here the local M.P. S. O. Davies, asked how he and his constituents could take the slogan 'More coal for Victory' seriously.

'The miners of Merthyr must be forgiven', he wrote, 'if they fail to reconcile the demand of 'more coal for victory' seriously with the refusal to re-open for full work a colliery within easy reach of their homes and families.'<sup>183</sup>

The unpopularity of pit closures ensured the death of the Regional Controllers concentration proposals especially as they were linked directly

to threats of closures. He issued a warning to sixteen pits that unless production was increased they would be closed down and workers transferred elsewhere. The representatives of six pits involved in Monmouthshire met and threw out any consideration of the scheme.<sup>184</sup>

The SWMF was not opposed to concentration as a concept, but argued that concentration of manpower in the more prolific pits would adversely affect production as the closure of pits would sour the men with the result that output would fall. They believed that a better atmosphere would result from concentration of manpower in the more prolific seams within the existing pits,<sup>185</sup> and they had some evidence that where such concentration had taken place at two pits, Great Mountain, Tumble and East Pit, Gwaun-cae-Gurwenan increase in production had been forthcoming.<sup>186</sup>

#### ii) The Output-Bonus Scheme.

The output-bonus scheme was a purely wartime measure designed to reward the miner for the additional effort which he was called upon to make during the war.<sup>187</sup> In May 1941 all pits had been given a weekly target of production at which they were expected to aim.<sup>188</sup> Each district also had a target for production. The output-bonus scheme initiated a system wherein if the weekly district target was achieved a bonus would be paid out to all miners in their area. It was

decided against giving bonuses for individual pits achieving their targets as the differences in conditions between pits could possibly cause disputes arising out of comparisons between one pit and another. Throughout Britain there were twenty-five districts, yet over the period of the schemes operation, July 1942 to April 1944, only two or three districts regularly achieved their target, and with that, their bonus.

The South Wales district was typical of the majority of districts. It never once achieved the bonus. Some individual pits within the coalfield did achieve their particular target, but the number was few. For example, during the weeks of December 1943, the collieries that did so were 13; 16; 36 and 12.<sup>189</sup> In the first week of January 1944 only six pits achieved the target, the lowest number to be recorded.<sup>190</sup> The one outstanding pit was Abergorki, a 100% mechanised colliery where their target was 'smashed' for over forty consecutive weeks before the Porter Award Strike.<sup>191</sup> This record was despite the fact that during one week in August 1943 the men had been on stop for a day in solidarity action with their striking colleagues at the Penrikyber colliery and that during another week a roof fall had stopped a district for a day.<sup>192</sup>

The offering of a bonus on a district basis



only was unpopular and the Onllwyn lodge proposed to the SWMF that they should agitate for the bonus to be made applicable on a pit basis.<sup>193</sup> However, although the MFGB did argue for this in early 1944, all sides of the industry agreed that the scheme should be abandoned as a failure. The refusal to operate a pit-based scheme for bonuses may have been in some way responsible for the collapse of the scheme but it was probably only a marginal factor. The Abergorki men broke the targets every month regardless of whether they had a bonus. The situation in the pits where conditions were deteriorating and where materials being used were not up to pre-war standards was not a conducive one for the offer of incentives, indeed it invited additional dangers. Secondly, the miners themselves were not interested in increasing their payments through incentives, their demand was for wage increased on a flat-rate basis and they would not be distracted from this.

#### 111) Pit Production Committees.

Pit production committees were originally set up during the period of the coal production drive before the Fall of France.<sup>194</sup> However, in the months that followed many of them collapsed as their 'raison d'etre' was somewhat removed. In 1941 when it began to become apparent that coal was once more in short

supply they were revitalised.<sup>195</sup> They were reintroduced as part of the legislation surrounding the application of the Essential Works Order to the industry. They were now given the additional responsibility of dealing with absenteeism, and it is largely because of this factor that they failed to achieve much in the direction of boosting production. If anything they turned out to be counter-productive, in many cases rekindling antagonisms within collieries.

After initial problems such as the timing of the meetings<sup>196</sup> and workmen's representatives' demands to be allowed to wear clean clothes<sup>197</sup> which was important symbolically to emphasise the joint nature of the discussions, the main source of contention was the amount of time that was spent discussing absenteeism. Management argued that it was most relevant as it was intrinsically related to the problem of declining production,<sup>198</sup> whereas workmen considered that the meetings were often being transformed into tribunals.<sup>199</sup>

One pit production committee at Llanhara<sup>n</sup> colliery broke down completely over this issue. Workmen, here, resented their colleagues being called before the committee to discuss their attendance records and passed a resolution objecting to their representatives attending the committee meetings.<sup>200</sup>

In some cases, however, union representatives felt no scruples in the fact that committees addressed themselves mainly to the absentee problem. After one meeting of the Aberpergwa and Rock collieries Joint Production Committee a public statement appeared criticising 'apathetic workmen'. The miners' agent William Betty accused some miners of 'hardly realising what was at stake, seemingly unaware that other men were giving their lives'.<sup>201</sup> This brought forth an angry reply in the local newspaper from another miner, also a representative on a pit-production committee in the area. He compared the operation of the committees as they were functioning to the Nazi Labour Front run by Dr. Ley in Germany. The committees he claimed should not be primarily used for the coercion and compulsion of miners. If the committees persisted in concentrating on such a role then the workmen were neglecting capitalising upon the opportunities the committees offered in giving workmen some say in the management and working of the pits.<sup>202</sup>

The criticism, above, was of how the committee were operating not of the concept as such, and union leaders particularly were adamant that they had an important role to play. Answering criticism that the union leaders had gone over to the 'Capitalists' because they were discussing measures

to improve production with the employers,  
Arthur Horner explained his feelings in the  
following manner:-

'It is a strange role for me, and many  
others I know to be advocating measures  
to improve production under a capitalist  
system, but I, like you, had to choose  
either to use measures that will increase  
production to help the war effort or  
inaction that would help a Nazi victory.

'The coalowners have not joined the 'Fed.'  
or the 'Fed.' the coalowners. But we both  
realise the strength of the enemy and  
appreciate the measure of our danger and  
because of that, subject to certain conditions,  
sat down to play our part'.<sup>203</sup>

Eventually proposals were made that the role of  
the committees should be adjusted. In April 1942  
an SWMF EC meeting proposed that the committee should  
no longer deal with absenteeism, which should be  
left to the management and the authorities, and that  
the SWMF be allowed to intervene on behalf of  
persons unjustly blamed or penalised.<sup>204</sup> Thus in  
June 1942 when the Greene tribunal announced proposals  
on the future running of the industry throughout  
the remainder of the war, they suggested that the  
function of pit production committees be restated

and that they be relieved of all responsibility for dealing with absenteeism and be allowed to devote their whole attention to methods of increasing production.<sup>205</sup>

Although relieved of the onerous task of dealing with absenteeism, the committees still struggled to become effective, largely because they continued to be seen as meetings between the representatives of the two sides of the industry rather than a genuinely joint enterprise.<sup>206</sup> Whereas, before 1942 the opposition to their operation had been from miners officials and representatives, after 1942 the pit managers attitude became a major stumbling block. The definition of the committees was to assist pit managers to secure maximum production and this many managers saw as a reflection of their competence and an encroachment on their responsibility. Their predicament, which came after the introduction of Dual Control was described by Arhhur Horner as being between 'two mill stones'. They had to please the Regional Controller on the one hand and on the other the colliery companies who employed them.<sup>207</sup> As a result of this unsatisfactory position they began to take on an increasingly militant, hostile attitude which militated against the effectiveness of the committees.

On 5 October 1942, nine pit managers in the Aberdare and Rhondda Valleys refused to work on the

pit production committees, alleging that they were usurping their function and that their statutory duties were laid down in the 1911 Coal Mines Act, which made them solely responsible for the control, management and direction of the mines.<sup>208</sup>

A manager from Pentre, stating the case to the press said that as members of a highly trained and technical profession they were resisting an attempt to take their responsibilities away from them.<sup>209</sup>

The union representatives from the pits affected said that they would carry on the meetings whatever the managers decided. It also presented an opportunity to make some useful propaganda, similar to that which had often been made against the miners themselves. One lodge official told the Western Mail;

'The refusal of the managers to serve on the pit-production committees should be condemned as unpatriotic. The miners are always the scapegoat for the failure of the industry to increase coal production, but are they really to blame? This stiff-necked attitude of the managers' when an opportunity for an allround co-operation presents itself might be the means of letting the public realise that some of the fault might rightly be attributed to the management side'.<sup>210</sup>

The dispute did not last for long. Representatives of the managers met the Regional Controller on 7 October and the next day the executive council of the NACM issued a statement indicating that despite certain factors such as the weakening of the managers authority following the introduction of the Essential Works Order and a recent ruling that the chairmanship of the Pit Production Committees should alternate between management and workmen, a decision that they claimed further undermined management's position, they were determined to give the pit-production committees a fair trial. They added the proviso that the committees should in no way interfere with the technical management of the mine for which they were held solely responsible by statute.<sup>211</sup>

A crisis was thus quickly averted, but the seeds of dispute had been sown, and it is notable that allegations of incompetence and other criticisms against the managers were more commonly made by SWMF members. One such was Will Arthur, the SWMF coal production campaign organiser. The main problem with the committees, he claimed, was that the agendas were prepared in the main by the colliery companies and consisted of complaints against certain workers that they were not doing enough work. Almost every suggestion that was made by the miners brought

one or two replies. Either, 'We are still managing the colliery,' or 'I'll take the matter to my agents'. The agent could report it to the managing director and the suggestion would get lost in the clouds, never to be heard of again. The lifetime of experience on which 90% of the miners suggestions were based was being totally ignored, he felt, because of the managers desire to preserve their dignity. Indeed, it was Will Arthur's belief that the manager's policy of non-co-operation had been sponsored by the colliery companies.<sup>212</sup> This was a sentiment also put forward by the Daily Worker, which suggested that those who paid the wages, called the tune.<sup>213</sup>

Will Arthur's assertions were backed up by a series of complaints from various lodges. The International (Garw) lodge alleged to the SWMF EC that interference by the company's group office was preventing the operation of their local pit-production committee.<sup>214</sup> It was also claimed that two of the largest combines in the coalfield were having reports of the pit-production committees sent to their group offices and general managers, and that in several instances these people had vetoed decisions taken jointly by the pit managements and the men.<sup>215</sup>



The embers of a dispute had been stoked during October 1942 and whilst the source of the argument appeared to centre on the pit managers' loss of dignity, the disagreements were far more political. In the Daily Worker<sup>216</sup> Ben Francis, its industrial correspondent called upon miners to make the committees 'an integral part of the Government control and the bedrock upon which it is based'. They represented to him the medium through which could be demonstrated the ability of the miners, managers and technicians to run the industry without coalowners. Many prominent SWMF officials, including the President himself, supported this view. This was not lost on the coalowners and managers who had seen the actuality of nationalisation come one step nearer with the introduction of Government control in June 1942.

For twelve months, however, the pit-production committees proceeded to operate without the accompaniment of a public debate but towards the end of 1943 at a time when industrial discontent was reaching a pitch in the coalfield and strikes were proliferating the managers decided that the system had been given a fair trial. Throughout these twelve months all had not been sweetness and light, the SWMF having received several reports from its members of intransigent managers, and of managers refusing to meet lodge committees,<sup>217</sup> but

in December 1943 the managers decided to take concerted action. A meeting of the South Wales Branch of the NACM was held to discuss indiscipline. Their President, Mr. David Jeffries, described the lack of discipline in the mines as acute. Officials, he said, were treated with disrespect and contempt. Trifling grievances on the part of the workforce were magnified and any demand not met with immediate satisfaction usually resulted in a go-slow or a strike. It was decided to issue an ultimatum to the Ministry of Fuel and Power which was accused of allowing a situation where strikes, threats of strikes, deliberate acts of sabotage and the withholding of effort were commonplace, and permitted with negligible disciplinary action. Unless a representative of the Ministry met the South Wales Branch of the NACM as a body within 14 days no management at any colliery would take part in any future pit-production committee meeting.<sup>218</sup>

One colliery official to illustrate the point being made claimed that during September, October and November 1943, 2,898 offences had been reported to the Regional Controller under the regulations of the EWO.<sup>219</sup>

The Ministry of Fuel and power offered little

sympathy to the NACM. They could not, in fact, understand their attitude, they said, when on 9 December, only two weeks earlier, they had met the NACM and in a discussion on discipline the association had expressed themselves as satisfied that everything possible was being done.<sup>220</sup>

Miners' leaders were more vehement in their response. They saw the protest as a deliberate attempt to sabotage pit-production committees and government control. 'If the Ministry of Fuel and Power allows the management to smash pit-production committees', warned Will Lawther, MFCB President, 'the nation must realise that a crisis without precedent will arise in the industry'.

Arthur Horner maintained that the 'outburst' by the colliery managers was timed as a political demonstration. The Ministry was at that time negotiating with miners and mineowners on ways and means of strengthening Government control. Horner believed that the managers were afraid that any reorganisation would prejudice their position. He also criticised them for not producing evidence for their allegations especially in respect of sabotage. However, he did see one advantage in their withdrawal from the committees.

"The threat to refuse to attend pit-committees will probably be welcomed by many Federation officials. Time after time their suggestions have been rejected. Our executive has, however, urged continued attendance because we believe that if the committees are properly operated they can secure results far better than under the so-called discipline of the past."<sup>221</sup>

Emrys Butler, Chairman of Park and Saron lodge described the resolution as 'a demonstration of childish pique'. He challenged the view that the pit-production committee had been given a fair trial and failed. He insisted that they had never functioned as they should in the interests of production and accused the managers of being resentful and jealous of the new ideas put by the men. John Williams, a miners agent in the Forest of Dean expressed the belief that the managers could not adapt themselves to sharing responsibility with the workmen. The average manager, he asserted, had had no intention of making the committees work and had quietly undermined their functions.<sup>222</sup>

In the face of such opposition, especially that of the Ministry of Fuel and Power itself, the executive of the South Wales Branch of the NACM met and decided to call a conference to reconsider their decision. The conference was arranged for a

date two days after their withdrawal threat was due to be implemented. Such action was postponed on the pretext that they considered that too short notice of their intentions had been given to the Ministry of Fuel and Power.<sup>223</sup>

The conference met on January 6th and a telegram from the Minister of Fuel and Power, Major Lloyd-George, was read out. He expressed surprise that the resolution of December 21st had been submitted in the light of previous discussions and also of the terms in which it was framed. It continued to state that in view of previous discussions with the national body no purpose could be served by meeting the South Wales Branch.

Upon hearing the telegram, the Branch decided by a majority vote to implement the resolution taken at the first conference.<sup>224</sup>

The following Saturday, January 10th an SWMF delegate conference met and decided that their representatives should attend the pit production meetings regardless of the absence of the manager.<sup>225</sup>

In the event, the production committees were boycotted for only one week. On Monday January 12 three members of the NACM met the Regional Controller to discuss the position. Here the Regional Controller agreed that better methods were needed to deal quickly and effectively with

matters of indiscipline.<sup>226</sup> The South Wales Branch of the NACM held another conference on Saturday, January 17th, at which they decided to resume attendance at pit production committees. In effect, they had climbed down, but they allowed themselves a parting salvo:

'If after this, no heed is taken by the Ministry to the grave warnings given by the Branch, the members cannot in any way be held to be responsible for decline in output resulting from indiscipline.'<sup>227</sup>

The Colliery Managers' dispute turned out to be very much a storm in a teacup, but it presents a sound indication as to what the atmosphere and tensions on pit production committees would have been like, and these can in no way have been conducive to boosting production. Surrounded by such controversy as they were, it is difficult to make a concrete judgement upon the effectiveness of the committees, but as they did meet regularly in most collieries their contribution to the production drive can be assessed in general terms.

Given the traditional hostility of miner and management a major psychological barrier had to be broken through before they could become effective. In pits such as Gelliceidrim<sup>228</sup> where

relationships seem to have been particularly strained it is not surprising that disputes broke out before the two parties actually got round the table. Many miners wanted nothing to do with the committees right from the start as W.H.B. Court has explained.

'It was difficult for the men to switch over from their stalwart attitude of no-compromise with the management on questions of pay and welfare, to one of friendly co-operation on pit-production committees'.<sup>229</sup>

This reluctance on the part of such miners was paralleled by that of many pit managers as has been seen. Their reluctance cannot have been lessened by the rather aggressive manner in which some factions of the miners were prepared to take up the new committees, such as the Communist Party Branch of the Amman Valley which maintained that as long as the miners vigilantly watched their interests and religiously reported their complaints and grievances to the pit-production committee, there would be no danger of mean and unscrupulous managers taking advantage of their patriotic efforts. Committees in the Amman Valley it was claimed had been fairly successful, the adoption of suggested improvements by experienced

miners having led to improvements.<sup>230</sup>

The suspicions of both miners and managers never seem to have been confidently overcome. Before June 1942, discussion of absenteeism which placed the onus on the miner bedevilled the committees and after that the fear of the managers having their authority undermined. With such issues dominating it appears that apathy set in amongst the workmen. This was the case at the colliery where Bert Coombes worked and he describes how it set in:-

'Certainly the newest and possibly now the most important of our committees are the pit-production committees. Perhaps we expected too much, anyway our satisfaction has so far been small .....

He then describes the attitudes that the men initially had towards the committees. Some like himself, thought that they could be used to prove that the men could handle mining management as well, if not better than the managers. Whilst others had agreed that they should be left alone, because they would not be properly constituted and would fail because the miners would get the blame and defeat any chance they had of achieving greater control over the industry. Then, after illustrating some of the suggestions 'that had gone away in the wind, apparently to the never-never land' he concluded, 'After the experience we have had so far, I, and the majority of miners that I know, feel that the last



attitude has proved correct. I am sure that the majority of miners throughout the coalfields have become apathetic towards these committees, not because the idea was wrong, but because they work in so many shackles. Every secretary I speak to, and every committee man feels that the pit-production committee is 'the bunk'.<sup>231</sup>

Coombes' is the only first-hand experience available with which to assess the effectiveness of the committees that is not couched in propagandandistic terms. However, both the SWMF and the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association carried out an investigation into the effectiveness of the committees and provided an analysis. These are worth summarising before making definite conclusions.

The SWMF circulated lodges with a questionnaire in May 1943.<sup>232</sup> The previous April they had issued a circular calling upon lodges to make pit-production committees 'the live bodies in the life of the mining community'.<sup>233</sup> The results of their investigations were to reveal very much to the contrary.

228 circulars were sent out, but only 90 lodges replied.<sup>234</sup> This itself would seem to reveal a lack of interest on behalf of a majority of lodge committees. The replies which were received were analysed by a sub-committee of the EC in conjunction with the Labour Research Department and they derived the

following conclusions from them:

1. A large percentage expressed a lack of confidence in the Ministry of Fuel and Power, considering that control was too remote and that recommendations referred to it were not acted upon effectively.
2. About one-third of the replies considered their pit-production committee to be unsatisfactory, it dealing mainly with absenteeism and managerial shortcomings.
3. Several lodges wanted the committees to have more powers, such as the right to carry out independent inspections of the pit and the right to report management and have penalties imposed upon them.
4. The call for outright nationalisation was a frequent response, and frequent amongst committees that reported their committees working well.
5. 53 lodges reported successes, and it was felt that once the initiative of the workers was realised they had a whole number of suggestions to make, although management posed opposition very often. Several lodges mentioned that the question of cost rather than output decided the management whether to take up this, or that suggestion. Profit-making considerations still played a large part in the question of output.

6. The report stressed the importance of close contact between the pit-production committee, the lodge and the trade union membership as a whole. Only 22 committees reported back to mass meetings or special meetings.<sup>235</sup>

Given the fact that under half the lodges in the coalfield replied to the SWMF circular it is difficult to make sweeping conclusions about the committees. Performance varied from pit to pit. It would be fair to say, however, that only in a small number of cases was production stimulated. The response in most pits was negative, whilst in others it sharpened the debate over methods of control in the industry and hence led to a worsening of relationships between management and the men. In this respect Angus Calder called the committees 'the grumbling appendix of the class war,' although it is perhaps unfair to use this phrase as a sweeping generalisation.<sup>236</sup> The conclusion made by the SWMF EC themselves was limited, but probably the only safe one that could be made:

'In some instances it brought to light the latent creative powers of the workmen ..... in other instances it has served merely to heighten class antagonism due to an overemphasis on the Gaffer and Kaffir approach to the problem'.<sup>237</sup>

The conclusions of the coalowners were equally as non-committal. Their report written by Iestyn Williams was based on replies from 31 colliery companies in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association, representing well over 75% of the mines in the coalfield. According to these reports the pit-production committees functioned at all the collieries except six. Whilst it is stated that the majority functioned regularly, it is also admitted that this gave no guide to the efficiency of the committees, to the measure of co-operation obtained, or as to whether they formed any valuable function.

Of the six pits where the committee was not functioning, at three it was because of disputes. At Penallta, the workmen's secretary, Mr. G. Phillips, had accused management of not co-operating, implying that workmen's representatives voted honestly and that management's did not. Management had walked out of the meeting here and refused to serve as long as Mr. Phillips remained a member. At Llanharan colliery the workmen's representatives had supported a 'go-slow' action by some colliers and the management refused to serve with them. At Mountain Colliery, Gorseinon a long-standing dispute had led to an irretrievable breakdown of the committee. At the other three collieries, Brynteg, Onllwyn No. 1, and

Avon and Bute, the committees had died from inaction, 'because there were no matters tabled for discussion'. It also could be gleaned from other reports that several other committees were sliding into this state, no meetings having been held for some time before the report was made. This was the case at Elliots, Windsor, Tirpentwys and Nine Mile Point collieries. Lack of agenda being given as the reason for the lack of meetings.

The main conclusion of this report was that whilst most functioned, there was some grounds for the charge that they did not do so effectively.<sup>238</sup> If the various reports are studied this is substantiated. Many meetings only had one or two items on the agendas of which the distribution of alarm clocks<sup>239</sup> was particularly common, especially in West. Wales. Another common feature was discussion of what the pit output target should be, which virtually always caused a division between management and the men.

Three interesting factors emerge from these reports. Firstly, despite the terms of reference of the committees after June 1942 that they should have no responsibility for absentees, some committees were still concentrating on dealings with persistent absentees and people 'not pulling their weight'. This is revealing as it demonstrates that many owners still saw the committee as disciplinary bodies and

indiscipline as the main problem of production.

The second factor that emerges is that there is not one comment in these reports upon improvements initiated at the workmen's behest, and the third which comes from the report of the Pochin colliery is that there was dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Fuel and Power. The report read as follows:

'Irrespective of the individual opinions held on matters, the Ministry's attitude in ignoring the committee was certainly discouraging. The only course left was to inform the Fuel Controller, that unless some acknowledgement was immediately received from him, the Committee would cease to function'.

This report, of course, tallies with complaints made by lodge committees in response to the SWMF circular. It seems very much as if the committees were left to find their own salvation and whether they were a success or failure seems to have depended upon the prevailing conditions in the pit.

Lack of encouragement and a lack of clear aims and objectives in many cases must have led to apathy. It seems that throughout the experiment management and miners could not come to terms as to what should be considered a good or a poorly functioning committee. In practice, therefore, they fulfilled none of the aims set them by the SWMF on the one side and management on the other. They neither became the

'live bodies in the life of the coalfield' not did they act as an efficient means of disciplining workmen.

The one lesson that can be drawn from the experiment is that in the mining industry sectional interests proved stronger than any unifying element such as national interest. The experience of the pit-production committees present very much a microcosm of the general experience of the industry in South Wales throughout the war years. Any harmony and co-operation achieved in the war years was only superficial, the trenches dug in the previous years of conflict could not be filled in, even by the crisis of war and attempts to do so only made for further entrenchment.

iv) Propaganda Aimed at Boosting Production and Production Drives

Apart from schemes aimed at boosting production and wage awards, the main method that the authorities depended upon to try and spur the miners to greater efforts, was an incessant flow of propaganda. Appeals came from the Ministry of Fuel and Power, the MFGB, the MAGB, the SWMF and many other organisations and individuals not directly connected with the coalmining industry. The appeals were usually related to a specific shortage or to one of the army campaigns, such as those in Africa and in Italy. In the last twelve months of the war they were geared to the call of speeding up the victory, Most were made through

the media of the radio or the press. On one occasion the SWMF sent a postal appeal to every single miner in the Federation.<sup>240</sup>

Another device that was used was that of taking influential people on tours of the coalfield. For example, in February 1942 a party of delegates from Russian trade unions came to South Wales. Throughout their tour references to and comparisons with Russia were used frequently. This was hoped to be particularly effective because of the close identification made by the SWMF with the Russian cause, especially with their repeated calls for the opening of a Second Front in the west. A typical headline that would appear in the Western Mail,<sup>241</sup> for example, was 'Russia needs coal not resolutions'. At the time of the Russian trades union delegates visit, the editor of the Western Mail pointed out that in his opinion the Welsh miners could demonstrate their solidarity with the Russians more effectively by attempting to emulate the prodigious feats of output reported from the Soviet Union rather than offering a hearty welcome, pretty bouquets and idle applause to the delegates.<sup>242</sup>

Another visitor to the coalfield was the Minister of Fuel and Power, Major Lloyd-George, in September 1942.<sup>243</sup> He came not to harangue but to seek out at first hand the causes of complaint from the workers. This approach was criticised by Iestyn Williams the



secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association. He claimed that the visit did harm, as it further lowered the power of the management by leading men to believe that they had an open approach beyond managers and officials to someone who would put management 'in their place'.<sup>244</sup>

Another device attacked by Iestyn Williams was the conference of management and workmen in the industry in London on October 31st. 1942. He pointed out that it cost a lot of money and was totally ineffective in South Wales in increasing the rate of production.<sup>245</sup> This conference was addressed by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill and by the South African, General Smuts, and was based upon an idea from Arthur Horner. It was the only industrial gathering that Churchill addressed in such a manner, thus demonstrating the crucial importance of the industry to the war economy. One delegate from each lodge in all the British coalfields attended the gathering, plus one member of the management from each colliery. Churchill's speech was later issued as a pamphlet as were posters of Churchill addressing the conference which had on them as a slogan, the last sentence of his address:

'We shall not fail, and then some day when our children say, 'What did you do to win this inheritance for us to make our names respected among men? One will

say, 'I was a fighter pilot', another will say, 'I was in the submarine service' and another, 'I marched with the Eighth Army', a fourth will say, 'None of you could have lived without the courage of the merchant seamen', and you, in your turn will say, with equal pride and with equal right; 'We cut the coal'.<sup>246</sup>

There can be little disputing the opinion of Iestyn Williams that these visits and conferences cost quite a great deal of money and did little to increase output, and certainly any gain that could be made by using Churchill as a propagandist amongst the miners were lost twelve months later by his pronouncements on the question of nationalisation.<sup>247</sup> This is the view of one of the South Wales lodge delegates to the conference, 'If anyone heard Churchill speaking that day, they would say quite openly that he gave one of the finest socialist speeches I have ever heard anybody given. That was when he was in need, but as soon as he had what he wanted you know what he did, he turned quite obstinate against the working class'.<sup>248</sup>

The SWMF took the campaign to boost production very seriously and in August 1942 one of their executive members, Will Arthur, was appointed as a full-time officer with responsibilities for boosting production and also selected a coal production

sub-committee from the E.C.<sup>249</sup> This committee organised a 'Speed the Coal' campaign throughout the coalfield in the latter half of 1942. It took the form of conferences, local meetings, the formation of local committees, B.B.C. talks, short films at local Cinemas on Sundays and loud speaker ears publicising in the streets.<sup>250</sup> Most leading members of the SWMF took part in these meetings, along with the miners' M.P.'s. One notable exception was Trevor James, miners' agent in the Swansea Valley who took a principled stand throughout the war against any form of participation in it, including those meetings aimed at boosting production specifically for the war effort.<sup>251</sup>

Most SWMF propaganda was framed in a different manner from that of the management or that in the popular daily press. On most occasions official statements were careful to distinguish very clearly between the union attitude and that of management, such as at the end of 1942 when the SWMF EC passed a motion calling upon all miners to intensify their efforts throughout 1943 and at the same time to 'ruthlessly expose all controlling authority that failed to utilise the available means to increase productivity in the industry.'<sup>252</sup>

Sometimes, however, miners officials made statements that might more commonly have been heard

coming from management. An example of this took place at the MFGB conference of 1942, during a debate on the opening of the Second Front. Will Betty, a full time officer at the miners office at Glynneath made an intervention in the debate that was widely reported in the press. The Western Mail reported as follows:

'He asked the Welsh delegates to point out to their own members what the resolution meant. In Wales there had been strike after strike and the lowest output in the country. Wales was not playing its part in production  
'To talk of the 'Second Front' without producing in the coalfield the necessary means to maintain it was sheer hypocrisy'.<sup>253</sup>

Following reports of Betty's alleged statements the SWMF EC received many protests from lodges concerning the contents and they issued a statement to counteract that attributed to Betty,

'The SWMF EC emphatically disclaim the suggestion implied that the Welsh miners are not doing their part in the war effort. The Miners Federation has consistently advocated all measures possible to ensure the maximum production of coal. Whilst there may be a small minority, as there are of all other classes who are not prepared to do all they can, the vast majority of miners are loyally carrying out the

policy of the organisation. The entirely false impression created by the speech and the wide publicity given to it is deeply resented by miners throughout Wales'.<sup>254</sup>

Whether Betty said what he was reported as saying is open to debate. Will Arthur, EC member for the Neath Valley at the time believes that Betty's speech was taken out of context and misrepresented, and <sup>he</sup> most likely said 'There are men who, instead of, all miners are'.<sup>255</sup> Idwal Penhallurick, miners agent at the time, felt very much the same, although he remembered cartoons appearing in the colliery at this time illustrating Will Betty standing over men with a pitchfork in his hand.<sup>256</sup> The clearest vindication of Betty however, came from the miners in his valley. The Vale of Neath Combine Committee convened a meeting in Glynneath for the purpose of allowing him the opportunity to substantiate or disclaim his reported allegations. The meeting concluded with a vote of confidence being passed in him by an overwhelming majority, only eleven votes being cast against him.<sup>257</sup>

Within the SWMF perhaps the most ardent advocates of production campaigns were the Communist Party members of the union. Their propaganda was framed in terms of the defence of 'Socialism' as represented by the Soviet Union. Arthur Horner called the war 'the highest form of class struggle'.<sup>258</sup>

All production drives associated with the Communist Party were connected with the Soviet Union. For example, during the defence of Stalingrad, the Evans-Bevan combine group of collieries organised a 'Stalingrad Week' production drive. During this week all production records were 'smashed' at the Onllwyn No. 1 pit.<sup>259</sup> In the Neath and Rhondda Valleys, Anglo-Soviet Production weeks were held to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.<sup>260</sup>

In some pits members of the Communist Party formed what were termed as 'shock brigades' to increase production rates. This occurred for example at Tower pit, Hirwaun<sup>261</sup> and in Fernhill colliery.<sup>262</sup>

At the time of the 'Speed-the-Coal' Campaign organised by the SWMF the Communist Party held a simultaneous '90 Days to End Hitler' Campaign. This campaign started with a meeting of 465 people, addressed by Arthur Horner and Idris Cox.<sup>263</sup> Within 40 days it was reported by Cox that in sixteen pits where Communists were active, coal production had gone up by 10,000 tons and that in ten pits there were nineteen shock brigades operating.<sup>264</sup>

In addition to propogandising in terms of the defence of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party also laid great stress on the atrocities of fascism, and one particular incident was used in particular -

the Nazi massacre of every man, and woman in the village of Lidice in Czechoslovakia. In a statement to all miners in June 1943 the Communist Party urged them to seek redress of grievances through recognised negotiating machinery, to make pit production committees work and to expose those guilty of deliberate absenteeism and mismanagement.

It concluded;

'Miners of Britain, we live in 1943, 1921 and 1926 have gone forever. But Lidice remains .... in Europe miners and their families have suffered more than any other section of the community.

'You are the most class conscious and best organised section of the working class.

You are the commandos of war industry.

Upon you, more than any other section of the working class in or out of the armed forces

the final and unconditional victory depends'.<sup>265</sup>

The appeal 'Lidice remains' had a special significance to the miners of South Wales and especially those in the top end of the Swansea Valley. Here, a unique film to commemorate Lidice was made. In September 1942 Humphrey Jennings, Director of the Ministry of Information Film Unit approached Arthur Horner and told him that he intended making a film about Lidice. He was looking

looking for a mining village which could reproduce the atmosphere and background of Czechoslovakia. The village of Cwmgiedd was chosen. Jennings held a meeting there and asked the people to help him, not only by co-operating with his film unit but also by taking part in the film. The film was to retell the story as it could have happened if the Nazis had ruled in Wales.

The Film Unit came to Cwmgiedd for four months and its members lived in the miners homes. Several prominent union officials, including D. D. Evans, the local miners agent, took leading roles in the film, and one of the most convincing things about the film is the naturalness of the acting, everyday people in their workaday clothes.<sup>266</sup>

The 'Silent Village' was undoubtedly a propaganda film, but it was totally different in tone from the majority of other films made in the war for this purpose. The realism of the film makes it all the more powerful. Whereas, talk of war, talk of atrocities, talk of fascism were always a step away from real life in one's own area this film made them frighteningly present.

It must be almost impossible to assess the impact that any propaganda had on production. As production figures continued a downward trend throughout the war it would seem to have been negligible. At a



particular time an individual might be rallied by an inspired speech, reading about the siege of Stalingrad, hearing a radio programme or seeing a propaganda film, but given the conditions in the mines even the most dedicated worker would have found it impossible to boost his efforts consistently. It was physically impossible and often courted danger. At one stage of the war the Western Mail suggested that the miners might be animated by the slogan 'the coal must be delivered' just as they claimed that the merchant service was inspired by the slogan 'the convoy must get through'. Arthur Horner wrote the following letter to the newspaper;

We are all for the development of such a spirit. What we are pressing <sup>for</sup> is the development of such conditions as will drive the slogan home and make it a reality. If a ship had all sorts of structural weaknesses in its machinery and direction were faulty, it would not be much good just declaring a slogan'.<sup>267</sup>

Here in a nutshell was the 'coal problem' summed up. The Industry manned by a depleted, weary workforce, labouring in old pits with sub-standard equipment, bedevilled by poor industrial relations inherited from the depression years, was not ship-shape.

1. Western Mail, 29 May 1941.
2. Economist, 19 July 1941.
3. Court op. cit., p. 109.
4. See Table I in Appendix II. p. 702.
5. Western Mail, 17 July 1944.
6. See Table I in Appendix II. p. 702.
7. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of the Ministry of Fuel and Power 1946, Para. 136. p. 52.
8. See Table I in Appendix II. p. 702.
9. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 7 June 1941.
10. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 21 June 1941.
11. Memorandum of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association on 'Productive Ability; Factors likely to Militate Against Maximum Productivity, June 1941'.
12. See Table I in Appendix II. p. 702.
13. Western Mail, 6 October 1943.
14. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum Re.- Declining Standard of Production, Jun3 1945.
15. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of Ministry of Fuel and Power, para. 150 p. 57.
16. See Table II in Appendix II. p. 703.
17. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of

- the Ministry of Fuel and Power, Para. 153, p.58.
18. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 7 October 1944.
  19. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 1946, para. 154-5, p. 58.
  20. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 17 March 1945.
  21. See Table III in Appendix II. p. 703.
  22. Mass Observation, op. cit., p. 159.
  23. See Table IV in Appendix II. p. 704.
  24. Western Mail, 16 February 1944. For further information on the Porter Award see Section III Chapter IV.
  25. Ibid., 17 July 1944.
  26. Aberdare Leader, 17 June 1944.
  27. See Table V in Appendix II. p. 704.
  28. Western Mail, 9 December 1944 and 17 February 1945.
  29. Western Mail, 14 July 1944.
  30. Daily Worker, 3 February 1944.
  31. Western Mail, 16 February 1942.
  32. CAB 87/93, Causes and Remedies of Decline in the Output of Coal November 1943.
  33. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coal Industry Conciliation Board 30 August 1943.
  34. Western Mail, 25 August 1942.
  35. Ibid., 31 August 1942.
  36. Heinnemann, op. cit., p. 24.

37. The Ministry of Fuel and Power ran a competition for the best design of a poster to publicise the drive for coal. The poster was to be put up at all pit heads in South Wales. The poster 'YOU HOLD THE KEY TO EUROPE' was submitted by Idris Griffiths, Ynyshir, a collier at the National Colliery - Western Mail, 29 January 1944.
38. Ibid., 26 July 1944.
39. SWMF EC Minutes, 28 February 1945.
40. Western Mail, 28 February 1945.
41. Ibid., 30 January 1945.
42. e.g. CAB 87/93, Committee on the Reorganisation of the Coal Industry - Causes and Remedies of the Decline in the Output of Coal. A Memo. by the Minister of Fuel and Power, 8th November 1943; Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum re. Declining Standards of Production, June 1945. Original draft, August 1943; SWMF Coal Board Sub-Committee, Report to E.C. August 26th 1943.
43. See Appendix III. p. 705.
44. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of Ministry of Fuel and Power, para. 210, p. 82.
45. Western Mail, 25 June 1941.
46. See above. p. 132.
47. Western Mail, 30 June 1941.
48. Ibid., 12 July 1941.

49. Ibid., 15 August 1941.
50. Ibid., 12 September 1941.
51. Ibid., 30 August 1941.
52. Ibid., 1 August 1941.
53. SWMF EC Minutes, 26 August 1943.
54. Memorandum of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association on 'Productive Ability; Factors Likely to Mitigate Against Maximum Production' June 1941.
55. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of Ministry of Fuel and Power, para. 208, p.81.
56. Western Mail, 3 December 1941.
57. Ibid., 16 December 1942.
58. Ibid., 3 March 1942.
59. Ibid., 8 May 1942.
60. Ibid., 29 September 1942.
61. Ibid., 18 May 1943.
62. Ibid., 25 July 1943, 21 September 1943, 23 November 1943, 18 January 1944.
63. Ibid., 23 November 1943.
64. Ibid., 13 April 1942, 27 April 1942, 1 May 1942.
65. Ibid., 8 July 1941, 3 March 1942.
66. Ibid., 12 October 1943.
67. Ibid., 12 July 1943.
68. Ibid., 25 July 1943.
69. Ibid., 18 January 1944.
70. Ibid., 26 February 1944.

71. David Day, Bevin Boy (Warwick 1975); J. B. Pick Under the Crust (London 1946); D. Agnew Bevin Boy (London 1947).
72. Lab 10/446 Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 31 March 1944.
73. Aberdare Leader 2 October 1943.
74. Western Mail, 30 October 1944.
75. Coombes, Miners Day, p. 80-81.
76. Court, op. cit., p. 123.
77. N. Longmate, 'How We Lived Then,- A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War (London 1971).
78. Lab. 10/446 Weekly Reports of IRO for South Wales, 8 September 1944.
79. SWMF EC Minutes, 14 June 1944.
80. SWMF EC Minutes, 16 May 1944.
81. Western Mail, 20 June 1944.
82. Ibid., 17 April 1945.
83. Ibid., 5 April 1945.
84. Ibid., 19 June 1945.
85. Minutes of Proceedings of the Joint Conciliation Board, 10 May 1943.
86. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Memorandum Re - Declining Production, June 1945.
87. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 1946 - para. 229 p. 88.

88. **CAB 87/93.** Memorandum by the Ministry of Fuel and Power on 'Causes and Remedies in the Output of Coal' to the Cabinet Committee on the Reorganisation of the coal industry, 8 November 1943.
89. Court, op. cit., p. 123.
90. SWMF EC Minutes 26 August 1943.
91. Western Mail, 26 March 1941.
92. SWMF EC Minutes 5 December 1939.
93. Ibid., 19 December 1939.
94. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 1 February 1940.
95. e.g. SWMF EC Minutes 11 June 1940. Motion forthcoming from the Taff Merthyr Lodge.
96. Ibid., 17 September 1940.
97. Ibid., 11 February 1941.
98. Western Mail, 19 February 1941.
99. Ibid., 7 March 1941.
100. Ibid., 19 March 1941.
101. Calder op. cit., p. 504.
102. Interview with Idwal Penhallurick by Stuart Broomfield, 19 March 1973.
103. Daily Express, 9 September 1941.
104. Daily Herald, 30 August 1941.
105. Merthyr Express, 20 February 1943.
106. Ibid., 13 March 1943.
107. Medical Press and Circular, No. 5474, 5 April 1944.
108. Coombes 'Those Clouded Hills', p. 41.
109. Western Mail, 6 April 1945.

110. For detailed descriptions of miners suffering from pneumoconiosis see Bert Coombes two wartime books 'Miners Day' and 'Those Clouded Hills'.
111. P. Hugh-Jones and C. M. Fletcher, 'The Social Consequences of pneumoconiosis among the Coalminers of South Wales, Medical Research Council Memo. No. 25. (H.M.S.O. 1951) p. 3.
112. Ibid., Appendix II Table II, p. 43.
113. Western Mail, April 1939.
114. P. Hugh Jones and C. M. Fletcher op. cit., Appendix II, Table II, p. 43.
115. Criticism of the five year clause is delivered in a discussion between Will Arthur, a former vice-president of the SWMF and Stuart Broomfield and David Egan, taped 31 May 1973, and now at the South Wales Miners Library.
116. P. Hugh-Jones and C. M. Fletcher op. cit., p. 5.
117. See Table I, in Appendix IV. p. 706.
118. Western Mail, 10 November 1943.
119. Ibid., 23 November 1944.
120. Ibid., 14 July 1945.
121. See Table I in Appendix IV. p. 706.
122. Arthur Horner 'Coal and the Nation' (CPGB October 1943).
123. W. J. Anthony-Jones, 'Labour Relations in the South Wales Coal Mining Industry 1926-1939' (Ph.D. Aberystwyth, 1956) p.51.



124. General Minutes of the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association, 25 October 1943.
125. Aberdare Leader, 11 November 1944.
126. South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Memorandum on Pneumoconiosis - Labour Difficulties arising from 1944 - 1945.
127. Ibid.,
128. Ibid.,
129. P. Hugh-Jones and C. M. Fletcher, op. cit., p. 5.
130. Will Arthur interviewed by David Egan and Stuart Broomfield, 31 May 1973.
131. See Table I in Appendix V. p. 707.
132. See Table II in Appendix V. p. 707.
133. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of 1946. Para. 214, p. 83-4.
134. Western Mail, 6 September 1941.
135. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of 1946. Para. 165 p. 60-1.
136. Western Mail, 15 October 1943.
137. Ibid., 10 May 1942, South Wales Voice, 16 May 1942.
138. W. C. Deveraux 'Post War Reconstruction of Industry in South Wales' (Published by the Western Mail and Echo Ltd., Cardiff, June 1943), p. 22.
139. South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Memorandum on Productive Ability; Factors Likely to Militate against Maximum Productivity, April 1941.

140. Will Arthur, interviewed by David Egan and Stuart Broomfield, 2 May 1973.
141. 'New Leader' 11 March 1944.
142. Western Mail, 31 October 1943.
143. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p. 9.
144. Coombes 'Miners Day', p. 78.
145. SWMF EC Minutes, 26 August 1943.
146. See Table II in Appendix VII. p. 712
147. Western Mail, 10 July 1944.
148. New Leader, 23 October 1943.
149. Ibid., 20 June 1942.
150. Aberdare Leader, 19 July 1941.
151. Mass Observation op. cit., p. 24.
152. The clash of interests between workers and management in the coal industry was summed up in a report for the Daily Express, 8 July 1942, by Trevor Evans, their industrial correspondent. The feature was entitled 'A Hatred Still Exists' and included an account of a discussion between a miner and Sir Evan Williams, Chairman of the Coalowners:-
- "Do you realise, Sir Evan", asked the miner, "that in all the opposition you have put up against us during the past 20 years, in all the victories you might think you have won, you have lost more than you have gained! Your policy has driven thousands of people from the pits and you

have planted hatred in the hearts of the men who still work for you".

Sir Evan, I am told, stroked his neat grey moustache and murmured. "Do you realise, if we had not opposed you, we would have been out of business long ago?"

153. Daily Mail, 14 September 1942.

154. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p. 72.

155. Coal : A Policy. (CPGB Pamphlet, January 1941).

The pamphlet cites the Partridge, Jones and Paton Company who owned 19 pits in South Wales as making a profit of £207,211 in the first six months of war.

156. Western Mail 6 June 1945. The annual profit figures were as follows:-

|                     |      |                     |      |
|---------------------|------|---------------------|------|
| 1939 - £214,600,000 | 1/7½ | 1942 - £186,900,000 | 1/6  |
| 1940 - £207,000,000 | 1/7  | 1943 - £176,400,000 | 1/6  |
| 1941 - £189,600,000 | 1/9½ | 1944 - £168,300,000 | 1/6½ |

157. Daily Herald, 4 May 1942.

158. South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Memorandum Re. Declining Standards of production June 1945.

159. See Appendix VIII. p. 713.

160. e.g. SWMF EC Minutes, 25 February 1943 - Gelliceidrim 35% below target; 31 March 1943 - over 20% below target.

161. Amman Valley Chronicle, 9 March 1944 and 16 November 1944.

162. SWMF EC Minutes, 11 October 1943.
163. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p. 73.
164. Heinneman *op. cit.*, p. 126.
165. Lab. 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 1 December 1944.
166. Western Mail, 6 February 1943.
167. *Ibid.*, 7 December 1942. Support for SWMF opinion that there was management inefficiency came from an insurance broker who wrote to the Western Mail (1 October 1943). Through his work he said that he met many people connected with the mines and had come to the opinion that improved management would be the most important factor in increasing output. He quoted examples of shortages of equipment, the breaking of agreements, and the failure to order equipment on time.
168. Court, *op. cit.*, p. 124, and see Section II, Chapter II p.
169. Mel Thomas, interviewed by David Egan and Stuart Broomfield, 29 May 1973. Tape at the South Wales Miners Library.
170. LAB 8/444 (V) Papers on Coalmining Industry Submitted to Forster Committee, 1941-2. add Aberdare Leader, 24 April 1943.
171. Court *op. cit.*, p, 307.
172. *Ibid.*, p, 141 - 2.
173. Minutes of the South Wales Branch of the National Association of Colliery Managers, 25 October 1941.

In the transactions of the NACM Yearbook, 1942.

174. Ibid., 25 April 1942. Transactions of the NACM Yearbook 1943.
175. Ibid., 25 March 1944. Transactions of the NACM Yearbook 1945.
176. Court, op. cit., p. 124.
177. CAB 87/93 Causes and Remedies of the Decline in the Output of Coal. A Memo by the Ministry of Fuel and Power. 8 November 1943.
178. Daily Worker 19 June 1943.
179. See above Section I Chapter I p. 45-46.
180. See above Section I Chapter II p. 84
181. Western Mail, 6 September 1941.
182. Amman Valley Chronicle, 24 September 1942, 8 October 1942, 15 October 1942.
183. Merthyr Express, 4 October 1941.
184. Daily Worker, 19 June 1943.
185. SWMF EC Minutes, 31 March 1943.
186. Ibid., 21 April 1943.
187. Court, op. cit., p. 225-6.
188. Daily Herald, 30 May 1941.
189. Western Mail, 6 January 1944.
190. Ibid., 12 January 1944.
191. Aberdare Leader, 11 March 1944.
192. Ibid., 27 November 1943.
193. SWMF EC Minutes, 24 November 1942.
194. Court, op. cit., p. 131.

195. Ibid., p. 139.
196. Many managements insisted on holding meetings during the working day but the SWMF pressed the owners to agree to evening meetings so that the workmen could be present in their clean clothes. SWMF EC Minutes 22 July 1941.
197. At Gelliceidrim colliery the manager refused to meet the workmen in their clean clothes, so they refused to meet him until he changed his mind. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 19 July 1941.
198. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Minutes of Conciliation Board Meeting, July 1941.
199. At a meeting of Aberdare Trades Council, Mr. D. J. Lewis, the delegate from Nantemelyn lodge stated that 'miners on pit production committees discussing the need for greater production always had absenteeism thrown up at them.' Aberdare Leader, 21 March 1942.
200. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Monmouthshire and South Wales Conciliation Board, 26 August 1940.
201. Aberdare Leader, 14 March 1942.
202. Ibid., 21 March 1942.
203. Ibid., 6 December 1941.
204. SWMF EC Minutes, 14 April 1942.
205. Court, op. cit., p. 210.

206. Western Mail, 13 October 1943.
207. Ibid., 28 October 1942.
208. Ibid., 5 October 1942.
209. Ibid., 7 October 1942.
210. Ibid., 6 October 1942.
211. Ibid., 8 October 1942.
212. Aberdare Leader, 24 October 1942.
213. Daily Worker, 29 October 1942.
214. SWMF EC Minutes 27 October 1942.
215. Daily Worker, 29 October 1942.
216. Ibid., 16 November 1943.
217. Western Mail, 13 October 1943.
218. Minutes of the South Wales Branch of the NACM,  
21 December 1943 in the Transactions of the NACM  
(Yearbook, 1944).
219. Western Mail, 30 December 1943.
220. Ibid., 24 December 1943.
221. Ibid., 23 December 1943.
222. Ibid., 30 December 1943.
223. Ibid., 3 January 1944.
224. Minutes of the South Wales Branch of the NACM,  
6 January 1944, in the Transactions of the NACM  
(Yearbook 1945).
225. Western Mail, 11 January 1944.
226. Ibid., 13 January 1944.
227. Ibid., 17 January 1944.
228. See above p. 198.

229. Court op. cit., p. 321-2.
230. Amman Valley Chronicle, 5 November 1942.
231. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills', p.34-8.
232. SWMF Circular to lodges, 28 May 1943.
233. SWMF Circular to lodges, 19 April 1943.
234. SWMF EC Minutes, 7 July 1943.
235. SWMF EC Minutes, 20 October 1943; Labour Research  
(December 1943). p. 178-181.
236. Calder, op. cit., p. 507.
237. SWMF Circular to Lodges 17 May 1944.
238. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners  
Association Memorandum on the Minutes of Various  
Pit Production Committees. December 1943 by  
Iestyn Williams, Joint Secretary.
239. The need for alarm clocks is explained by  
Bryn Thomas of Llandybie in an interview recorded  
by the SSRC Project. They were necessary he said,  
particularly for those men who lived a couple of  
miles from the pit and had to walk to work. It  
was impossible to buy the clocks in shops because  
of wartime shortages. Bryn Thomas interviewed  
by Merfyn Jones, Tape at South Wales  
Miners Library.
240. Daily Express, 11 July 1941.
241. Western Mail, 2 February 1942.
242. Ibid., 14 January 1942.
243. Ibid., 11, 12, and 14 September 1942.



244. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum on the effect on Coal Production of the application of the terms of the Government White Paper presented to Parliament on 3 June 1942, upon the South Wales Mining Industry, March 1946.
245. Ibid.,
246. PREM 4 - 9/2 Prime Minister's Papers, Conference of Mine-workers and Managers, June 1942 - April 1943.
247. See below Section II Chapter V p. 494.
248. Rees Brynmor Davies interviewed by Alun Morgan 13 December 1972. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
249. SWMF EC Minutes, 18 August 1942.
250. Ibid., 28 September 1942.
251. Ibid., 5 May 1943.
252. Western Mail, 30 December 1942.
253. Ibid., 22 July 1942.
254. SWMF EC Minutes, 28 July 1942.
255. Will Arthur interviewed by Stuart Broomfield and David Egan 31 May 1973. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
256. Idwal Penhallurick interviewed by Stuart Broomfield 19 March 1973.
257. Aberdare Leader, 22 August 1942.
258. Aberdare Leader, 7 March 1942.
259. Western Mail, 19 October 1942.
260. Daily Worker, 22 October 1942.
261. Ibid., 15 September 1942.

262. Daily Express, 3 September 1942.
263. Daily Worker, 5 October 1942.
264. Ibid., 23 November 1942.
265. Ibid., 23 June 1943.
266. Picture Post, 3 July 1943 in the D. L. Evans  
(Abercrave) Collection, Swansea University  
Archives. In the D. L. Evans collection there  
is a complete copy of the script of the 'Silent  
Village'.
267. Western Mail.

SECTION II

Industrial Relations in the South Wales  
Coalfield During the Second World War.

## CHAPTER I :

The Improvement of Conciliation Machinery

IN August 1943 Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association spoke of the history of industrial relations in the South Wales Coalfield as being one of 'gradual progress from independent to collective bargaining, and from distrust and antagonism to increasing confidence and collaboration.'<sup>1</sup>

This statement was made at a time when unrest in the coalfield was reaching a pitch and may thus appear to be a surprising comment, given also that a superficial glance at wartime industrial relations reveals a constant acrimonious debate concerning the levels of absenteeism and the increase in unofficial strikes, and their consequent effect on the fall of output, but the unofficial nature of these activities more often than not brought rank and file miners into conflict with their own union officials as much as with the owners and government bodies. Iestyn Williams' statement, therefore, refers more particularly to the relationship between the Coalowners organisation and the official organisation of the miners, the SWMF, and there is no doubting that there was a development of the conciliation machinery set up by these two bodies during the war and an increasing effectiveness in its operation.

In the years before the outbreak of war relationships between the SWMF and the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association had been severely strained by the attempts of a Company Union, the South Wales Miners Industrial Union, to establish itself in the coalfield following the demoralisation that had set in following the General Strike and Lockout<sup>2</sup> but right from the start of the war a more willing attitude to come to quick agreements was apparent on both sides. Within the space of a month, the union and the coalowners had made three major agreements. A preliminary settlement was made on the issue of non-unionism, a nine-month old strike at Brynhenllys colliery was ended<sup>3</sup> and there was a wages agreement. In addition, agitation upon the question of shorter shifts on Saturdays was brought to an abrupt halt.<sup>4</sup>

Commenting on the atmosphere within the industry, the industrial relations officer for South Wales stated that owing to the position arising out of the emergency there were indications of a desire to drop minor differences and that all sections were being as helpful as possible in meeting the problems arising from war requirements.<sup>5</sup>

The only black cloud on the horizon at this stage concerned the national wages agreement in October 1939. This agreement increased wages for men

by 8d. per shift and those for boys by 4d. per shift. Also, a sliding scale agreement to govern wages in relation to cost of living movements was introduced. At a Conciliation Board meeting Arthur Horner told the coalowners that there was 'a very grave dissatisfaction about the meagreness and inadequacy of the offer' in the coalfield. Nevertheless the SWMF EC recommended that their members should support the offer.<sup>7</sup> This recommendation was rejected by the lodges.<sup>8</sup> It was fairly unusual for an SWMF EC recommendation to be rejected by the membership, although it did become a more common event as the war progressed. On this occasion it seems that the SWMF EC in making their recommendation were heavily influenced by the fact that the MFGB had taken over the responsibility for National Wage Negotiations, and this they considered to be a progressive step.<sup>9</sup> At the national conference of the MFGB the delegates voted in favour of the new wage advances, with the exception of those from South Wales and one or two other areas.<sup>10</sup> This early discord over wages was a rather ominous event, given the conflicts that were to occur over the next five years.

In 1939, this slight altercation excepted, trade union policy was much more conciliatory to the owners, and the outbreak of war was a very influential factor in determining this approach - under no other

circumstances had it ever happened that trade union leaders and owners appeared together on common platforms in the South Wales coalfield calling for old prejudices to be scrapped<sup>11</sup> - however, war was not the sole factor responsible. Credit must also be attributed to the establishment of industrial conciliation machinery in the mid-1930's. The war enhanced its development.

In 1946, W. J. Saddler, then General Secretary of the South Wales Area of the NUM and Iestyn Williams, secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association wrote a report describing the nature and development of this machinery, and outlining its successes for the National Coal Board.

The procedure was that in the event of a question arising at any colliery which demanded urgent attention, the President of the miners' union and the President of the Coalowners could be the representatives of the employers and the workmen concerned in the question before them, in an endeavour to conciliate the parties and settle the issue.

It was first operated by Arthur Horner and Iestyn Williams during 1936 and 1937 by merely common consent, with no written authority, and this was the case until it was included in the Conciliation Board Agreement for the Coal Trade of Monmouthshire and South Wales in March 1942.

Conciliation was seen as an alternative to arbitration. Saddler and Williams considered that the success of the method could be measured by several outstanding facts:-

1. No strike or stoppage was authorised by the Miners Union or the Employers organisation since the method was adopted in 1937.
2. The number of disputes declined considerably.
3. The time taken to settle the great majority of disputes was very much reduced.
4. The number and length of strikes was reduced.
5. The loss of output arising from precipitate stoppages had been reduced to a probable minimum.
6. The holding of Disputes and Conciliation Board meetings and the calling before these meetings of a large number of colliery executives on the managerial side and the miners leaders on the workmens side were reduced to a minimum.<sup>12</sup>

1) The 1942 Conciliation Board Agreement for the Coal Trade of Monmouthshire and South Wales.

The disputes procedure described above became part of the area Conciliation Board Agreement after operating effectively for five years without statutory authority. This authority was considered desirable by both sides. On their side, the Coalowners and three reasons:

- a) If it were left to the Government to decide



- matters that were in dispute, they felt that decisions would be given in favour of the men.
- b) Iestyn Williams felt it desirable to have the proper authority of the Coalowners Association behind him. Much of the work had been carried out without this.
- c) As the authority of Arthur Horner was increasing, it was desirable that when the occasion arose, such authority should be met without delay.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to including the conciliation procedures the new agreement also included an additional clause on union membership and amendments to previous clauses, such as increasing overtime rates and allowances to colliers helpers over the age of 21. The terms of contract of colliers awaiting places were also altered.<sup>14</sup>

The agreement was not finally accepted, however, until there had been a great deal of discussion, debate and disagreement. The old agreement had been made in 1937 and was scheduled to run until 30 September 1941. The Coalowners were of the opinion that the 1937 agreement should not be terminated, but the union representatives on the Conciliation Board put forward about twelve items which they had been instructed by their conference to submit as conditions for making a new agreement. Hence negotiations for a new agreement were entered into.<sup>15</sup>

One of the main grievances that SWMF members had with the 1937 agreement was over the classification of the many and varied occupations in the industry into four grades with the fixing of a base rate for each grade. Almost immediately, after the 1937 agreement had been signed workers in certain occupations had claimed that they had been placed in too low a grade. Whilst over the years the agreement had been adhered to, the opportunity to change the grading had now arrived. A special sub-committee was set up to consider reclassification of the wage groups.<sup>16</sup>

A new agreement went to an SWMF delegate conference in January 1942 with a recommendation from the EC that it should be accepted. It was rejected by 495 votes; 1,223 against, 728 for. This was quite a large defeat. The main bone of contention was over the issue of grading, but Arthur Horner felt that there was far more behind the critical vote than this one major grievance. He told the owners representatives on the conciliation/<sup>board</sup> what he thought were the roots of the opposition,

'..... it became quite clear to me that these objections were not the basis of the opposition that exists in the coalfield. We found speaker after speaker using our own argument that coal is the basis of the country's industry; it is a vital war industry and whilst our men are asked to

continue work in coalmines under conditions of very great difficulty, and whilst they are being brought back against their wills, all those other workers in the consequent war industries are in receipt of much better wages and much better treatment than our men, for example, in Monmouthshire, you get example after example from Glascoed; in the Rhondda and the Garw-Maesteg-Ogmore district you get nothing but quotations of what this woman is getting and that man is getting. It is corrupting the coalfield .....<sup>17</sup>

Despite Horner's plea to the coalowners to change some of their proposals they refused to do so. The SWMF EC had to take back to their members the same agreement that had been turned down in the January. Another conference was called. The SWMF EC advocated that the agreement be accepted on the grounds that although it did not provide improvements to all classes of workmen, the terms offered were the best obtainable from a district coalfield agreement.<sup>18</sup> In the fortnight before the conference the executive organised an intensive campaign to try and persuade the majority to accept the terms,<sup>19</sup> and to head off calls for strike action.<sup>20</sup>

At the conference on February 28 1942, the agreement was accepted by 1,021 votes to 1,004 or in

terms of men - 51,050 to 50,200.<sup>21</sup> The majority was minute, and according to Horner was probably the smallest ever recorded in the history of the Federation.<sup>22</sup>

The unpopularity of the agreement was demonstrated when Arthur Horner was angrily heckled at a meeting in Mountain Ash,<sup>23</sup> and very quickly there was dissatisfaction over its operation. The SWMF EC claimed that some colliery companies were refusing to operate the agreement and threatened that if the employers failed to honour the agreement they would authorise 21 days notice being given to the Ministry of Labour.<sup>24</sup> It seems as this threat was enough to bring the offending colliery companies into line.

## II) The Non-Unionist Agreement

The clause of the new Conciliation Agreement that concerned membership of the union was not voted upon on February 28th 1942. The owners and miners leaders were still divided upon the question and it was not until April 21st that the SWMF membership accepted that a clause on this issue be incorporated in the Agreement. The clause read as follows:<sup>25</sup>

'Every workman normally employed by the Owners under the terms of the Conciliation Board Agreement shall be required to be a member of the SWMF'.

'This provision is made on the assumption that the SWMF has, and will retain complete authority to enter into and maintain agreements with the Employers, and on the complete understanding that if the SWMF should become subject to the over-riding control of any other authority this provision shall become null and void'.

'This provision has been agreed having regard to all the obligation laid upon the SWMF under the various clauses of the main agreement and subject to the undertaking that the SWMF will contrive to exclude from direct or affiliated membership, the clerical staffs<sup>26</sup> of, and all persons who hold official positions at the collieries.<sup>27</sup>

The acceptance of this clause in the Conciliation Board Agreement was one of the concluding chapters of what had been a long and bitter struggle between the owners and the SWMF over the existence of non-unionism in the coalfield.

More or less as soon as the war had started a tentative 'closed shop' agreement was made between the Owners and the SWMF, which was to last for the duration of the war. The Owners undertook to give assistance if any workman did not meet his obligation as a member of the SWMF in order to avert any interruption of work.<sup>28</sup>

The onset of war certainly hastened the making of this agreement, but equally important factors were a campaign of stoppages in the months just before the war had begun, and the fears of the Owners that if no agreement was made the Government would intervene.<sup>30</sup>

Part of the agreement made in October 1939 was that union officials were to present lists of non-unionists and men in arrears to the management every three months, and miners agents and colliery managements were to meet to discuss methods of dealing with these people.

Arthur Horner saw the advantage of the arrangement in enabling the SWMF to maintain complete freedom of action, securing 100% organisation without resorting to costly struggles against men who were ready to accept all the benefits secured by the organisation without being prepared to share in the costs of maintaining it.<sup>31</sup>

The agreement, however, did not work smoothly as co-operation from management was not always forthcoming and in many collieries there was still quite a high degree of friction on the matter. Only in one case did a stoppage result, for three days at Wyndham Colliery,<sup>32</sup> although several other lodges did tender notices.<sup>33</sup>

The shortage of manpower was partly why the problem persisted. Arthur Horner thought that there

were a few men who made trouble by trading on managements desire to get the maximum number of workmen into their pit. He urged managements to ensure that all men they took on should have a clean card.<sup>34</sup>

Horner saw another problem posed by the Essential Works Order. Any matter that was likely to lead to a disturbance in a colliery should have been dealt with under the order. It would take a big stretch of the imagination, he thought, to persuade the authorities that the refusal to pay the Federation was an act of misconduct for which a man should be dismissed.<sup>35</sup>

The main problem area was in the Rhymney Valley where there were, believed Horner, between 5 and 10% recalcitrants.<sup>36</sup> The most intransigent company was Powell Duffryn. At the Penallta Colliery in June 1941, it was estimated that there were fifty non-unionists and notices were tendered here after a special conference of the Powell Duffryn Workmen's Combine Committee.<sup>37</sup> It was felt also by this Committee that some men were taking advantage of the national emergency to ignore the trade union.<sup>38</sup>

Both sides of the industry maintained that they wanted a much firmer agreement than that signed in October 1939. Sir Evan Williams told Arthur Horner,

'We never had any advantage from the fact that some of your people did not pay their

money to the union. Non-unionists cause more substantial trouble for us than they do for you'.<sup>39</sup>

The nature of any agreement, however, was very much open to contention and discussions upon it were prolonged. The chief source of dispute lay in the method by which union dues were to be collected. The Coalowners wanted the Federation dues to be deducted from the men's pay packets at the colliery office and this was opposed by the miners representative who considered it important that the men paid their dues directly to union officials as this was a means of actively involving the men in the union.

The Powell Duffryn Workmen's Combine Committee called upon the SWMF to begin negotiations on the basis that membership of the Federation be made a condition of employment, but that the machinery of the Federation with regard to collection of contributions be maintained.<sup>40.</sup>

This was, in fact, the settlement that had been made in the Northumberland and Durham coalfield, but at a very early stage in the discussions Sir Evan Williams for the coalowners had refused flatly to consider the proposition.<sup>41</sup>

At a Conciliation Board meeting in July 1941, Horner put forward a compromise solution. All men should be allowed to pay their 6d. a week voluntarily to the union but that if the men fell into arrears up to the extent of 4/- and therefore out of



compliance then it should be deducted from their wages. Sir Evan Williams argued that regular deductions would be much less trouble and rejected Horner's suggestion.<sup>42</sup>

Another proposal put by the SWMF was that any wage increases negotiated should be paid to Federation members only. This was also rejected by the coalowners who were insistent that they collect the union contributions and then hand over the money to the Federation. In December 1941 the SWMF EC took a vote on the Coalowners offer. The result was a tie, which meant that the SWMF held to the position that there should be voluntary payment of dues.

There were clear divisions within the SWMF itself, a substantial proportion believing that the owners offer should be accepted. The Tredegar Combine EC campaigned throughout the Federation that this should be the case. They pointed out that non-unionism was still an unsolved problem in the coalfield despite repeated efforts and huge expenditure. In their own case, although they had maintained a 100% membership, it was at the cost of unending friction and the expenditure of large amounts annually on show cards. If a solution was not arrived at, they believed that non-unionism would become an increasing problem after the war. They urged that the new Coalfield Agreement should contain the clause that 'membership of the SWMF be a condition of employment and that all contributions to it should be deducted from members wages at the colliery office and handed over to the lodge secretary'.<sup>44</sup>

When it came to negotiate the terms of the new agreement, therefore, not only was Horner faced by a resolute and determined Sir Evan Williams insistent upon deduction of the dues at source, he was also aware that he was arguing from a comparatively weak base within the Federation since there was substantial opposition to the stand that he was taking.

Eventually the principal demanded by the Owners was accepted by the union negotiators and a Conciliation Board meeting was held to finalise the agreement on March 16 1942. This meeting proved to be exceptionally controversial. When the miners negotiators arrived they were presented with a set of conditions by the owners to be discussed as a basis for signing the agreement. They claimed that the deduction of the men's wages in the agreement might be against the Truck Act and they were suggesting conditions that might cover this. Included in these was a demand that the SWMF undertake steps to reduce unavoidable absenteeism and refrain from opposing any action which employers might take to prevent workmen's breach of contract.. A further demand was that the SWMF should undertake strong measures to ensure that every workman would co-operate with the employers in the introduction of any means to improve output purposes. More contentious than these proposals were ones that demanded that the contributions of members to the SWMF should

be an amount agreed between the owners and the union, and that only employees should be members of the union which meant that unemployed miners would be prevented from joining.

These were all proposals that had been made during discussions in 1938 which had broken down. They were resurrected without any foreknowledge being given to the SWMF delegates and following discussions that had only concerned the method of collection of the dues. Arthur Horner was enraged. He accused the owners of trying to force a bargain on the union that would effectively castrate its power. He told them that there was no possible way of it ever being accepted by his membership. He was adamant that he would not even take these proposals back to his executive.

'In return you want us to appear to give up the functions of a trade union. What I object to is this: since the war we have been discussing simply one question. I know these things work back to 1938 ..... There was no war at that time. Now the situation is entirely different. There is a war on, we want to avoid stoppages during the war. We say to you, 'We must have this money and are prepared to take it in the easy way which will avoid conflict', and then

suddenly the matters which might have been discussed in 1938 just over three years ago are perfectly properly brought up. But we have just signed an agreement which reaffirmed our Conciliation Board proposals. Since then we have passed rules which were not in existence at that time, limiting our right to recruit members to the Federation. Since then we have had months of participation in coal production, matters which would have been unthinkable in 1938; nobody in 1938 would have conceived that we would be sitting down in 1942 discussing the matter in a manner we have been doing since the war started, and then you want to put this in a document to make it appear that for this, the Federation has given that. We will not do it!'<sup>45</sup>

The Coalowners did not pursue the matter and at a meeting a month later it was decided to sign the agreement and operate it from 1st June 1942.<sup>46</sup>

Even the signing of this agreement, however, did not totally eradicate non-unionism as a problem. Complications arose concerning the Essential Works Order and in 1944 on the introduction of Bevin Boys into the industry.

At a meeting of the SWMF EC in October 27 1942,

it was reported by the Vice-President, Alf Davies, that 160 men had refused to sign the necessary authority for a deduction of the Federation contributions to be taken from their wages.<sup>47</sup> The General Secretary of the SWMF wrote to Iestyn Williams stating the problem and saying that every conceivable method, short of giving notices had been tried to persuade those men to agree to the arrangement.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time Iestyn Williams received a similar letter from the chairman of the Powell Duffryn Company concerning the refusal of two men at Windsor Colliery to pay their contributions. He replied to this letter saying that he did not know what could be done as those men could not be prevented from working as that would constitute a breach of the Essential Works Order.<sup>49</sup>

In February 1943 the matter became slightly more complicated when sixteen men at Hafodynnys Colliery refused to permit deductions from their wages. The local miners agent and the lodge committee mentioned that if nothing were done, they would not work with these men.<sup>50</sup>

The issue came up for discussion at the Conciliation Board meeting on 1st March 1943. Horner described the problem:- The number of men involved was small, about 200 in all. Monmouthshire was the area affected most, with the heaviest concentration being in the Crumlin Valley, Llanerch, Tirpentwys,

Eastern Valley and Naval collieries also had small groups, whilst elsewhere they were in one's and two's. For the most part, Horner believed, the men were not anti-Federationists, they did not object to paying, they objected to the principle of having money deducted. The only possible solution, given the nature of the EWO, was that the owners deducted the money whereupon the men affected could go to court to get their money back, with the union indemnifying the owners.<sup>51</sup>

The introduction of the Bevin Boys into the mines presented an opportunity for the opponents of the 'closed-shop' principle to attack it once more. A Conservative M.P., Commander Galbraith, asked a question of the Minister of Labour with this intention in mind. He wanted to know what steps Bevin proposed to take to ensure that those people directed to the mines would not be compelled to join the Mineworkers Federation. In South Wales, of course, by 1944 it was written into the Conciliation Board Agreement that 'every workman normally employed shall be required to be a member of the SWMF'. The problem raised was as to whether the direction of recruits came within the meaning of the words 'directly employed'.<sup>52</sup>

Horner responded swiftly to this conjecture, issuing the following statement:

'The trainees will be in the same position as other miners. They will be called upon

to pay their contribution to the federation. If they object to paying they will place themselves in a position of considerable weakness.

'It is the Federation they will have to depend upon to look after their interests and to see that they are treated equally in all respects as with other miners, and it is the Federation that they will have to depend upon if they are injured'.<sup>53</sup>

There is not a recorded case of a Bevin Boy questioning the fact that they had to be a member of the SWMF.

What might be termed as the conclusion to this whole episode surrounding non-unionism came in late 1944 when the SWMF decided that the time had come to terminate the Bedwas Agreement of 1936. Bedwas had been a Company Union pit since only the S.W.M.I.U. had been recognised after a strike in 1933. In 1936 when that union was ousted from the colliery, a special non-strike agreement, outside the area of the Conciliation Board Agreement, was made perpetuating the conditions of work at the colliery. This Agreement, made for four years, was extended for a further four, in 1940. With the wider question of non-unionism in the coalfield having been dealt with as adequately as possible, the SWMF EC presumably considered the time right to tie up all the loose ends surrounding

the issue.<sup>54</sup>

The settlement of the non-unionist issue through conciliation is the clearest illustration of how a matter that had been particularly contentious in the inter-war years could yield to the twin pressures of improved negotiating machinery and the exigencies of war.



1. Western Mail, 19 August 1943.
2. This is the subject matter of 'The Struggle Against Company Unionism in the South Wales Coalfield, 1926-1939' by David Smith, Welsh History Review, Vol. 6 No. 3. 1973.
3. The Brynhenllys strike began on 28 December 1938 on the question of revised piece-work rates in the Waunllwyd Slant. 70 men were initially affected, but the other 200 men came out in support from 11 January 1939. Negotiations were long, drawn-out and on several occasions agreements made by the miners agent and accepted by the SWMF EC were rejected by the men (e.g. SWMF EC Minutes, 29 August 1939). When the workmen finally agreed to a settlement (SWMF EC Minutes 29 August 1939), the owners refused to open the colliery. Hence, the strike turned into a lockout. Amended terms were finally agreed with the owners (SWMF EC Minutes 3 October 1939), and the men agreed to return to work (SWMF EC Minutes 17 October 1939). This stoppage was the longest individual stoppage in the South Wales Coalfield since the General Strike.
4. Saturday hours were longer in South Wales than anywhere else in Britain (Daily Herald, 21 August 1939). For several years there had been a campaign to shorten the shift so that men came

up at 12.00 instead of 2.30 p.m. At a Special SWMF Conference a motion on behalf of 7 Combines called for vigorous action to be taken by the union (Daily Herald, 2 August 1939). At a joint combine meeting it was resolved that the men should stop work at 12.00 on Saturday 7 October and every succeeding Saturday (Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 2 September 1939). At an SWMF Special Conference, the SWMF EC decided to issue instructions that the inter-Combine Committee had no such authority to issue such instructions and urged that no workers take such action (SWMF EC Minutes 30 September 1939). The BeHate was overshadowed by the international situation. Only one combine, the Amalgamated Anthracite, voted in favour of action. At a special meeting they discussed taking action themselves, but following a vote of 9 lodges for, 8 against and with 7 having no mandate, the Chairman voted against this. (AACC Minutes, 4 October 1939).

In his Presidential Address in April 1940, Arthur Horner maintained that it was still the intention of the SWMF to secure a reduction in working hours by achieving a shorter Saturday shift. The realisation of this, he stated, had been rendered more difficult by the war, but

the project was still in their minds as the war had increased the need for organised leisure (SWMF Minutes, 25 April 1940).

5. LAB 10/365 Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 9 and 16 September 1939.
6. Minutes of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Joint Conciliation Board, 23 October 1939.
7. Minutes of SWMF EC 20 October 1939.
8. LAB 10/365 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 28 October 1939.
9. See resolution passed at Special SWMF Conference, 30 September 1939.
10. Western Mail, 28 October 1939.
11. A conference was held on 27 September 1941, organised by the South Wales District Joint Production Committee. It was the first time ever that leaders of the owners and workmen appeared together on a common platform. Arthur Horner and Sir Evan Williams addressed the meeting. They urged the scrapping of prejudices in the interests of the one common need - coal for victory. Western Mail, 29 September 1941.
12. Joint Memorandum on the Operation of the Conciliation Scheme for the Settlement of Disputes Arising at Collieries in Monmouthshire and South Wales to the National Coalboard

(Designate) 3 June 1946.

13. Minutes of Meeting of Representatives of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners on the Conciliation Board, 3 June 1940.
14. Amendments to the Conciliation Board Agreement for the Coal Trade of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 2 March 1942.
15. General Minutes of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association 13 October 1941.
16. LAB 10/367 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relation Officer for South Wales, 22 November 1941.
17. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 19 January 1942.
18. SWMF EC Minutes, 13 February 1942.
19. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 19 January 1942.
20. SWMF EC Minutes, 27 January 1942. Arrail Griffin and Cwmtillery lodges called for a strike.
21. Ibid, 28 February 1942.
22. Western Mail, 2 March 1942.
23. Aberdare Leader, 14 March 1942.
24. Western Mail, 25 March 1942.
25. SWMF EC Minutes 21 April 1942.
26. The clause excluding clerical workers at collieries from membership of the SWMF is of interest. At this time the clerical workers union, the CAWU were campaigning for recognition from the coalowners.

There had been an intense recruiting campaign for a period of months and the CAWU had achieved over 50% membership in the area.

LAB 10/368 (Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 14 March 1942).

The clerical workers were the only unorganised section in the coalmining industry and many felt that it was an anomalous situation that the owners had agreed to 100% membership of the SWMF, on the one hand, but clerical workers on the other were not allowed to join a union.

(Western Mail, 4 March 1943). The owners argued that as they considered that clerical staff had direct access to management, collective bargaining was unnecessary. The inclusion of this clause in the Conciliation Board Agreement was clearly an attempt by the owners to head off any support for the clerical workers from the mineworkers.

Amongst some clerical workers there was some bitterness at the attitude of the SWMF, feeling that they had been deprived of a strong ally (South Wales Voice, 24 January 1943). When clerical workers at the collieries of North's Navigation Company and Partridge, Jones and Paton's went on strike for union recognition in December 1943, the SWMF although proclaiming sympathy, refused to identify themselves

- actively with the dispute. 600 miners at the Vivian Colliery who went on solidarity strike were instructed to return to work by the SWMF. (LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 17 December 1943).
27. Amendments to the Conciliation Board Agreement for the Coal Trade of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 2 March 1942.
  28. SWMF EC Minutes, 20 October 1939.
  29. The campaign was intensive from May 1939 through until September. The Upper Gilfach and Aberaman lodges were given permission to tender notices on September 26, just days before the commencement of the war. The notices and stoppages were most frequent at collieries in the Powell Duffryn and Cory Combines. Areas most affected were the Aberdare and Rhymney Valleys.
  30. Minutes of Meeting of Representatives of the Coalowners on the Conciliation Board, 25 September 1939.
  31. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes, 25 April 1940. Presidential Address.
  32. This was an unofficial strike. The SWMF EC told the lodge to withdraw notices (SWMF EC Minutes, 24 December 1940), but the lodge went ahead and struck for three days from 30 December 1940

(Record of Stoppages without notice from the Coalowners Records). The SWMF EC refused to give strike pay. (SWMFEC Minutes, 4 January 1941).

33. (a) 1,300 men tendered notices at Penrikyber Colliery on 9 January 1940. SWMF officials contended that they received no assistance from the management on the question of 50 non-unionists being employed in the pit. LAB 10/366 (Weekly Report of the IRO for Wales, January 13 1940).
- (b) Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd, gave notices in November 1941. (Record of Stoppages Without Notice from the Coalowners Papers).
- (c) 400 men at Blaenhirwaun Colliery, Cross Hands, LAB 10/368 (Weekly Report of the IRO for Wales, January 17 1942).
34. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 3 June 1940.
35. Ibid, 26 May 1941.
36. Ibid,
37. Ibid, 8 July 1941.
38. Aberdare Leader, 21 June 1941.
39. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 26 May 1941.
40. SWMF EC Minutes, 10 June 1941.
41. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 26 May 1941.

42. Ibid, 8 July 1941.
43. SWMF EC Minutes, 2 December 1941.
44. Memorandum from the Tredegar Combine Executive to all other SWMF Combines, 9 August 1941. See Minutes of the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee.
45. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 16 March 1942.
46. Ibid, 20 April 1942.
47. SWMF EC Minutes 27 October 1942.
48. File on Conciliation Board Wages Disputes, 1898-1946. No. XXXIV on 'Request from Workmen's Representatives that deductions made in respect of contributions to the SWMF shall be paid to Federation weekly'.
49. Ibid,
50. Ibid,
51. Extract from Minutes of the Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 1 March 1943. Included in File quoted above.
52. Western Mail, 21 January 1944.
53. Ibid, 25 January 1944.
54. SWMF EC Minutes, 12 September 1944.



## CHAPTER II

Absenteeism, Restrictive Practices  
and Sabotage.A - ABSENTEEISM

More than anything else, absenteeism was the scourge of the mining industry during the Second World War, the publicity that miners absenteeism received left all those who worked in the industry tarred with the same brush. It is significant that in his lengthy book 'How We Lived Then' which is a series of reminiscences, Norman Longmate mentions little of the coalmining industry but what is mentioned about the miners is hostile in tone and includes the following statement:-

'..... many miners now, for the first time in their lives earning good money and safe from the sack, took time off when they felt like it'.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps, from a reading of the general press in the war years it is the most clear impression of miners that can be formed, and it is not surprising that, as is shown by the following selection of quotes, almost everyone connected with the industry, the Minister of Fuel and Power, the coalowners, the colliery managers and trade union officials made public statements on what was presented popularly as the main cause of the decline in output.

'If we are to win this war, every man will have to pull his weight. There can be no toleration of people who voluntarily absent themselves from work, or men who work short time deliberately because they fear they will have to pay income tax'.

Mr. John Griffiths, President of the South Wales Branch of the NACM 1942.<sup>2</sup>

'In view of the necessities now put on the country, the percentage of voluntary absenteeism is unreasonably high. The reduction in output per shift is unreasonable'.

Iestyn Williams, Joint Secretary, Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association.<sup>3</sup>

'It will be a blot on the miners escutcheon and a grave reflection on their organisation if a minority are allowed to retard output by staying out of work'. Western Mail Editorial.<sup>4</sup>

'Stoppages and avoidable absenteeism amount to a grave scandal and suggest that despite expressions to the contrary a considerable body of miners are trying to sabotage the industry in the hopes that these tactics will win nationalisation'. Western Mail Editorial.<sup>5</sup>

'Coal output is falling per man employed! Lack of regularity of attendance without reason is on the increase! Unnecessary

stoppages have occurred! There is a mentality amongst some miners that reflects unconcern for the danger with which this country is faced. These and other deterring factors perpetrated by the men reflect on the credit of our organisation. As a responsible committee, we desire to speak straight and plain. We are not satisfied that all our members are doing all they can all of the time to produce all the coal the nation requires'.

Statement of the MFGB EC.<sup>6</sup>

'If the problem of absenteeism is solved we are satisfied the necessary coal can be obtained to produce the guns, tanks and other equipment required by the services. We are not asking the man who is working six days a week to do any more. It is the man who fails to turn up on Saturday and Monday we are appealing to'. W. J. Saddler, Acting General Secretary of the SWMF.<sup>7</sup>

'The position is serious and we are definitely of the opinion that measures taken against offenders are far too lenient. The persistent losers are in a minority and we appeal to all men who realise their responsibilities to their country and therefore themselves to shame their so-called "butties" and make them realise that they are lengthening

the war and the lives of the man and his associates responsible for it'. Glamorgan Colliery Pit Production Committee.<sup>8</sup>

'The coal situation is serious. We cannot afford to lose a ton. We are now at a critical period when avoidable absenteeism is a crime. Coal plays a big part in the Africa operations. If British miners had not made the vital contribution to the campaign and we had failed to provide the coal in readiness for the advance there might have been a major defeat of the Allied Forces in Africa. We want miners to realise what production means in the present circumstances'. Arthur Horner, President SWMF.<sup>9</sup>

'There is an irresponsible minority, mainly composed of young men, and others who absent themselves, particularly at weekends. That irresponsible element bears a heavy responsibility at the present time. If the 4½% who are guilty of voluntary absenteeism today would decide to reduce their absenteeism by only half, this country would have 4 million tons more coal per annum'. Gwilym Lloyd-George, Minister of Fuel and Power.<sup>10</sup>

'The men fighting out there in Italy in the mud and snow of the Apennines facing death at every corner feel a great resentment

against absentees at home. They feel that it is unfair that one man should have to suffer every discomfort while another in the peace of his own home is able to absent himself from his work when he pleases. Absenteeism is shooting our own fighting troops in the back'.

Major Barry Llewellyn (recently returned from Italy and a former member of Montgomery's staff in the Eighth Army), speaking at Rhigos Colliery, Glynneath.<sup>11</sup>

This selection of quotations helps illustrate that absenteeism was seen as a significant problem, given the decline in output, by all those involved in the industry and important enough to comment publicly upon. How significant a problem was where views differed. Owners, colliery managers and the Western Mail in South Wales tended to view it as the central issue that had to be dealt with if output was to be increased, whilst union officials viewed it as one of a number of important factors. They recognised it as being a problem posed by only a minority of the workforce and it is noticeable in the quotation from Horner above, that he is at pains to compliment the mass of the workforce at the same time as being critical of absentees. The SWMF in fact were themselves critical of the proportion of the output debate that was devoted to absenteeism. In a circular to the MFGB they asserted that absenteeism was being used to

sidetrack the debate on declining production away from the central question of organisation and control of the industry.<sup>12</sup> One correspondent to the Western Mail described the anti-absenteeism campaign as 'grossly inhuman' and 'a mere stratagem of vested interests to smokescreen the need for reorganisation'.<sup>13</sup>

The media did concentrate on the topic of absenteeism seemingly incessantly, and the Minister of Fuel and Power was moved to comment that,

'Miners as a body suffer from the fact that there is a statistical searchlight on their attendance and absences, such as exists in no other industry'.<sup>14</sup>

Such concentration, according to a Mass Observation survey into British War Production, was in itself detrimental to production.

'Opinion of efficiency or inefficiency of industry is not necessarily based on knowledge, but large numbers of people in all groups and all levels of knowledge feel that industry is inefficient. This extreme belief in inefficiency, most marked among the better educated, better off and most responsible sections of the community is in itself a factor operating towards further inefficiency through a general feeling of

dissatisfaction, distrust and bad morale'.<sup>15</sup>

So far, the subject has been discussed in the abstract with no reference to statistical data, and if this is done, it will be revealed that in terms of coal production in the South Wales area, absenteeism was far from being the major reason for declining output. Although there was an increase, this had a marginal effect on output figures.

By the end of 1944 the rate of absenteeism was almost double what it had been in 1939 - 12.67% as compared with 6.48%.<sup>16</sup> These figures include unavoidable as well as avoidable absenteeism, an important element to be born in mind, and not always referred to by those critical of the absentees. As was the case with output decline, the increase in absenteeism was not a steady step by step rise,<sup>17</sup> month by month, there were fluctuations. These fluctuations do not always correlate with the figures for decreasing output, which is evidence in itself that absenteeism cannot be considered the major cause of that decline. For example, in a period when output was increasing, such as in that immediately following the D-Day Landings, there was an increase in the number of manshifts lost. In the three months ending June 1944 the percentage of manshifts lost was 10.88, in the three months afterwards it rises to 13.12. However, it is interesting to note that in the period in which

discontent was at its peak in the coalfield, in early 1944, the percentage absenteeism figure reached its highest point for the war - a 13.64% loss of manshifts from January to March 1944. This would seem to reveal that the rate of absenteeism can itself be used as an indicator to measure morale and dissatisfaction in the industry.<sup>18</sup>

Additional evidence that supports the assertion that there is no direct correlation between output decline and absenteeism is the fact that whilst the output decline for South Wales was greater than the average for Great Britain as a whole, the rate of absenteeism was below the national average, as revealed in the table attached to this page.<sup>19</sup>

A study of mining absentee statistics in the post-war period has also noted that the three divisions in England and Wales with the lowest output per manshift also showed the lowest rate of absenteeism.<sup>20</sup>

From the table below it will be seen that there are two types of absenteeism recorded, avoidable and unavoidable. The latter term relates to absences for which satisfactory reasons were given. Up until 1943 when this terminology was instituted, figures on absenteeism were quite misleading, and Major Lloyd-George explained this to the House of Commons in June 1943;

'So many statistics are produced from differing quarters, all rather coloured,



according to the view of the gentlemen putting them forward. I, long ago asked for the most comprehensive figures to be made available to me.....I expect that some of these facts will be very new to hon. members. Most people are familiar with the statement that absenteeism in the coalfield is running at about 11% or a little more ..... I asked that this percentage should be divided between shifts lost for reasons within the control of the individual and shifts lost for reasons outside the control of the individual, such as illness, injury and certain other causes. They show that 4.45% of the total manshifts possible were lost through avoidable causes and 6.98% through unavoidable causes. These figures may surprise the House. It is not generally realised that in the manpower force of this industry of 708,000 men, there are in any week 50,000 men who do not work through sickness and injury. That means that the effective manpower of this industry of 708,000 is 660,000. The absence of these non-effectives is and always has been included in the absentee figures..... Many members will not know that the number of

absences reported in each year involving absence of three days or more is between 150,000 and 160,000, that is on average, one man in four suffers injury involving absence of three days or more, at least once a year. There are in a year 135,000 cases involving absence of eight days or more. The industry has a very high rate of occupational sickness, whilst the miner is more prone than people in other industries to rheumatism. Taking into account the number of men not employed in the industry in any one week, the effective rate of voluntary absenteeism is not more than 4½%.<sup>21</sup>

This is a most revealing statement from the Minister, for it not only puts the true level of avoidable absenteeism in perspective, but at the same time highlights the danger and difficulties of mining and demonstrates the risks that a miner had to face each day of his working life.

One further point has to be made to put the degree of absenteeism in its true perspective. Miners worked on average more shifts during the war as compared with before. According to W. J. Saddler, General Secretary of the SWMF, the average number of shifts worked in a week by miners <sup>before</sup> the war was 5½, and this compared to figures he had for September 1944,

which approached 5.6.<sup>22</sup> In 1943 when Major Lloyd-George made the speech quoted above to Parliament, he estimated the national weekly average at above 5½. These figures, he stated, should be taken into account whenever accusations were made against the miners as a body.<sup>23</sup>

Little heed was taken of Lloyd-George's request and persistent criticism remained a constant factor for the rest of the war. There is no denial that a problem did exist, what is questioned is the extent that it was a problem and the effects that it had on the declining rate of production. Those who were traditionally critical of the miners were quick to turn the absentee rate against the miner when, say, he called for higher wages, and to point to it as being the source of the output decline. That prejudice coloured their arguments seems to be the case if regard is taken of statistical evidence. Nevertheless whilst the problem was never as serious as commonly presented, there was still a problem. Lloyd-George and W. J. Sandler of the SWMF accepted a figure of round 4½% avoidable absenteeism, the causation of which will now be discussed.

#### Causes of Absenteeism - 1) Fatigue

The real connection between absenteeism and the decline in output was that they had, to a great extent, the same causes - exhaustion, fatigue and poor

working conditions. Angus Calder summed this up in a sentence:

'Absenteeism whatever adjective you gave it, was bound to increase as middle aged men who had suffered in many cases from years<sup>out</sup>/of work, filled more shifts and contended with increasingly run-down equipment.<sup>24</sup>

The increase in the average age of the workforce was a most significant factor, and these men were working more shifts than before the war and had less holidays for respite. One government memorandum on 'Absenteeism at Collieries' accepted that workers had to be idle on odd days in order to 'husband their strength'.<sup>25</sup> In truth, the 'voluntary absenteeism' figures concealed within them a large proportion of the percentage that could be considered involuntary. Many ill and injured men could not afford to have time off. Bert Coombes cited such an example:

'He is sitting by me now, on an old chair. Young and fair haired, he would be goodlooking if his cheeks were not such a cavern between his face bones. His patched clothes droop on him like a boney framework. I know him for a superb worker in the coalface, his father died slowly from dust disease. This is his problem - he has been losing some time and has been ordered to see the investigating

officer, but he stutters very badly and cannot explain his case. He wants me to write for him. His wife weighs six stone and he cannot weigh much more himself, but they have four bonny children. It is easy to see that both have denied themselves to keep those children looking as they are. He has been losing an average of two days a week for several weeks. Why? I ask him. Without struggling to answer he takes off his shirt. The lower part of his back is covered with bruises and running down the line of the vettical column is a gash as if someone had drawn a knife that way. A stone did that, and had it been a little heavier his walking days would probably have finished. He was in work next day and has kept on going every day he could drag himself there, but six days a week was beyond his strength. Had he stayed on compensation he would have received two pounds eight a week after the first three days. By driving his body into the agony of work he has earned nearly a pound a week more.

'I couldn't live on the compo', he explains. He coughs deeply and goes outside to spit up the lump of small coal .....

to an outsider, knowing nothing of the story, he is just another of those lazy absentees'.<sup>26</sup>

Many miners took a day off when they did not consider themselves 100% fit and would be recorded as avoidable absentees. In a sociological survey of miners Ferdinand Zweig came across the following response in such instances:

'It wouldn't be fair to my mates because if a man does not feel 100% fit down the pit he is a public danger'.<sup>27</sup>

Statistics reveal nothing of these experiences. Furthermore, they were fairly common knowledge amongst those familiar with the mining industry, yet they were not the recipients of incessant publicity. One man who occasionally put forward such views was the industrial correspondent of the Daily Express, Trevor Evans, who hailed originally from Merthyr. The Express itself was usually hostile to the miners but Evans did explain on one occasion that the strain of work and the danger of the pit lead some men to take days off occasionally.

'Generally men stay away because they are exhausted', he wrote. 'Men are not machines. Don't think I am excusing absenteeism. I merely seek to explain some of it'.<sup>28</sup>

In a letter to Sir John Anderson, the Lord President of the Council, Churchill, the Prime Minister, revealed that he had some knowledge of the situation:

'According to figures supplied by the Health Insurance Approved Societies to the Government Actuary, the average number of people away from work owing to minor illnesses had increased in the last year by more than a quarter. If this applies to the whole working population it is equivalent to having 80,000 less people working than would normally be the case. It may well be that such absenteeism is due in part, at any rate, to causes other than deterioration of health but such a notable increase may be an indication of imposing more and more hardships on the civil population'.<sup>29</sup>

Despite such sentiments little was done to improve conditions. This can be understood given a war situation, but the continuance of persistent criticism given the awareness illustrated above cannot. During a debate on the coal situation in Parliament in 1943, Aneurin Bevan, who was M.P. for a mining constituency made a vitriolic attack on the Government, in defence of the miners on the subject of absenteeism:

'You could reduce it', he said, 'If the men had brass lungs, iron muscles and wooden heads. The Government should base its' plans on the

real miner, not the ideal one'.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the fact that the men were working more hours, the job itself was becoming increasingly strenuous, given the shortage of materials and the worsening of conditions in the pits. According to Arthur Watkins, Secretary of the Powell Duffryn Combine Committee with most of the skilled workmen passed their prime, they could not be expected to maintain their previous work-rate, especially as the pace of work had increased with the introduction of modern machine mining.<sup>31</sup>

W. H. Crews, a member of the SWMF EC complained that many pits were being worked 'feverishly' for four days, thus imposing a great strain on the men. In some places, he recommended, it would have been better to spread the work more evenly over six days.<sup>32</sup>

Arthur Watkins also maintained that the quality and quantity of rations that the mineworkers received were not adequate for them to keep up a consistent work-rate. They were not being sustained sufficiently and the SWMF campaigned throughout the war for increases.<sup>33</sup> Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour himself was of a similar opinion, he wrote to the Prime Minister expressing the following opinion.

'There is a lethargy due mainly to physical conditions. We have run the food supply too low for the people in the heavy industries, their energy is sapped and no appeals can make



up for it'.<sup>34</sup>

Again there seems to have been an awareness at the highest levels of the real nature of the problems being faced in the industry but either the will power to act firmly or the resources were lacking.

A background factor that helped bring on fatigue was the lack of respite that men had in their out-of-work time. This was partly due to the shift system and partly to wartime cut-backs. Bert Coombes says that the afternoon shift was the most unpleasant, it being known as the 'castor-oil' shift. It cut its workers off from everything:

'For them no evening walks, no cinema, no games and no social life in any form. This three-shift system has almost spoiled all the choirs, the leading dramatic societies which used to be so energetic in the mining areas'.<sup>35</sup>

The SWMP for their part were critical of the coalowners for not allowing a shorter shift on Saturday so that their men could enjoy the amenities of life.<sup>36</sup> Those amenities, however, were not very great. A Government memorandum on absenteeism stated that it had its roots in causes of a social nature:

- 'i) Lack of adequate and beneficial facilities for recreation,
- ii) The strenuous nature of mining and the system of shift working prevents the collier from

taking advantage of such beneficial facilities that are available, leading him to less beneficial facilities.

iii) Poor housing is probably a potent cause also'.<sup>37</sup>

The memorandum is a total indictment of the miners' environment, both in and out the colliery, but whilst the Government departments seemed to recognise that the problem of absenteeism was intrinsically bound up with the miners social predicament, when it came to addressing themselves to the problems, no improvements were forthcoming. The immediate issue, the need for greater production took priority and short term measures were always implemented and these more often than not included more impositions on the miners themselves.

Fatigue expressed itself in many ways, but perhaps the most common result was the affliction of over-sleeping. This meant late arrival at work in many cases and that meant in turn that there was no going down the pit that day and hence the loss of a shift. Trevor Williams, chairman of Aberdare Trades Council, claimed that workers were unjustly criticised for absenteeism as 75% of it was caused by over-sleeping and this because no alarm clocks were available.<sup>38</sup> A campaign resulted and eventually each lodge was allotted a number of alarm clocks for which members could apply. It seems, thereafter, that most Pit Production Committees spent their time assessing the claims of applicants and

the distribution of the clocks.<sup>39</sup>

There is, finally, one statistic that gives credence to the fact that fatigue was a major contributory cause of absenteeism. That is, that the section of men most prone to absence were the face workers, those engaged in the most strenuous work. In 1943 for instance the percentage of 'unavoidable absence' amongst face-workers in South Wales was 9.0% as compared with 7.8% for the workers underground and 5.5% for surface workers. In 1944 the figures were 8.9%, 8.1%, 5.6%.<sup>40</sup>

ii) 'Customs'

One contributory cause of absenteeism could be characterised as 'customs'. It was also a contributory cause of many unofficial strikes. War had introduced a new phenomenon into the coal industry - with the exception of the months after the Fall of France - regular working. Six years of continuous work, five and a half shifts a week was a new experience for most men. They had, both through circumstances and habit, established a pattern of working less. One miner told Zweig in his sociological survey;

'You call it absenteeism now, but remember that in the old days I was lucky when I could get three or four days work. I had weeks when I spent every single night in the market. But of course this was not absenteeism on our part and no great fuss was made over it'.<sup>41</sup>

Zweig deduced from this that most colliers were used to living on a few days wages because they had to, and this had developed into a habit.

There were more particular instances where old habits or customs died hard, and in some cases men abstained from work because of their beliefs, notably religious fundamentalists who refused to work on Sundays.<sup>42</sup> There were several particular cases where the wartime crisis was responsible for eroding into established customs. In the summer months it was common practice for many young miners to take a break from working in the pit and travel up to Herefordshire to go hop-picking, work in the open-air. In the early years of the war this habit was carried on by a few. A scandalised Daily Express correspondent reported that over a hundred Rhymney Valley miners did this in 1941.<sup>43</sup> In 1942 measures were taken against offenders and 16 young miners who had absented themselves from work to go hop-picking were fined at Abercynon.<sup>44</sup>

Another example which caused some controversy was the tradition of the Valde of Neath collieries to take off Neath Fair Day. On September 14th 1939, in keeping with a tradition well over fifty years old all the colliers in the valley took the day off. On this occasion, taking advantage of the critical international situation the Amalgamated Anthracite Company decided to take the case to court, to fine the miners and to

get the Fair Day Holiday declared illegal, as they had attempted to do in the past. To their chagrin, the judge declared that the day off was an immemorial custom and that the miners were within their rights to take it. The coalowners appealed but this was turned down.<sup>45</sup>

In 1940 most of the men were out of work when Fair Day came around, but on the corresponding day in 1941 the colliers took their traditional holiday, although there was no fair in Neath that year, because of the critical war situation. The men acted against the advice of the SWMF EC.<sup>46</sup>

The Neath Valley miners were attacked from all quarters and one critic suggested that the men's actions indicated that 'custom in the anthracite was more sacred than winning the war'.<sup>47</sup>

The men eventually gave up the Fair Day Holiday for the rest of the war. At the time the decision was to operate only for the duration of the war, but in fact Fair Day was never reinstated as a holiday.<sup>48</sup>

### iii) Absenteeism among young miners.

According to many coalowners and colliery managers one of the main causes of absenteeism was that in cases where men would be likely to pay income-tax if they worked a full week, they would prefer to absent themselves from work for a day rather than do so.<sup>49</sup> Whilst this may have been true in some cases, it is

doubtful whether it would apply to men with wives and families. It was an allegation aimed particularly at young miners. The age group of miners under 30 seemed to present a particular problem, if there were hard-core absentees, they were largely in this category. The South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of 1946 states that an undue proportion of absentees were wage-earners under 30 and a House of Commons Select Committee on National Expenditure report on Absenteeism made the following assertion:

'..... notwithstanding the qualification that the present labour force shows an increasing proportion of older men, many of whom were working more shifts than they would normally work in peacetime and are beginning to feel the physical strain, the fact remains that a small percentage of men particularly from the younger age groups are persistent offenders.'<sup>51</sup>

The editor of the Western Mail, D. R. Prosser was of the opinion that the production problem was '50% in the hands of that small minority of young workmen who absent themselves ..... whilst the older men are straining all they can do to produce the coal'. The great majority of miners, he suggested to the Minister of Fuel and Power would back him if he brought these defaulters up to scratch.<sup>52</sup>

There is no evidence of a great amount of hostility for these young boys. If anything there was quite a deal of understanding. In a debate on absenteeism in the House of Commons, James Griffiths made the following contributions, referring especially to young miners. He told of war strain and then remarked:

'If you are a year older in parliament, it doesn't mean very much, but if you are one year older in the pit it means a lot'.

'Let the House remember something for which it has a responsibility. These men in the pits began this war with some twenty years of poverty behind them. Absenteeism? Miners are not angels. If they were, they wouldn't be miners. There are, of course, bad ones, and I am in difficulty about these young men. They are a problem. Sometimes they are cynical. They are children of the depression, reared on the dole, thrown on the scrap-heap and allowed to rust'.<sup>53</sup>

T. W. Bowden, Secretary of Deep Duffryn lodge wrote to the Aberdare Leader that he was fed-up with the fact that 'all we read in the press is absenteeism'. He commented on the young absentees:

'..... in the old days of mining ( say up to 1926 or so) a boy entering a mine was properly trained and his body allowed to develop and harden in the apprentice stage.

Today a different system of mining is operated. With machine mining we find that instead of the machine helping the man, the man is trying to beat the machine. So much high speed is burning up the young miners and results prove that they do not stick the pace as the old man does. They are really old men at 35, largely due to speed, hardwork and a shortage of proper foods.<sup>54</sup>

It is against this background - their upbringing in the years of the depression, the high speed of the work process and their susceptibility to accidents that the absenteeism of the young miners should be understood. There are also some factors peculiar to war-time that are relevant. The shortage of recreation facilities affected the young particularly but more important in producing the cynical attitude, referred to by James Griffiths, was the degree of ignominy that was felt about being at home during wartime. Many young men had had no choice of occupation, it had been straight to the mines from school and then they were tied to the industry for the rest of the war. Whatever the dangers, many of them would have preferred to fight in the armed forces.

One group of boys who must have felt an even greater antagonism to their work situation were the conscripted recruits to mining, the Bevin Boys. In 1944 and 1945 there is no doubt that they were partially responsible for an increase in the 'avoidable absenteeism'



figures. W. J. Saddler wrote the following report in December 1944:

'During the month of September (1944) we feel that the absenteeism shown by the very high average figures of 19.89% is largely due to the new recruits coming into the industry ..... We have no complaints against the work of the Bevin Boys, but he does stay away from the pit. Many of them leave the pit and are not seen for weeks afterwards and it is very difficult to trace them'.<sup>55</sup>

Given that these recruits were conscripted against their will into mining in the first place and that most came from backgrounds totally divorced from mining their high rate of absenteeism should be in no way surprising.

Measures Designed to Deal with the Absentee Problem

Absenteeism upset the system of production in a colliery, as Ferdinand Zweig has described:

'First you lose one hour before you can arrange the replacement of absentees by spare men or by taking men off other faces. In some collieries the men would not move because they resent being shifted like sand, besides, being afraid of losing wages when the face to which they are to be transferred is regarded as worse than their own .....

..... if absenteeism was steady and regular the loss of output would be relatively small because one could foresee it and adapt the system of working beforehand. The trouble with absenteeism is that it is so erratic'.<sup>56</sup>

There is no doubting that absenteeism did cause some loss of production as the Zweig quotation explains, although this loss as it has already been shown was greatly exaggerated. In the face of the press campaign against those culpable, the Government was forced to act upon the problem. Even though it was recognised up to the highest levels of government that there were significant background factors behind the problem, the only practical attempts to reduce it during the war involved penal measures. These, if anything increased the problem, rather than reduced it.

Provisions for dealing with absentees were first introduced at the time of the EWO (Coalmining Industry) in May 1941, when the local National Service Officer was made responsible, in consultation with the Pit Production Committees, for imposing measures against them.<sup>57</sup> Later that year an amendment was made and full responsibility was given to the pit production committees to ensure that effective measures should be taken at the pit to deal with any person whose conduct militated against the maximum production of coal.<sup>58</sup>

Offenders were first to appear before the committees who would warn them that if they persisted to absent themselves from work without good reason the union would take no responsibility for their defence if they got into trouble. If trouble still persisted the men involved would then be at the mercy of the authorities and not the pit committees.<sup>59</sup> In some cases, therefore, pit production committees decided to institute police proceedings against habitual offenders. This happened at the Windsor Colliery after the absentee rate increased from 8.92% to 10.54% over one four-week period.<sup>60</sup>

The involvement of union officials in the policing of their own members was unpopular and as has been seen in the discussion of pit production committees,<sup>61</sup> it was widely felt that absenteeism should be dealt with by only the management and the authorities. The SWMF should only intervene it was thought, when men were unjustly blamed or penalised. The dislike of union representatives having to deal with their fellow workers was one of the reasons why absenteeism was not effectively being handled according to Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the Coalowners.<sup>62</sup> Thus both sides of the industry were not sorry to see an amendment to the EWO in September 1942. This stated that it was an immediate offence for a miner to be absent from work without reasonable excuse, to be persistently late, to fail to comply with any reasonable and lawful orders

given to him and to behave in work in a manner likely to impede effective production. A new officer of the Ministry of Fuel and Power was established, a Regional Investigation Officer, to either recommend for or against prosecution by the Ministry of Labour and National Service.<sup>63</sup>

A miner from Area No. 9 of the SWMF, the Forest of Dean, William Gwilliam entered the pages of legal history by becoming the first man to be charged and fined under this scheme,<sup>64</sup> although many had been fined and several sent to prison under the old scheme.<sup>65</sup>

For the months of September to November 1942, the immediate period following the introduction of the new order and the publicity surrounding it, the South Wales Regional Fuel Board reported a small decrease in 'avoidable absenteeism'.<sup>66</sup>

Following an increase in the December and January following, there was another decrease in February 1943. According to the Regional Controller this was due to the Ministry's concentration on the younger men. During the month cautions to 230 men had produced improvement in 202 cases.<sup>67</sup>

Persistent offenders were imprisoned. For example, an Aberdare Valley miner who was absent for 111 shifts in between November 7th 1942 and May 15th 1943, received a two month sentence. He was described by the National Service Officer as the worst case he had

ever had.<sup>68</sup> In addition to these imprisoned directly for absenteeism, some men were gaoled for refusing to pay fines imposed following convictions concerning absenteeism. This happened to two men who worked at the Seven Sisters colliery.<sup>69</sup>

In some cases the imprisonment of miners brought protests from their lodges and in one case, that of Arthur Roberts of Lady Windsor lodge, a stoppage was only narrowly averted. Roberts had lost 32 shifts in seven months, but including overtime he had worked more than seven shifts per week in this period. Only 'ordinary time' worked had been sent to the Ministry of Fuel and Power. Whilst he was imprisoned the lodge held a weekly collection to make up his pay and they eventually secured his early release.<sup>70</sup> Imprisonment was not always followed by protest however. It has been noted above<sup>71</sup> that the Glamorgan Pit Production Committee which included miners' representatives complained that measures against absentees were too lenient. The official SWMF position, as expressed by Arthur Horner in his 1943 Presidential Address to the Annual Conference of the SWMF was that no support of any kind would be given by the Federation to miners found guilty of avoidable absenteeism.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout 1943 however, absenteeism continued to increase and there was much disagreement concerning the effectiveness of the prosecutions. Iestyn Williams,

secretary of the Coalowners criticised the procedures as being ineffective, due to delays caused by the limitation of the Regional Investigation Officers powers. He could only recommend prosecution to the National Service Officer who then had to look into the matter himself. On the other hand, a member of the Ministry of Fuel and Power claimed that convictions were in no way a deterrent to absenteeism.<sup>74</sup>

Commenting upon the imprisonment of young men who had refused to be conscripted into the mines, Bert Coombes remarked that it was far more likely to make them life long rebels rather than miners.<sup>75</sup> Doubtless, the same could be said of those men imprisoned for persistent absenteeism.

A breakdown in the number of prosecutions for absenteeism is not as yet available, but it can be ascertained that the policy of imprisonment was reduced in 1944. The Ministry of Fuel and Power was not convinced of its validity and wished to see more involvement of the trade unions in the disciplinary procedures concerning persistent offenders, including their enforcement of expulsion from the union. This type of policy was supported by the Regional Fuel Controller in South Wales, William Jones, who considered that the majority of workmen were opposed to acts of indiscipline and should be encouraged to bring their influence on offenders.<sup>77</sup>

In South Wales, therefore, negotiations were pursued between the SWMF and the coalowners, and a variation of the national scheme was devised. Innovations introduced were that the managements reports on absentees were to be examined by the Regional Investigation Officer and two members of the local pit production committee, one from each side. The Pit Production committee didn't actually deal with the case itself as had been the practice in the months between May 1941 and September 1942. A second innovation was that there was to be a standard fine of between 10/- and £2. to be deducted from a man's wage and handed over to a charitable fund agreed by the local lodge and the management. Each case would be reviewed within two months in order to check whether the attendance of the man at work would qualify him for a refund of the fine imposed. There was some opposition amongst the SWMF EC to the union being involved in the imposition of fines on its members but the scheme was accepted in November 1944.<sup>78</sup>

B. Restriction of Output

Increasing indiscipline within the workforce was also considered by many as a major contributory cause of the declining output. A memorandum of the Ministry of Fuel and Power on November 8th stated that it was symptomatic of the unrest in the industry at that time, that the standard of discipline was declining. It was

said to be due to the removal of the main weapon for enforcing discipline in the prewar days - unemployment.<sup>79</sup>

The increase was reflected, not only in the increase of minor stoppages but also in attitudes to work inside the pit. This was reflected by two things, the increase in dirty filling and some deliberate restriction of output.

i) Dirty Filling - Dirty filling led to the decrease in the percentage of saleable coal from the quantity produced. During the years 1937 to 1944 Iestyn Williams for the coalowners, claimed that it had increased to an alarming extent. Saleable coal in relation to pit-head output had decreased from 94.63% to 88.97%.<sup>80</sup> According to one of the owners, Edward Hann of the Powell Duffryn Company, losses due to dirty filling were equivalent to the expenditure that had been made on machine mining.<sup>81</sup>

At a meeting of the South Wales Conciliation Board Sir Evan Williams told those in attendance that the filling of rubbish in South Wales was at a higher rate than anywhere else, and Iestyn Williams added that the blame could not be attributed to the introduction of machinery.<sup>82</sup> If this was so, however, it might be assumed that the increase was a direct response by the men to the oppression of their working conditions, especially to that imposed due to the speed up of operations following the introduction of machinery.



The South Wales Conciliation Board Agreement, accepted by the SWMF in March 1942 reflected the coalowners concern with the problem by including a clause emphasising the need to reduce it.<sup>83</sup>

ii) Go-slows and the 'Stint'

The South Wales Conciliation Board Agreement of 1942 also included a clause stating that 'stints' and restriction of output would not be practised. Restrictive practices had a long history in the mining industry, and in 1912 in the 'Miners Next Step' they had been forcefully recommended as a weapon of industrial militancy.<sup>84</sup> The 'stint' a fixed target on the coalface which every coal-getter could be expected to achieve without suffering from overwork was important to many miners because it gave them some measure of control over the work process.<sup>85</sup>

According to D. D. Evans, a former General Secretary of the South Wales Area of the NUM and a miners' agent in the Swansea Valley in the war years, the use of these tactics was usually determined by the quality of the coal in a particular pit. He illustrated his point by describing the collieries in the village of Ystalyfera. One, Tareni, was strike prone, another Tirbach, suffered commonly from go-slows and a third Pwllbach rarely took any form of militant action. He explained why he thought that this was so:

'Where you had go-slows in the main they were at collieries that produced quality coal. They could afford the go-slows. Now, at the poorer quality coal pits, say at Pwllbach, red vein coal, they daren't go slow, the colliery would go bankrupt. The margin was so small between the price you paid for the coal and the cost of the coal at the pit'.<sup>86</sup>

It is difficult to determine how widely such tactics were used during the war. On the one hand Professor Court believes that although restrictive practices were maintained in the war years, amongst the generality of workmen they were uncommon<sup>87</sup> whilst during the war spokesmen for the coal owners often claimed them to be on the increase. In the Maesteg and Bridgend area North's Navigation Colliery Company asserted that deliberate restriction of output was on the increase as a protest against the comparatively higher wages being paid to men and women at the Bridgend Arsenal.<sup>88</sup> Official memorandums from the coalowners cited both the Greene<sup>89</sup> and Porter Awards<sup>90</sup> as being responsible for a widespread increase in restrictive practices. These awards had led to a considerable increase in the demands for new price lists and the owners alleged that 'in such circumstances it is notorious that immediately the necessity arises to fix a new price list, a restriction of production is practised by the workmen in an endeavour to prove

that the ability to earn wages is low and consequently the piece-work price per unit should be high!

It was the belief of the coalowners that restrictions of output affected production by at least 25% and on average between 30% and 35%.<sup>91</sup> Whether this was true or false, whatever the percentage loss of output due to restrictive practices, there is little evidence to illustrate that they increased significantly in the war years, therefore this figure has little or no bearing on the wartime loss of output.<sup>92</sup>

### C. Sabotage

During the war years there was, undoubtedly, sabotage in the collieries of South Wales but the word, with its implications of sensational wreckage, in reality refers, here, to a series of small, though nonetheless damaging acts of misdemeanour. Such acts, however, provoked extreme rage on the part of some, especially colliery managers, who claimed that the practice was on the increase in the wartime coalfield.

The chief accuser was Mr. T. R. Tallis, the colliery agent in the Tredegar area. In November 1942 he wrote an article in the Western Mail entitled 'Coal Output Impeded by Wilful Acts of Damage!' Wilful acts perpetrated by workmen were retarding production, he asserted, and the workmen's representatives were doing little except to shield the culprits.<sup>93</sup> This brought a storm of protest from the SWMF and was referred to conference for discussion.<sup>94</sup> Arthur Horner issued a

statement to the press. The union would be amongst the first to condemn such actions and call for the punishment of those proven guilty, he said, for not only did they impede the war effort but they endangered the lives and limbs of those working underground. What Horner could not understand about Tallis' accusations, though, was that the matter had not been raised in discussion between the owners and the SWMF and that no proceedings had been taken against persons alleged to be guilty of such offences.<sup>95</sup>

Tallis responded to Horner by stating that of the eighteen cases he had cited, three had been the subject of successful prosecutions, whilst in the other fifteen cases the culprits could not have been traced. In all cases, he said, pit committees and other responsible SWMF officials had been informed. He went on to reassert that 'as a result of the tacit policy adopted by workmen in responsible positions there has been no restraining effect on the culprits.'<sup>96</sup>

Tallis was backed up in the press by colliery officials from the Rhondda and from Ammanford detailing incidents of sabotage in their areas. The impression being created seemed to be that there was a widespread movement of saboteurs at large in the coalfield.<sup>97</sup>

At the time of the pit managers' dispute over Pit Production Committees the colliery managers brought the issue to public light once more. One of their

number described a list of acts of sabotage enacted at his colliery in one two-month period,

- '1) wooden wedges inserted between the belt and the rollers of a belt conveyor, bringing the conveyor to a stop,
- 2) pumping arrangements interfered with at the end of the night shift so that the men on the next shift could not proceed to the face,
- 3) signal wires torn down,
- 4) signal wires stolen,
- 5) tappet rollers taken from the face conveyor engine,
- 6) sprags mounted into the reversing gear of an electric haulage engine,
- 7) bags for clearing at electric haulage motors and brushes for sweeping up the engine house were stolen,
- 8) men stole hatchets and saws (the most expensive tools) from their mates'.

This correspondent maintained that he had never before experienced such conduct in 30 years of work connected with mining. All those acts had the purpose of hindering production, he alleged.<sup>98</sup>

There is little doubt that such acts took place and that they did retard production, but the interpretation of the motivation attributed to those who were responsible is open to question. Tallis and other colliery managers seem more concerned at times with discrediting the SWMF and the whole body of workmen in the industry.

Implications of a widespread movement, suggestions of complicity of the union officials in shielding culprits and a total lack of discrimination in their remarks, thus tarnishing all miners with the same image as unpatriotic saboteurs did little to allow for rational discussion of the problem. There is little evidence to indicate that sabotage increased in the war years, and as with restrictive practices it is a false use of statistics to relate this factor to the wartime decline of output.

The timing of the allegations made by the colliery managers is also suspect in that they are made during periods of dispute concerning the operation of pit production committees, whilst support for their remarks are not forthcoming from the coalowners. Indeed in December 1943 Idstyn Williams commenting on the effectiveness of pit production committees noted that there were only 'a few isolated cases of reference to definite acts of sabotage'.<sup>99</sup> The problem, however, undeniably existed and was recognised by union officials. Bert Coombes expressed his bewilderment at such cases:-

'Strange as it may seem there are irresponsible persons, even among the miners who insist on damaging things invented for their own benefit. We have found sprays smashed and pipes punctured in places where no accident can be blamed. Detection is

difficult because of the darkness, but we have decided that no mercy will be shown to any culprit. What causes this strange destructive tendency apparently allied to complete disregard of all ideas of right and wrong? It is confined to only a small section of the workers, probably no more than five percent, but it is a cancer that must be killed.

'Frequently we find men's tools smashed and locks destroyed. These sets of tools may be worth up to ten pounds and a man pays for them himself - without them he cannot do his work properly. Then we find an engine damaged after the driver has gone out, or safety appliances damaged. Ventilation doors unhinged, boots and clothes stoken from the pithead baths, and even places where mandril points have been driven through glass screens and doors of welfare buildings. It is a strange mentality and shows something lacking in our methods of education.

'I wonder, is it a sign of boredom or a protest against working conditions?' <sup>100</sup> This quotation from Coombes is especially important in that it illustrates that the victims of sabotage were mainly the miners themselves, both financially and in terms of their personal safety. Owners, of course, would have to

suffer the cost of repairs and replacement and production would also be affected, but that the actions were deliberately designed to hinder production is doubtful. Sidney Jones, a miners' agent in the Tredegar area considered that the acts were those of mainly ignorant and irresponsible youths who had no thought of sabotage and who did not trouble themselves either one way or the other with the war effort. 'The malpractices' he suggested, 'could not be described as consciously unpatriotic actions'.<sup>101</sup>

There have been a number of analyses of sabotage and one, with particular relevance to mining, has come from Dave Douglas, a modern 'miner-writer' who has written about the Durham coalfield. Sabotage, he notes can be a common feature where pit conditions are bad and one job, haulage, he believes particularly invites sabotage. Several of the acts referred to by the colliery manager above, concern haulage gear:-

'The young worker is faced with an endless stream of tubs, minute by minute, hour by hour, day after day, The situation seems hopeless; the worker literally can't stop, even for a drink of water, because if he does so, the stream of tubs bump into each other and come to a stop. They then have to be pushed from a dead start, which is very hard work, and for the rest of the shift he



will be working to make up for lost time. He may organise a smash-up to get a rest .... A more desperate form of restriction which I witnessed among young haulage workers is self sabotage. The worker may be so desperate in the face of the speed and intensity of his job that he hurts himself deliberately to escape from it and have a few weeks on the club'.<sup>102</sup>

K. G. Knowles in his work on 'Strikes' suggests that most sabotage is probably an expression of industrial discontent. He sees it as generally characterising a weak trade union movement.<sup>103</sup> Whilst it would be absolutely wrong to characterise the SWMF as weak there was during the war, at various times, a high level of discontent with the union. One such time was during the large scale unofficial action concerning the Porter Award. Shortly after the resumption of work following the strike, haulage gear was found at the bottom of Steer Pit, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, with sand in the motor bearings.<sup>104</sup> This pit had a reputation as both militant and unconstitutional. The high level of stoppages there probably partly reflected irritation of the workers with the conciliatory policies generally adopted by the union throughout the war. The return to work after a fortnight long strike with no concrete gains having been received could well have been the crucial background factor in provoking this particular

act of sabotage. Other acts in other pits may well have been indicative of the discontent of individuals with the union policies and leadership.

Those men accused of sabotage and found guilty were dealt with severely by the courts and received long prison sentences. The most notable case occurred in 1941 when a fifty-one year old miner, Bernard Rombach of Abernant was sentenced to three years for alleged sabotage and malicious damage to the elevator of the washery at Werfa Dare colliery. Rombach claimed at his trial that the damage was accidental and that he had, previously, a very good conduct record.<sup>105</sup> Attempts to secure his release, however, failed.<sup>106</sup>

1. Norman Longmate 'How We Lived Then - a history of every day life during the Second World War' (London, 1971) p. 321.
2. Western Mail, 24 March 1941.
3. Ibid., 25 March 1941.
4. Ibid., 24 September 1941.
5. Ibid., 16 May 1942.
6. Ibid., 18 August 1942.
7. Ibid., 26 October 1942.
8. Ibid., 12 March 1943.
9. Ibid., 24 April 1943.
10. 390 H.C. Debs. 23 June 1943.
11. Western Mail, 6 January 1944.
12. SWMF Circular to the MFGB 7 December 1943.
13. Western Mail, 22 February 1943.
14. 390 H.C. Debs. 23 June 1943.
15. Mass Observation, op. cit., p.45.
16. See Table I in Appendix VI. p. 708.
17. See Section I Chapter III pp 140-147.
18. See Table II in Appendix VI. p. 708.
19. Ministry of Fuel and Power Statistical Digest From 1938. Published 1944, Table 17, p. 29.
20. S. Moos 'The Statistics of Absenteeism in Coal Mining', The Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies, Vol. XIX, p. 99-100.
21. 390 H.C. Debs. 23 June 1943.

22. SWMF Circular to the MFGB, 7 December 1944.
23. 390 H.C. Debs. 23 June 1943.
24. Calder, *op. cit.*, p. 437.
25. POWE 20/55 Memorandum on Absenteeism, January 1943.
26. Coombes, Those Clouded Hills, p. 51.
27. Ferdinand Zweig, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
28. Daily Express, 14 July 1941.
29. PREM 4, 40/17 'Sickness and Absenteeism December 1942 - July 1943'.
30. 383 H.C. Debs. 6 October 1942.
31. Western Mail, 30 October 1944.
32. Daily Herald, 3 February 1942.
33. Statement of the SWMF EC to the Western Mail, 26 March 1941. See also Section I Chapter III p.
34. PREM 4 40/4 Letter to the Prime Minister, January 1941.
35. Coombes, Miners Day, p. 78.
36. Western Mail, 26 March 1941.
37. POWE 20/55 Memorandum on Absenteeism, January 1943.
38. Aberdare Leader, 10 April 1943.
39. See Section I Chapter III. p. 228.
40. See Table IV in Appendix VI. p. 710.
41. Zweig *op. cit.*, p. 66-7.
42. Western Mail, 14 June 1940.
43. Daily Express, 12 September 1941.
44. Aberdare Leader, 14 November 1942.
45. Minutes of Meetings of the Representatives of the Coalowners on the South Wales Conciliation Board, 1 January 1940 and 26 February 1940, The News Chronicle, 22 December 1939.

46. SWMF EC Minutes, 9 September 1941.
47. Western Mail, 24 September 1941.
48. Interview with Idwal Penhallurick E.C. member for the Vale of Neath at that time. 19 March 1973. The Fair Day was in fact a 'stop-day' for which the men were not paid. Within the workforce at Aberpergwm colliery, especially, there were a large number of men from Aberdare and Merthyr to whom the Fair Day meant nothing - only loss of pay. There was therefore, a division of opinion on the issue amongst the men themselves.
49. See above p. 289.
50. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report, 1946. Para 227, p. 87.
51. Western Mail, 29 May 1943.
52. POWE 20/55 Absenteeism at Collieries. Letter from editor of Western Mail to Minister of Fuel and Power, written 15 October 1942.
53. 383 H.C. Debs. 6 October 1942.
54. Aberdare Leader, 11 November 1944.
55. SWMF Circular to the MFGB, 7 December 1944.
56. Zweig, op. cit., p. 58.
57. Ministry of Labour Gazette, May 1941 p. 95.
58. Ibid., October 1941, p. 197.
59. Western Mail, 29 September 1941.
60. Minutes of the Proceedings of the South Wales and Mon. Conciliation Board, 10 November 1941.

61. See above Section I Chapter III, p.209-210.
62. Minutes of the South Wales Branch of the NACM, 25 July 1942 in the Transactions of the NACM Yearbook, 1943.
63. Ministry of Labour Gazette, September 1942, p. 160.
64. Western Mail, 19 November 1942.
65. e.g. a Blaenavon miner was imprisoned for two months in April 1942 Western Mail 1 April 1942 and two Dowlais-Cardiff miners were similarly sentenced in May 1942. Aberdare Leader, 2 May 1942.
66. Western Mail, 19 January 1943.
67. Ibid., 16 March 1943.
68. Aberdare Leader, 12 June 1943.
69. SWMF EC Minutes 8 June 1943.
70. Lady Windsor Lodge Minutes, General Meetings 9 May 1943 and 16 May 1943, SWMF EC Minutes 11 May 1943.
71. See above p. 290.
72. Western Mail, 30 April 1943.
73. South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Memorandum on the effect on Coal Production of the application of the terms of the Government White Paper presented to Parliament on 3 June 1942 upon the South Wales Mining Industry, March 1946.
74. POWE 20/55 Memorandum on Absenteeism, January 1943.
75. Coombes, Miners Day, p. 81.
76. POWE 20/55 Memorandum on Absenteeism, January 1943.
77. Minutes of the South Wales Branch of the NACM, 6 February 1943, in the Transactions of the NACM Yearbook, 1944.

78. SWMF EC Minutes, 14 November 1944.
79. CAB 87/93 Committee on the Reorganisation of the Coal Industry, Causes and Decline in the Output of Coal - A Memo. by the Ministry of Fuel and Power - 8 November 1943.
80. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Memorandum Re - Declining Standards of Production - June 1945.
81. Minutes of Meeting of the Coalowners Representatives on the Conciliation Board, 29 September 1941.
82. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the South Wales Conciliation Board, 18 April 1940.
83. The South Wales Joint Conciliation Board Agreement, March 1942.
84. 'The Miners' Next Step' first published in 1912 by the Unofficial Reform Committee. Reprinted by the South Wales Area of the NUM in January 1973, p. 29-31.
85. Zweig, op. cit., p. 49-50.
86. D. D. Evans interviewed by Hywel Francis 5 December 1972. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
87. Court, op. cit., p. 124.
88. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Memorandum on 'Productive Ability, Factors Likely to Mitigate against Maximum Productivity' - April 1941.
89. Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Memorandum on 'The Effect on Coal Production of the Application of the terms of the Government White Paper Presented to Parliament on 3 June 1942, upon the South Wales Mining Industry'. March 1946.

90. Monmouthshire and South Wales Memorandum re-Declining Standards of Production, June 1945.
91. Memorandum on the 'Stint' in the Anthracite Area prepared by R. W. Burgess and J. Davies 1943.
92. This view is supported by Professor Court making the following summation concerning restrictive practices. 'The explanation of fall in output at the coalface was not due to some such cause, its explanation must be sought in other influences which were peculiar to the war years. Restrictive practices were not'. op. cit., p. 34.
93. Western Mail, 17 November 1942.
94. SWMF EC Minutes, 24 November 1942.
95. Western Mail, 18 November 1942.
96. Ibid., 19 November 1942.
97. Ibid., 20 November 1942.
98. Ibid., 14 January 1944.
99. Memorandum from Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association to the MFGB on the Minutes of Various Pit Production Committees, December 1943.
100. Coombes, Those Clouded Hills p. 18-19.
101. Western Mail, 19 November 1942.
102. David Douglas Pit Life in County Durham p. 41
103. K. J. C. Knowles, Strikes; A Study in Industrial Conflict (Oxford, 1952) p. 13.



104. Western Mail, 18 March 1944.

105. Aberdare Leader, 13 December 1941.

106. SWMF EC Minutes 14 April 1942 and 27 October 1942.

CHAPTER IIIUNOFFICIAL STRIKES - A GENERAL SURVEY

Every single strike that took place in the South Wales coalfield in the war years was unofficial. None received the sanction of the SWMF. In fact, after July 1940 when the T.U.C. accepted the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order it became illegal for union officials to call their men out on strike. The Order amounted to the renunciation by the trade unions of the use of the strike weapon, and the introduction of compulsory arbitration in the last resort in disputes.<sup>1</sup>

What the order could not do, however, was to prevent workers themselves organising unofficial strikes and hence, one of the out-standing phenomena of wartime industrial relations, not only in South Wales, but throughout the rest of Britain, was the preponderance of unofficial strikes. Despite the fact that all strikes were unofficial the years 1943 and 1944 saw more individual stoppages in industry than any year since 1890.<sup>2</sup>

The main feature of these stoppages was that they were short in duration, small numbers of men were involved and they were usually limited to one works or pit. It would be misleading, however, to give the impression that the spate of unofficial stoppages were a direct result of wartime conditions specifically. Indeed, it has already been noted above<sup>3</sup> that all strikes in the South Wales Coalfield were unofficial after 1937, two years before the war started.

In his book 'British Trade Unions', Noah Baroër has put forward the case that these stoppages were the 'illegitimate child of industrial conciliation'.<sup>4</sup> The process of negotiations under the conciliation procedure, he maintained, almost always proved to be slow and to result in compromises. On both counts this gave rise to dissatisfaction. This can be instanced in South Wales by reference to replies made to a questionnaire circulated within the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine lodges in August 1941 concerning delays experienced in the settlement of disputes. Rock, Pantyffynon, Pentremawr, Pwllbach, Ystalyfera, Carway and Armanford lodges all complained of long delays and two lodges stipulated the length of such delays. Cross Hands lodge replied that they were awaiting a decision from arbitration since July 1940 and Cefn Coed announced that they had been awaiting a decision for over two and a half years.<sup>5</sup> Another problem was that miners' officials considered that conciliation was not in all cases suitable, especially where abnormality of working conditions was concerned. To solve such cases it operated far too slowly because the desire for a quick settlement would be prevalent in the men's minds.<sup>6</sup>

In Britain in 1944 two-thirds of all strikes were in the coalmining industry. This percentage was not an unusual statistic, however. In the period 1890-

1945 the number of strikes in the coalmining industry was higher than in all the other industries put together, but it is in these war years that strike action amongst miners reached its peak.<sup>7</sup>

In the South Wales Coalfield there were 514 stoppages in the period from the commencement of the war until the end of October 1944.<sup>8</sup> The majority of these were short, averaging about three days, and they were usually limited to one pit or district of a pit. Whilst this number may seem large and was certainly used by those critical of the miners war effort, an analysis of the number of actual pit days lost because of the strikes and the effects of these strikes in terms of tonnage lost is seen as not being as extensive as in other prewar years. In the six years 1914-20, for example 9,962 pit days were lost owing to disputes which involved a tonnage loss of 6,157,001, whilst in the six years 1939 to 1945 the comparative figures read 3,777 and 1,062,848. The figures for 1939-1945 include a pit days idle total of 2,657 for 1944 and a tonnage loss of 681,164 - this was the year of the coalfield-wide Porter Award strike.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout all the British coalfields in the years 1939-1943 and including the first quarter of 1944, losses of saleable coal from causes other than absenteeism amounted to 49,874,700 tons. Of these just over one tenth of the loss, 5,475,000 tons was as a

result of disputes. The percentage loss is minimised even more if it also is taken into consideration that the miners were saving over three and a half million tons on average every year after 1939 by accepting a reduction in holidays.<sup>10</sup>

These figures tend to indicate that the detrimental influence that the strikes in the mining industry had on the war effort was grossly exaggerated. Claims that the series of sporadic unofficial strikes affected the output of coal in Britain to a greater extent than the heavy bombing of the Ruhr by the R.A.F. affected German output, were only made for emotive effect.<sup>11</sup>

A prominent economist, Professor Bowley, estimated that the country's loss of coal through strikes in these years was negligible,<sup>12</sup> and this assertion was backed up by Mr. D. R. Grenfell, Labour M.P. for Gower and a Secretary of State for the Mines in the early years of the war. 'The time lost through strikes in the industry throughout the war', he told the House of Commons, 'was less than a quarter of an hour per man per week. The men had worked illegal overtime far in excess of that'.<sup>13</sup>

However negligible the effect of the strikes on output was, they still remain an important phenomenon to be considered. It is difficult not to agree with N. Barou that the vast number was proof of the

unhealthy, unhappy and highly dangerous conditions of the industry.<sup>14</sup> They were evidence of the tremendous dissatisfaction felt within the industry both with conditions of work and wage rates. They largely represented a form of pressure to be put on the trade union Leadership and the Government to remedy grievances. Alan Bullock effectively summed up the wartime mentality of the miners when he wrote in his biography of Ernest Bevin that:-

'The miners are not lacking in patriotism, as their record in the fighting services shows, and there has never been any doubt about their strong political interest, of their hatred of Nazism. But in their attitudes to their own industry there was a conflict between the miners undoubted patriotism and his strong sense of wrongs unremedied'.<sup>15</sup>

#### Chronological Outline of Strikes During the War Years.

As was the case with absenteeism and the decline in output the intensity of the unofficial strikes was variable. Particular political events, at home and abroad, affected the quantity.

From the start of the war until the last months of 1941 there were comparatively few stoppages, as is proven by the number of pit days idle owing to disputes in those years - 141 in 1940 and 105 in 1941. The

Fall of France in particular had a damping down effect. There was only one dispute that lasted for any length of time in this whole period. This occurred in March 1940 in the Dulais valley, involving five collieries in the Evans-Bevan Combine for between nine and eleven days.<sup>17</sup> Over 3,000 men were involved altogether. This issue concerned the non-payment of extra allowances for pushing trams up steep places at Brynteg Colliery. The money had been paid since 1934 but the company had recently adopted a policy of an all-in price that excluded the 7/6d. extra allowance.<sup>18</sup> Twice during the dispute the Joint Combine Committee of the Evans-Bevan collieries rejected the recommendation of the SWMF that notices be withdrawn and work resumed.<sup>19</sup>

The strike was the first major one in South Wales since the war had begun and it immediately prompted a 'red-scare!' The News Chronicle quoted a miners' leader as stating that the application of the conciliation machinery was obstructed by agitators from London, the Rhondda and Ammanford.<sup>20</sup> The secretary of Dillwyn Lodge, E. W. Evans, strongly denied this and blamed the strike on the slow moving operation of the disputes machinery.<sup>21</sup>

Although strikes were few in these first few years, the press was quick to draw attention to any that did take place, such as those at Brynteg in March 1941 which lasted for fourteen days,<sup>22</sup> Elliot Colliery<sup>23</sup>

and Markham Colliery in June 1941.<sup>24</sup> These last two strikes lasted just four and two days each, but as both collieries were large, employing over 1,500 men, output losses would be fairly high. If these strikes had taken place at any other time they would most probably have by-passed the notice of the press.

Towards the end of 1941 strikes began to become more frequent in number and the tendency continued throughout the early months of 1942. In March 1942, there was a fifteen-day stoppage at Onllwyn No. 3 in the Dulais Valley, the longest individual stoppage in the coalfield of the war.<sup>25</sup> There was a build-up of strikes to a small crescendo in May 1942.<sup>26</sup> These included a four day stoppage at the Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd where over 1,000 men were employed.<sup>27</sup> National wage negotiations were taking place at this time on the Greene Award, so the SWMF urged all strikers back to work in case they prejudiced the outcome.

One of the main motives behind these strikes was a general dissatisfaction with wage rates, especially in comparison with other industries. The Greene Award announced in June 1942 was very much a response to this dissatisfaction which had in fact been demonstrated more forcibly in other coalfields. However there were other important factors in motion. Alan Bullock believed that for two years the sense of common national danger had effectively damped down the economic and



social conflict of the inter-war years. By 1942, however, the miners resentment at the indifference of the rest of the nation to their conditions was being revived. The events following the Fall of France had rekindled old feelings of insecurity and an attitude of intransigence caused by the accumulation of grievances, war weariness, the Essential Works Order and the wages question, was emerging.<sup>28</sup> This analysis is largely supported by Henry Pelling who considered that the change in the war situation at this time made possible an expression of such feeling. The war had moved away from the skies above Britain itself to distant theatres of the world which people could not visualise.<sup>29</sup>

In South Wales such a mood did not express itself solely in strikes. As has been noted above, another form of expression was probably demonstrated in the coalfield votes concerning the new Conciliation Board Agreement in January and March 1942.<sup>30</sup> Arthur Horner described the mood in the following way:

'There is a terrific feeling in the coalfield which is almost 'un-get - able'. I find it like elastic: if you go and push against it, it has got no clear justification which can express and articulate, and it gives, but immediately afterwards it comes back in the same place'.<sup>31</sup>

The announcement of the Greene Award and with it Dual Control put a brake upon the situation, although it far from satisfied the apprentice boys. With the exception of their strikes<sup>32</sup> there was a quiescent period for a short time. It was, however, the lull before the storm. The year between March 1943 and April 1944 proved to be one of the most troublesome in the history of the industry and because of this requires separate treatment, and is discussed elsewhere.<sup>33</sup>

A turbulent twelve months came to an end in April 1944 with the eventual acceptance of the Porter Award and the National Conciliation Board Agreement. Relative peace returned to the coalfield and the invasion of Normandy by allied forces ensured a period of further calm. The last nine months of the war did not produce any major stoppages but the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales was at pains to point out in his reports that there was a large degree of restlessness amongst the workforce. He attributed this to the feelings of uncertainty that the men sensed about the postwar situation. Anxiousness about the effects of changes in production and the curtailment of war contracts was becoming evident, he thought.<sup>34</sup> Commenting on an increase in the number of disputes in October and November 1944 he had the impression that workers were becoming conscious of the approaching end of the war and were taking more interest in their employment conditions, whilst on the other hand employers were becoming more

and more reluctant to make concessions when claims were presented to them.<sup>35</sup>

Wales had been a depressed area before the war and there were genuine fears that it would return to such a state afterwards. These fears were voiced through the local press. The following extract from an editorial in the Aberdare Leader may give some indication of the feelings of apprehension felt about the future.

'Growing impatience can be detected in letters we receive from serving men and home readers regarding prospects for the post-war years in their valley. There is a general fear of recurrence of the depression and the unemployment which followed the last war. This is fed by lack of news of what is being done in Mountain Ash and Aberdare to create work and build houses'.<sup>36</sup>

As early as 1942 a mass observation investigation had reported that the 'prevalent feeling' was that after the war 'money will be tight and jobs scarce'. Most people based their expectations on what had happened at the end of the First World War, and on this basis a victory for Britain could amount to a personal defeat for the employee.<sup>37</sup>

Uncertainty was on every miners mind in these last months of the war but surprisingly, perhaps, there was no

major outbreaks of unrest. There are two disputes of note, in that they both involved the tactic of the stay down strike. After the successful use of the tactic in the struggle against company unionism they had become fairly frequent towards the end of the nineteen thirties, often used in fairly minor disagreements. They had been almost totally absent from the industrial scene in the war years, so it is interesting to see a slight re-emergence at the tail end of the war. One was at Nine Mile Point, scene of a dramatic stay-down in 1935.<sup>39</sup> In May 1945, twenty-eight men stayed down for three days<sup>40</sup> and at Steer Pit, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, twenty-five men stayed down for two days in June.<sup>41</sup> The Steer Pit dispute was a protest against fines made upon men for alleged ca'canny whilst the Nine Mile Point issue involved disputes procedures at the colliery. A workman there made the following significant quote to a reporter during the strike. It is illustrative of the attitude of many during this closing phase of the war:

'We are not thinking of the past, or the present, but of the future and not only of Nine Mile Point, but other South Wales collieries as well'.<sup>42</sup>

### Causes of the Strikes

#### 1) Political Agitators

Henry Pelling in discussing the industrial relations of the Second World War concludes that one of the

remarkable features was the 'almost entire absence of political motivation in the strikes that took place'.<sup>43</sup> From a reading of the popular press during the period such a conclusion might not appear to be true. It has been noted above how the first lengthy strike of the war in the South Wales mines was attributed to outside agitators<sup>44</sup> and it was a persistent allegation in the following years. In the period down to the Nazi invasion of the U.S.S.R. blame was placed on members of the Communist Party. This bogey has been effectively debunked by K. G. Knowles in the following manner:-

'Unofficial strikes, in general, cannot be wholly ascribed to political poltergists. One cannot agitate in a vacuum. Significantly, perhaps, the number of strikes reached its all-time maximum during the recent war, when Communist influence had been thrown into the opposite scale and the influence of the political splinters such as Trotskyists was more or less negligible ..... Although towards the end of the interwar period Communists may have been able to instigate particular strikes their influence seems to have been slight, not only in 1939-40, but also after it was thrown on the other side in 1941, e.g. the greatest damping down of

strikes took place in 1940 (in the period of Dunkirk) and in 1944 (during the invasion of Normandy) rather than in 1941 (during the Battle of Moscow) or in 1942 (during the drive towards Stalingrad). These figures although straws in the wind imply that Communist influence on strikes was overshadowed by stronger motives'.<sup>45</sup>

What Knowles has written refers to the general experience in Britain, but it also applies in microcosm to South Wales, in an area where the Communist Party was relatively strong and of course where one of its members, Arthur Horner, was President of the SWMF. Oral evidence collected provides little evidence that the Communist Party attempted to provoke strikes or retard production in the period before June 1941.<sup>46</sup>

Towards the end of the war Trotskyists replaced the Communist Party as the 'political poltergeists'. Rumours of their activities were quite widespread throughout Britain in 1943, but there is little evidence of activity in South Wales before the strike over the Porter Award in March in 1944.<sup>47</sup> The 'Red Scare' at this time was largely the work of the Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin, aided, certainly in South Wales, paradoxically, by the Communist Party.<sup>48</sup> Later on, in 1944 one SWMF lodge did complain about the activities of the Revolutionary Communist Party and called upon the SWMF executive to take some action

upon the matter,<sup>49</sup> which they refused to do. Though the RCP did build some small roots in South Wales in 1944 and 1945 their influence upon the labour movement was next to non-existent. Aneurin Bevan summed up the creditability of the 'Red Scare' in the following manner:-

'It was an insult to the miners to suggest that they went on strike in opposition to the advice of their own leaders as a result of the advice and agitation of a small outside body of obscure political pedants. It was either an insult to the intelligence of the miners, or on the other hand, to the public'.<sup>50</sup>

During the last turbulent months of 1943 an allegation that had been made many times before the war was reiterated. Trouble and discontent was rife in the industry, because the union supported so many 'paid agitators'. So said John Kane, a prominent member of the South Wales Colliery Managers Association.<sup>51</sup> These 'paid agitators' included miners M.P's some of whom 'thrived on making trouble', members of the union executive and miners' agents, 'most of whom reached their positions by means of possessing a slick tongue and an aptitude for causing trouble over trifling things', and local lodge officials, committee men and check weighers.<sup>52</sup> The continuous competition for office at colliery level was the source of 90% of labour troubles according to Kane. Given that all

strikes were unofficial at this time and that miners M.P's and the SWMF EC were particularly prominent in trying to prevent them, these allegations can hold little substance. The SWMF was quick to respond to what was considered to be a gross insult.

'The attempt by Mr. Kane to convey the impression that union officials are incapable of, or fearful of standing up to tendencies which would interfere with the effective prosecution of the war is a slander, and a shameful one at that ..... The fact that orderly relations have been maintained despite the inflammable situation during the years of the war is the complete answer to people holding the views of Mr. Kane'.<sup>53</sup>

It is, of course, true that many of the people in the positions referred to by Kane were members of political organisations, but generally whatever their agreements or disagreements with the SWMF EC policy, they would carry out accepted policy. There is no better example than Arthur Horner himself, who, although a Communist Party member, accepted the union policy of supporting the war effort after the SWMF had discussed its attitude in a special conference in February 1940.<sup>54</sup> Men elected to the positions mentioned by Kane were usually there not because of their political stance but because of their proven ability as



negotiators. Thus, when Trevor James, who held the view that the war effort should not be supported because of its imperialist nature was elected as miners' agent in SWMF Area No. 1 in 1942 with 17,000 votes<sup>55</sup> it cannot be construed that in this West Wales region there were 17,000 men who were rabidly opposed to British participation in the war.

The charge that agitators were at the root of most strikes can thus be largely dismissed. It was the situation in the coalfield in 1944 that brought the Trotskyists down to South Wales, for instance, not they that fermented the disputes. Commenting on the role of agitators in strikes Knowles was of the belief that strikes could not be artificially created, and agitators could only be successful in a case where widespread grievances were already apparent.<sup>56</sup> They were apparent in the South Wales coalfield and no outside instigator was necessary to stir up discontent.

#### ii) Preconditions Usually Present in Most Strike Situations

The background factors behind the cause of the wartime strikes are not dissimilar to those responsible for the decline in output and the increase in absenteeism.<sup>57</sup> The wartime miner had many tangible grievances, some created by the war and others that had been ever present throughout his life. His apprehension for the future and, equally, his bitter remembrance of the past<sup>58</sup> helped mould the psychology

that made him prepared to strike to remedy those grievances.

In his study on strikes, Knowles maintains that in most strike situations there are usually three underlying causes in operation.<sup>59</sup> All three were apparent in the South Wales coalfield during the war.

a) Bad Social Conditions - In 1917 there was a commission of enquiry into industrial unrest in the South Wales coalfield one of whose main conclusions was that the conflict was accentuated by the fact that the social conditions of the working class were of an unsatisfactory character. 'Miners felt deeply discontented with their housing accomodation and with the unwholesome and unattractive environment', the report concluded.<sup>60</sup>

Houses in most communities had been thrown up in the area and once the great influx of workers and their families had entered, first to work in the iron works in the early nineteenth century and then the coalmines towards the end of the century. Most of the poor housing referred to in 1917 still remained and it is significant that a government memorandum on absenteeism, mentioned above, pointed to poor housing and lack of recreational facilities as potent factors contributing to unrest.<sup>61</sup>

b) Fatigue and Frustration - Knowles was of the opinion that many wartime strikes in particular were a reaction

to overstrain and often represented a concealed holiday.<sup>62</sup> It has already been noted that the number of extra days worked by miners throughout the war due to loss of holidays greatly outnumbered the work days lost through strikes.<sup>63</sup>

c) Inferiority of the Workers Position. Knowles believed that in general a worker's discontent would be intensified by the weakness of his bargaining power.<sup>64</sup> Whilst this might be an operative factor it worked with a twist during the war. It was felt by many that the miners had, in fact, a far greater bargaining power than ever before, vital as their co-operation was in the war effort. Arthur Horner actually stated this in a meeting at Mountain Ash. The miners union and the majority of workers, however, had no great desire to take advantage of this potential strength, described by the Aberdare Leader as being like 'two sticks of dynamite in the miners pocket'.<sup>65</sup> Such a responsible attitude, however, it was thought was leading to the exploitation of their patriotism. Indeed, in March 1943 the SWMF EC did release a statement accusing the owners of taking advantage of union policy of not advocating strikes for fear of impeding the war effort.<sup>66</sup>

iii) Grievances Developed by Wartime Conditions

War necessarily brought with it disruption, inconvenience and irritation. Everyone in the country

had to suffer this, not only the miners, but there were cases where regulations and alterations were made with a lack of sensitivity and understanding. Small cases of irritation or injustice rankled and as their number increased so did frustration in the workmen's minds. The first two points, below, aim to illustrate this. Everyone had to use the blackout and disruption of bus services was common throughout the country. Generally there was little complaint and they became accepted in the way of life, but the cases below show how insensitive handling by the authorities could turn an inconvenience into a major grievance.

a) The Blackout - Many collieries were situated up inaccessible hillsides and had to be approached by very poor roads. In such circumstances the blackout regulations created a positive hazard. However, it took an unsavoury incident to make the authorities recognise that a problem existed and that the regulations should be stretched. A miner in the Midlands was fined for carrying his lamp between the lamp-room and the pit-head, and this led James Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelli to raise the matter in Parliament.<sup>67</sup>

A controversial incident occurred at the Lewis Merthyr colliery concerning the blackout. Men were told by an official to carry lights for a particular job. The lights were beyond what the police considered to be proper and the men were fined for an offence against

the lighting regulations.<sup>68</sup> What is odd about this case, however, which made it contentious, was that it was the men that were fined whilst the colliery company at the behest of whom the men had carried the lights escaped conviction.

b) Bus Services - Many miners lived many miles away from their workplaces and were dependent upon efficient transportation to and from work. The extent of travelling required was probably greater than was necessary and was a result of decisions implemented by the coalowners as Arthur Horner told the Annual SWMF Conference in 1940:-

'Following the 1926 stoppage I am afraid certain Coalowners drew the conclusion that they could restrain the workmen if they separated them from each other socially. The view was expressed that if the men only met in their work, and did not fraternise with each other so fully in the evenings, there would be less prospect of unity within the ranks, and therefore less likelihood of stoppages and strikes. The result of this is that men are passing each other going to and from work, travelling as much as 20 miles in a day which is quite unnecessary'.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, a grievance existed prior to the war and a curtailment of services made matters worse. In Area No. 1, West Wales, it was alleged that services had

been reduced by fifty per cent, and that to be at the collieries in time some of the men had to leave home two hours before they had done so previously, and then suffer similarly on return.<sup>70</sup>

Other complaints were that the men had to pay their own bus fares, and that the buses were overcrowded. A collier from Pantyffynon complained to the local press that after a hard day's work it was no joke to travel for nine miles, standing, along with thirty other people.<sup>71</sup>

An incident that brought quite widespread publicity and occasioned much disgruntlement took place at Penallta Colliery. The colliery employed 130 men from Merthyr who travelled the thirteen miles distance by bus. The service was inadequate and the men were often late, up to four out of six times a week. In one six-week period the men lost five shifts for which they were never compensated, because the bus arrived so late. The men were not allowed down the colliery. After complaints to the Traffic Commissioner, the service was improved, but soon lapsed again so that the men became late on numerous occasions. Sometimes the manager allowed the men to go down the pit on being approached by the bus driver, but on occasions he refused to let them down.

On June 8th, 1943 the service was so late leaving Merthyr that one bus did not stop to pick up men

on the way down and at another point the men felt it was too late to board the bus in view of the manager's attitude on previous occasions.

When the bus arrived at the pithead, the driver refused to make the customary appeal to the manager, and the men, in order to enforce the Traffic Commission to remedy the service, returned home.

The manager ascertained the names of 27 of the men in the bus and obtained the names of these that had not travelled. All were sued for breach of contract and summoned before the County Court. They were fined between sums varying from £5-7-1 to £6-19-1 to be paid weekly in deductions of 5/- per week. The total damages were estimated to be over £400.<sup>72</sup>

This particular incident was cited by Arthur Horner at one Conciliation Board meeting as an example of the type of episode that could lead to an outburst of tensions in the coalfield.<sup>73</sup>

The complaints concerning the blackout and bus services might seem to be trivial, but constant irritation explains why on many occasions men came out on strike when there appeared to be no substantive reason. It was experiences such as those of the Penallta men that produced 'inflammable human material',<sup>74</sup> that could be ignited at any time.

c) The Breaking Down of Customs. - The erosion of established customs was another contentious issue. It was this, Bert Coombes, believed that was the basic cause of many sudden stoppages. He quotes several examples:-

' A boy is sent to do a man's job at a boy's pay; The custom of going out with a dead man being given up; The fair day; The insistence on each man sticking to his job had been lost and the refusal to owners to collect union fees had been surrendered.<sup>75</sup>

Such losses were resented, particularly as the men felt, as a result of bitter experience, that anything given away, even temporarily, would be gone forever. Hence, even though the union leadership had made these concessions, at pit level, men were still determined to retain time-honoured practices.

Strikes over 'customs' were heavily criticised in the press and one SWMF official told his membership that they should not expect to be able to drift along complacently, clinging to their old manners, traditions and customs, when their comrades of the working class in many other lands were working as slaves'.<sup>76</sup>

Coombes, however, supported the attitude that customs should be defended:-

'I want to assert, here, that most customs in the mine have a background reason. When the papers tell you so sarcastically that a thousand men are on strike because of what happened to one, try and believe that each of those thousand men have a mind and some responsibilities. They are not going to throw



wages away unless they think that the action is justified and they know that the injustice that is meted out to their mate will eventually come their way unless it is checked at the start.

It is also very often the case that the miners feel they must retain some customs and privileges for the boys who are coming to work in the future, or for those brothers and friends who are away fighting, and will some day have to come back to the mining industry'.<sup>77</sup>

d) Prosecutions.

The issue that caused most hostility from miners was the application of strict disciplinary measures and the policy of prosecution in cases of alleged misconduct. Incidents such as those quoted above at Penallta and Lewis Merthyr made men particularly angry, especially as in the former case there seemed no legitimate justification for prosecution and in the other the miners had suffered after carrying out the orders of the colliery manager.

One of the greatest injustices of all was that in some cases men suffered dual penalties. Indeed, at one SWMF EC meeting Arthur Horner raised the matter that some miners were being penalised as many as three times for the same offence. He cited a case at Seven Sisters colliery where a man was being penalised for a breach of contract and breach of duty, and had also been reported to the Regional Controller for a breach

under the E.W.O. - all for one incident at the colliery. This was because the owners stated that they had the right to claim damages from men who had caused financial injury to the colliery company irrespective of what the Coal Controller contemplated doing with them for a breach of the E.W.O.<sup>78</sup> In this situation, the New Leader, organ of the Independent Labour Party, believed that the most striking thing about the mining disputes was that they were so often concerned, not with wages and working conditions, but with the defence of a comrade whom the miners considered to have been victimised or unjustly treated.<sup>79</sup>

It is true that a fairly high proportion of the strikes could be termed 'solidarity strikes'. The most notable instance in the South Wales coalfield being the support of twenty hauliers at Tarreni Colliery who were jailed in May, 1943.<sup>80</sup> Another example of 'solidarity' action were the one-day stoppages at Pwllbach and Tarreni collieries in support of the three lodge committee men from Betteshanger colliery in Kent who were jailed.<sup>81</sup>

The tactic of the prosecution of strikers has a record of notorious failure, usually creating for the government involved as many problems as it was intended to solve. Knowles has termed the falling back on this type of policy as a 'confession of disciplinary impotence, in practice amounting to little more than fixing the war guilt on the worker'.<sup>82</sup>

In South Wales during the Second World War the policy met its usual fate. Rather more than quelling strikes it created a more antagonistic and intransigent attitude in the miners. Commenting on the stay-in strike at Steer Pit in June 1945 which followed the imposition of fines on men for alleged 'ca'canny',<sup>83</sup> the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales wrote that although the men might lose in money, "they were left with a deep sense of grievance, which showed itself at recurring intervals."<sup>84</sup>

The Industrial Relations Officer expressed reservations when Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour introduced Regulation 1A in 1944, which made it an imprisonable offence to incite workers to strike. He thought that this would lead to an increase in ca'canny methods in the coalfield.<sup>85</sup> This regulation was opposed vociferously in South Wales. Aneurin Bevan was particularly vocal in his opposition<sup>86</sup> and the Annual Conference of the SWMF in 1944 called for its annulment.<sup>87</sup> What exacerbated the sense of grievance over disciplinary measures very often was that the stringency that was applied to the miners did not seem to apply to the owners. This has already been noted in the case quoted above at Lewis Merthyr.<sup>88</sup> Bert Coombes made a special stress of this fact -

'Another point which puzzled us is that we do not hear of colliery companies being prosecuted for their faults in these days. A miner loses

time or does something which upsets some of our minor law dispensers. The offender is sent to prison and we lose his output for that time. Also we embitter the miner and he is not likely to become a contented citizen, rather I expect him to become a rebel. But he never meets coalowners in jail.....in fact, no coal controller or magistrate seems to ever speak roughly to them'.

Coombes, then substantiated his point by referring to the dispute at Penrikyber in August 1943.<sup>89</sup>

'Let's examine one affair which happened..... at Penrikyber colliery incensed by long sustained failure to get their proper payment, the men stopped work, other pits joined them, and the support of the working miners was spreading rapidly whilst a large amount of coal was lost each day. Finally, the controller arrived held an inquiry and found that the men were in the right, then work was resumed. What I want to know is, when are the ones responsible for that stoppage going to be prosecuted and sent to jail? Or must we be more convinced of what we have always believed - that there is one law for the worker and another for the rich'.<sup>90</sup>

Arthur Horner also referred to such a situation in a Communist Party pamphlet. He told of an incident in Scotland where the owners locked out some of the

workmen and were fined £50, whilst fines were imposed on miners in court the same day amounting to £215. He concluded.....

'There must be an end to this one-sided treatment ..... such prosecutions in other industries are hardly known. It is always the miners who are singled out for provocative treatment. Coalowners are hardly ever dealt with and none are ever sent to prison as miners are'.<sup>91</sup>

iv) Wages

A large percentage of the unofficial strikes took place on the issue of wages. In South Wales the major strike of the war years, that expressing dissatisfaction with the Porter Award, and the troublesome apprentice boys strikes ostensibly took place because of this factor.<sup>92</sup> A closer examination of these strikes, however, would tend to substantiate the claim made by Knowles that 'it is common for a high proportion of strikes to take the form of wage strikes, but since wages stand for far more than can be bought with them, wage strikes tend to be symbolic of wider grievances.'<sup>93</sup> This general view, however, should not disguise the fact that there was a huge grievance over the level of the basic wage rates in the industry whilst a particular wartime complaint, the unfavourable comparison with other workers, accentuated the dissatisfaction.

The majority of strikes that could be called 'wage strikes' did not take place over straight demands for flat rate increases or over particular wage claims, but on the question of local price lists. The price list was a contract, including a list of payments for varying items of labour to be performed mainly by piecework colliers. Some price lists had as many as forty items of payment. Once settled the price list became a part of the workman's contract which could not be varied within the lifetime of the Conciliation Board Agreement unless a change of conditions of working could be proved.<sup>94</sup> Given the fact that the geological strata of the South Wales coalfield was more disturbed than in any other coalfield this occurrence was very common.

According to Iestyn Williams, Secretary of the South Wales Coalowners Association, the number of demands for revision of price lists increased largely with the introduction of the Minimum Wage and the Greene Award.<sup>95</sup> The new price lists could take any amount of time to settle, from a few hours to over a year. A strike could often be a necessary part of accelerating the settlement procedure.

The conflict over price lists was very often an indication of a wider discontent with the basic wage, but the price list was the only part of the wages structure over which an individual miner could have a direct influence.

The discontent over the basic wage was aggravated strongly in those years by the knowledge that men who worked in munitions factories earned much higher wages.

'The comparisons between what a man could earn in the pit, after years of experience, with what others could earn in the Royal Ordnance factories, elsewhere, with hardly any training at all, was of the sort that struck home to the dullest'.<sup>96</sup>

According to Horner, it was the sense of injustice at this comparison that was the real motivating factor behind the initial rejection of SWMF rank and file of the new Conciliation Board Agreement proposed in January 1942.<sup>97</sup>

The complaint of the miners was not that the wages were too high in the munitions factories, but as has been put by Margot Heinneman, 'wages in mining had ceased to bear any relation to the skill and exertion required even to the standards established in other industries'. She believed that this experience revealed to the miners in the most striking way the degradation of their calling and the degree of exploitation to which they were subjected.<sup>98</sup>

It added insult to injury that the miner was tied to his industry by the operation of the E.W.O. and was directly excluded from the opportunity of working in the munitions factories. Within the industry there

was indeed a large group of men who had been transferred from the factories back to the pits - these, perhaps were the most aggrieved of all. The transference back to the mines may have cost these men anything from £1 to £2-10-0 a week.<sup>99</sup>

Another insult for the miner to take was the fact that his wife and daughter might well be working in a factory and be earning more than he. As MFCB President Ebby Edwards told Sir Evan Williams at one of their meetings:

'You can expect trouble when you have men working in the industry where their daughters are working on the other side of the road and taking £2 a week more than their fathers home in wages'.<sup>100</sup>

The indignity felt at this was probably stronger in the mining valleys than elsewhere according to the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, because prior to the establishment of the munitions factories the economic dependence of the women on the men had been absolute.<sup>101</sup> Bert Coombes relates a small episode that illustrates humourously, how the question of women workers had become an issue in the miners' minds.

'Benjy becomes annoyed as he tells us of a woman of ninety-three who is getting good wages at a Government factory -  
 "Two policemen helping her to work every day, aye".  
 "She can't be ninety-three" I argue.  
 "Over eighty, anyhow, he insists. Later he comes down to knowing that "she is a good age, whatever".<sup>102</sup>



It was not that every miner was a rank male chauvinist, but that it was not within his previous experience that his womanfolk should go out to work. The objection was hardened by the knowledge that untrained people were earning more than he. His sense of inferiority was reinforced.

As soon as the war started a campaign for the increase in miners' wages began. Both the union and the men themselves recognised that war restrictions would affect the cost of living to quite a large extent. Relatively quickly, therefore, by the end of October 1939, the MFGB made an agreement with the owners which stipulated that wages were to be governed in relation to the movement in the cost of living for the duration of the war. It was an unpopular agreement in South Wales, however, as it was thought that the increase in wages were inadequate.<sup>103</sup>

In the awareness of their members dissatisfaction the SWMF pressed the MFGB to re-examine the rise in the cost of living and to demand further increases from January 1st 1940. The SWMF EC found themselves in a somewhat awkward position. Although in sympathy with their own members demands they did not wish to provoke a split in the national unity of the miners and hence had backed the MFGB recommendations.<sup>104.</sup>

This demand for a re-examination of the agreement so soon after it had been made was interpreted by the

Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales as an attempt by the EC to restore any loss of prestige which might have been occasioned amongst their members by their public stance over the previous claim.<sup>105</sup>

The new initiative may well have come from the Communist Party members on the executive which included Arthur Horner. Their support of the agreement made by the MFGB was publicly criticised by the South Wales Committee of the Communist Party and in the Daily Worker. Such support was in contravention of official Communist Party policy which was to call for a bigger wage increase. Coinciding with the new demands from the SWMF for increases was a leafleting campaign organised by the Communist Party in support.<sup>106</sup>

The agreement made between the MFGB and the owners in October 1939 represented an increase in wages of only 7% when the official Government figure for the increase in the cost of living was 9%. This 'official' figure was scornfully regarded by most housewives and given that there was also evidence of sharp practices and profiteering taking place at the expense of the community, it is not surprising that this first agreement was widely frowned upon. Such a call for a further increase came from the editor of one of the local newspapers circulating in South Wales, the South Wales Voice.

"Wages must not be allowed to lag behind the cost of living" he wrote,  
"If public morale is to be kept up it is

essential that those who produce the nations wealth and the sinews of war should get a square deal".<sup>107</sup>

The MFGB took up the initiative of the SWMF and made a fresh application for wage increases in early December.<sup>108</sup> They demanded an increase of 7d. a day for each adult worker and 3½d. for others. In addition they wanted a rise of 0.88d. a day for every point increase on the cost of living index. The Owners offer was 4d. a day for each adult and 2d. for non-adults,<sup>109</sup> which was rejected by the MFGB on the basis that it was not in keeping with the rise in the cost of living.<sup>110</sup> A specially convened delegate conference endorsed this view.<sup>111</sup>

The stance taken by the MFGB was backed in South Wales by an SWMF delegate conference which urged the MFGB to gain a formula whereby wages were increased to a level at least equal to that of the increase in the cost of living.<sup>112</sup>

Fresh negotiations took place and a compromise was reached. Adults wages were to be increased by 5d. a day and non-adults by 2½d. The figure for future increases in relation to the cost of living index was 0.70 for each point rise in the index.<sup>113</sup> This agreement was again unpopular in South Wales, the SWMF EC recommendation that it be accepted being turned down at a delegate conference.<sup>114</sup> As South Wales were the only area to voice disapproval, this did not affect the

final MFGB acceptance of the deal.<sup>115</sup>

The events surrounding this first wages agreement of the war were auspicious in two ways. Firstly, the South Wales miners had served notice of their discontent and that no government could take advantage of a national crisis to try and attack their living standards, and secondly, it revealed a dilemma faced by the SWMF EC. Time and again, throughout the war they faced the conflict of either supporting what they considered to be justifiable claims by their members, or preserving the unity of the MFGB.

The wages increases accepted in February 1940 were backdated to January 1st 1940 and in the next eighteen months the miners received four more - 4d. a shift in April 1940<sup>116</sup> 5d. a shift in October 1940,<sup>117</sup> 6d. a shift in January 1941<sup>118</sup> and 10d. a shift in June 1941.<sup>119</sup> These increases were those necessary in order that wages kept pace with the increase in the cost of living. By January 1941 it had risen by 24% since the start of the war<sup>120</sup> and a feeling was beginning to emerge that the cost of living rises were not adequate to keep pace with the rising costs and that there was a case for an increase in real terms. The growing awareness of the lower level of miners wages as compared with those in other essential industries was also beginning to make its impact at this time.

"Despite the war increases" / <sup>said</sup> Arthur  
Horner, "miners wages are far below those

paid in other industries essential to the war effort".<sup>121</sup>

Motions began to flood into the SWMF EC calling for improvement in the basic rate. Typical was one of the Caerau lodge, Maesteg. They urged for an increase of 1/6d a day and in their demand referred pointedly to the wages earned in the munitions factories. Many men in that area worked at the Bridgend Arsenal.<sup>122</sup>

The application of the EWO to the industry with its effect of restricting miners from leaving and gaining higher wages in other industries, led the SWMF to campaign for a guaranteed weekly wage, and an increase in basic rates.<sup>123</sup> A guaranteed weekly wage, for six days, not five as the union wanted, was eventually accepted as an integral part of the EWO.<sup>124</sup>

Dissatisfaction, could not be stemmed, however, and in 1942 the mood in the coalfield started to become increasingly militant.<sup>125</sup> On May 6th 1942 the SWMF EC passed a motion urging the MFGB to put forward a national demand for an increase of 2/- per shift in miners wages.<sup>126</sup> Significantly this move followed discussion of a motion from the Maesteg Miners Joint Lodges Committee, a committee particularly sensitive to the issue of wages in the Bridgend Arsenal.

Evan Williams, General Secretary of the SWMF sent a telegram to the President and General Secretary of the MFGB warning of the level of discontent in South Wales and the sensitivity aroused when women and young girls were earning more money than men in many cases.<sup>127</sup>

There was an increase in stoppages in May 1942 and the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales believed these to be indicative of dissatisfaction with wages.<sup>128</sup>

On May 22nd the MFGB EC placed a request before the coalowners for a substantial increase in wages, with a guaranteed minimum wage of £4-5-0 a week.<sup>129</sup> MFGB and MAGB officials failed to reach agreement, and the matter was referred to the Government,<sup>130</sup> whose proposal to set up a tribunal to assess the claim was accepted by both sides.<sup>131</sup> The Government reacted to the situation with remarkable alacrity and the Greene Award was announced on June 19th, less than a month after the claim had been put forward by the MFGB.

The tribunal made three proposals.

1. A national minimum wage for all workers over 21 at a rate of £4-3-0 a week for underground workers and £3-18-0 for surface workers.
2. An increase in the flat rate of 2/6d. per shift.
3. An addition to the wages of all workers in accordance with a sliding scale, for increases of output beyond a variable standard figure fixed for each pit.<sup>132</sup>

A national delegate conference of the MFGB accepted the offer on June 23rd.<sup>133</sup> and the coalowners accepted it on June 25th.<sup>134</sup> The Greene Award came a long way to meeting the MFGB demands, although they had called for a minimum wage of £4-5-0 and a flat rate increase of 4/- per shift. In practice, also, no

bonuses ever materialised under the third proposal.<sup>135</sup>

Aneurin Bevan, for one, thought the increases offered were inadequate and that rewards in the mining industry were well below those in the other trades.<sup>136</sup> Looking at the award from a positive angle, however, Margot Heinneman believed that as a result of its proposals for the first time since the war had begun the miners real standard of life was raised.<sup>137</sup>

The measures introduced by the Greene tribunal only had a temporary effect on quietening down the coalfields. Alan Bullock commenting on Ernest Bevin's attitude at this time says that he was pessimistic as to whether the award and the simultaneous introduction of Dual Control would be able to cure the ills of industry. He continued:-

'For more than a century Britain's industrial strength had rested on the foundation of a cheap and abundant supply of coal, in the 1940's it was belatedly forced to realise that if it had been cheap in money costs, it had been purchased at too high a price of human misery and suffering and human resentment. Neither Bevin nor anyone else could remove within a year, or two, the social and psychological consequences of the long and bitter history of the mining industry.'<sup>138</sup>

The discontent that manifested itself so clearly in the first part of 1942 and which forced the Government to act so swiftly was only curtailed briefly and was to emerge even more strongly in 1943 and 1944, eventually erupting in the unofficial coalfield strike over the Porter Award.<sup>139</sup>



1. G. D. H. Cole in Preface to N. Barou, British Trade Unions (London 1947).
2. Ibid., p. 109. In 1943, 1,800,000 working days were lost in 1,785 strikes, and in 1944, 2,194 strikes led to a loss of 3,700,000 working days - These figures quoted in Angus Calder op.cit. p.456.
3. See Section II Chapter I p.263
4. Barou op.cit. p.155.
5. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes 30 August 1941.
6. LAB 10/550 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 27 July 1945.
7. Barou op.cit., p.111.
8. Western Mail, 18 November 1944. This is an official Ministry of Fuel and Power figure as Major Lloyd George announced it to the House of Commons.
9. See Table I in Appendix VII. p. 711.
10. See Table II in Appendix VII.p. 712.
11. Western Mail, 19 November 1943.
12. Barou, op.cit., p. 111.
13. Western Mail, 14 July 1944.
14. Barou, op.cit., p.111.
15. A. Bullock op.cit. p.164.
16. See Table I in Appendix VII. p. 711.
17. Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Records.

18. Daily Herald, 19 March 1940. LAB 10/366 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 16 March 1940.
19. SWMF EC Minutes, 19 March and 27 March 1940.
20. News Chronicle, 28 March 1940.
21. Ibid., 2 April 1940.
22. Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Papers.
23. Western Mail, 11, 13, 16 and 17 June 1941.
24. Ibid., 26 June
25. Ibid., 4 March and 13 March 1941. Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Papers.
26. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales 16 May 1942.
27. Western Mail, 15, 16, 17 and 18 May 1942.
28. Bullock, op.cit., p.161-72.
29. Henry Pelling. op.cit., p. 158-9.
30. See Section II Chapter I pp. 265-267.
31. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning the Conciliation Board, 2 March 1942.
32. See Section II Chapter IV pp. 407-443.
33. See Section II Chapters IV and V.
34. LAB 10/446. Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 22 September 1944.
35. Ibid., 3 November 1944.
36. Aberdare Leader, 21 July 1945.

37. Pelling op.cit., p. 251.
38. In addition to the two stay-downs mentioned in the text I have been able to find seven others recorded in the Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Papers. At most they lasted for twenty-four hours, but probably were only a few hours long. They involved very few men.

Penllwyngwent - 6.12.39

Merthyr Vale - 17.2.40 14 men involved

Glenrhondda - 4.4.40. 9 men involved

Onllwyn No. 3 - 20.8.40 9 men involved

Merthyr Vale - 5.6.41 17 men involved

Onllwyn No. 3 - 13.2.42 8 men involved

Glenrhondda - 7.9.43 9 men involved

The stay-down at Onllwyn No. 3 on 13.2.42 is described by Ben Davies, one of those who took part, in an interview with Hywel Francis 11.6.73. The tape is at the South Wales Miners Library.

39. See David Smith, 'The Struggle Against Company Unionism in the South Wales Coalfield'. Welsh History Review Vol. 6 No. 3 pp.372-375. This stay-down was also the subject of a novelette 'Stay Down Miner' by Montagu Slater (London 1936).
40. SWMF EC Minutes, 15 May and 23 May 1945. A fairly detailed account of the disputes can be read in the Nine Mile Point lodge minutes in the Swansea University SWMF Archive.

41. Western Mail, 19 June 1945.
42. South Wales Echo, 17 May 1945.
43. Pelling op.cit., p. 250.
44. See above p. 342
45. Knowles op.cit., p. 40.
46. Interviews with Mel Thomas (Maesteg) Jim Phillips (Ammanford) and with Will Arthur (Neath). The first and last of these were recorded and the tapes are to be found in the South Wales Miners Library. The only dispute actually led by a Communist Party member was the stay-down strike in Onllwyn No. 3 in February 1942. The man who led it, Ben Davies, subsequently resigned the secretaryship of the local C.P. branch, although retaining his membership. See tape in South Wales Miners Library.
47. See Section II Chapter V. pp 541-544.
48. In an exposee article 'Trotskyist Activity in South Wales' in the Western Mail, 8 April 1944, most of the information comes from a statement by the South Wales Committee of the Communist Party.
49. SWMF EC Minutes, 4 July 1944. Oakdale Navigation Lodge sent a letter complaining that the RCP was spreading disaffection amongst members of the lodge and urged the EC to take steps to check the movements of the people in this party and to make a survey of the coalfield to measure the extent of the disunity that had been created in the ranks of the miners.

50. Michael Foot, op.cit. p.451.
51. Western Mail, 22 November 1943.
52. It was popular for management to attribute agitation to check weighers in particular. For instance during a dispute at Nine Mile Point when the management refused to discuss a change to payment by a tonnage price list rather than a yardage price list it was claimed that it was the checkweigher, who was also the lodge Chairman, who was at the root of the dispute as his livelihood was at stake. (Documents relating to Typical Disputes - Nine Mile Point, 12 February 1942 in the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Association Collection). The role of checkweighers was, in fact, on the decline. The position was dispensed with at Aberpergwm colliery due to mechanisation and the change from tonnage to yardage payment and at Cwmcynon colliery, Mountain Ash, in an area that had been in the van of the campaign in 1863 for colliers to elect their own representatives to check the weights of items at the pithead. (Aberdare Leader, 5 October 1940).
53. Western Mail, 24 November 1943.
54. See below, Section III Chapter I. p. 579.
55. South Wales Voice, 22 August 1942.
56. Knowles op.cit., p. 9. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour also expressed this view at a Cabinet Meeting

which discussed the activities of the Communist Party.

"The only way to suppress subversive influences", he said "is to deal with grievances concerned with production and working conditions". Minutes of the Wartime Cabinet Committee on Communist Activities. CAB 98/18.

57. See above. Section II Chapter II and Section I Chapter III.
58. Ferdinand Zweig in his sociological survey of miners 'Men in the Pit' maintains that the fact that the past weighed heavily on most miners minds 'was the most important problem of the mines'. p. 10-12. An article written in Reynolds News 5 September 1943 gives some credence to this viewpoint. Written by a South Wales miner Bob Condon as a justification of strike action during the war, it was entitled 'Miners Do Not Forget'.
59. Knowles op.cit., pp. 212-224.
60. Ibid.,
61. See above. Section II Chapter II p. 305.
62. Knowles op.cit., p. 212-224.
63. See above p. 339-40.
64. Knowles op.cit., pp. 212-224.
65. Aberdare Leader, March 7 1942.
66. Western Mail, 24 March 1943. Daily Worker, 24 March 1943.
67. South Wales Voice, 2 December 1939.
68. Minutes of Conciliation Board meeting with the Regional Controller re-Penrikyber 30 August 1943.
69. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes 25 April 1940.
70. News Chronicle, 11 December 1939.

71. Amman Valley Chronicle, 16 April 1942.
72. The New Leader, 28 August 1943.
73. Minutes of Conciliation Board meeting with the Regional Controller, re - Penrikyber. 30 August 1943.
74. A phrase used by Sir Evan Williams at the meeting quoted in the previous note.
75. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p.43.
76. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 22 August 1942.
77. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p. 16.
78. SWMF EC Minutes, 5 April 1943.
79. New Leader, 9 October 1943.
80. See below Section II Chapter IV. pp. 447-456.
81. Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the Mon. and South Wales Coalowners Association Papers. Western Mail, 28 January 1942.
82. Knowles op.cit., p. 11.
83. See above Section II Chapter III p. 347
84. LAB 10/550 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, 27 July 1945.
85. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales. 21 April 1944.
86. Foot op.cit., p. 450.
87. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes, 25 April 1944.
88. See above Section II Chapter II p. 355-6.
89. See below. Section II Chapter IV pp. 456-467.
90. Coombes 'Those Clouded Hills' p. 30-1.

91. A Horner, 'Coal and the Nation' (C.P.G.B. Pamphlet pub. October 1943).
92. See below Section II Chapters IV and V.
93. Knowles op.cit., p. 220.
94. Joint Memorandum on the Operation of the Conciliation Scheme for the Settlement of Disputes arising at Collieries in Monmouthshire and South Wales to the National Coal Board Designate. 3 June 1946.  
Prepared by Iestyn Williams and W. J. Saddler.
95. See above Section II Chapter II p. <sup>321</sup>
96. Court, op.cit., p. 221.
97. See above, Section II Chapter I p. 266
98. Heinnemann op.cit., p.43.
99. Ibid., p.44.
100. R Page Arnot op.cit., p.320.
101. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 30 May 1942.
102. Coombes, 'Miners Day' p.15.
103. See above. Section II Chapter I p.261.
104. Western Mail, 8 November 1939.
105. LAB 10/365 Weekly Report of the I.R.O. for South Wales, 11 November 1939.
106. Daily Worker, 28 November 1939.
107. South Wales Voice, 28 October 1939.
108. LAB 10/365 Weekly Report of the I.R.O. for South Wales, 9 December 1939.



109. Minutes of Meeting of Coalowners Representatives  
on the Conciliation Board, 1 January 1940.
110. SWMF EC Minutes, 23 December 1939.
111. Western Mail, 30 December 1939.
112. Ibid., 11 January 1940.
113. SWMF EC Minutes, 11 January 1940.
114. Ibid., 6 February 1940.
115. Western Mail, 6 February 1940.
116. General Minutes of the Monmouthshire & South Wales  
Coalowners Association 1 January, 18 March 1940.
117. SWMF EC Minutes, 24 September 1940.
118. Ibid., 31 December 1940.
119. Western Mail, 23 May 1941.
120. Coal - A Policy (CPGB pamphlet pub. January 1941).
121. Western Mail, 4 March 1942.
122. SWMF EC Minutes 22 April 1941.
123. Western Mail, 29 March 1941, 7 April 1941.
124. Ibid., 23 May 1941.
125. See above p. 343.
  
126. SWMF EC Minutes 5 May 1942.
127. Western Mail, 13 May 1942.
128. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the I.R.O. for South Wales  
16 May 1942.
129. Western Mail, 23 May 1942.
130. Ibid., 29 May 1942.
131. Ibid., 6 June 1942.
132. Ibid., 20 June 1942.

133. Ibid., 24 June 1942.
134. Ibid., 26 June 1942.
135. See above Section I Chapter III pp 206-208.
136. Michael Foot, op.cit., p.440.
137. Margot Heinnemann, op.cit., p. 47.
138. Allan Bullock, op.cit., p.171.
139. See Section II Chapter V.

CHAPTER IVPERSISTENT STRIKERS AND SIGNIFICANT STRIKES

Although most of the wartime strikes were of short duration and involved relatively few workers, there are several that do have a special significance and merit some discussion. Most notable of all was the unofficial coalfield-wide strike over the Porter Award which will be described and analysed in a separate chapter, but there are others particularly in 1943, the most turbulent of years in the wartime coalfield, that shall be discussed in this chapter. In addition to those strikes of particular note there are two other statistics in relation to the strikes that appear to be outstanding. The first is the high percentage of strikes that occur in the anthracite district of West Wales and the second is the high proportion of strikes that involved the apprentice boys who worked in the mines. These two features will be discussed first.

A The High Incidence of Stoppages in West Wales.

The West Wales coalfield can be described geographically as the area between the Gwendraeth Valley in the West and the Neath and Afan Valleys in the East, including the Swansea, Twrch and Amman Valleys. The majority of the pits in the region mine anthracite coal. The valleys tend to be remote and insular in attitude, possessing a more distinctive Welsh culture than the rest of the coalfield. The Welsh language is spoken



widely throughout the area. The valleys are far more rural in appearance than those in the steam coalfield and the villages are more open, not being enclosed by steep-sided valleys. Those signs of rapid industrialisation, small terraced houses are largely absent and housing is far more substantive.

The anthracite coalfield was not really developed until the 1920's and peak production was reached in 1934,<sup>1</sup> when the rest of the coalfield was in the depths of depression. At this time, when prices were either falling or steady a man in work was benefiting doubly, so when the Fall of France came in 1940 with its consequent unemployment, it was felt as a particularly severe blow.

The coal seams of the anthracite area were generally older and more broken and faulted than in the rest of the coalfield and the workings had a high quantity of dust. The drive for increased production which in one way led to greater prosperity, also demanded a massive increase in shot-firing and this resulted in the horrifically high incidence of silicosis. For many, a too terrible price to pay.

In the early 1920's most of the pits in the area had belonged to small companies and local trades people. There had, in fact, been fairly close links between the men and the owners. The increasing demand for high quality anthracite coal had prompted the managements to accede to excessive demands for allowances and privileges from the men.<sup>2</sup> From the mid-1920's

however, the atmosphere began to change as large colliery combines moved into the area taking over the small, local companies. The combines attempted to eliminate non-economic working practices and this began to lead to continued strife especially as many of the notorious Powell Duffryn managers and overmen from the east were brought into the area with the intention of cutting price lists.<sup>3</sup>

The men of the anthracite were tenaciously determined to hold on to their 'customs' as had been proved in the long and vicious strike of 1925.<sup>4</sup> They worked in small units of production and smaller than those in other sectors of the coalfield and an unusually close bond of solidarity developed amongst them which encouraged unity in opposing authority and in fighting alleged grievances.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of the 1930's the major Combine, the Amalgamated Anthracite Company was becoming crisis-ridden, facing untold financial problems and the attempts to reduce restrictive practices became more imperative. As World War began, a private war had not been resolved in the anthracite district, and in the remote insular valleys of the area the effects of World War were perhaps as minimal as anywhere. Chris Evans, a member of the Seven Sisters Lodge Committee during the war has said significantly,

'If it wasn't for the reports in the press and

the blackouts we wouldn't have known there was a war on'.<sup>6</sup>

The background to the nature of the disputes that occurred in the anthracite district is expanded more fully below, but first it is necessary to describe the extent of the strike problem.

During the war from September 1939 to June 1945 thirty collieries in South Wales experienced more than five stoppages (total or partial) in addition to being involved in the Porter Award stoppage. Twenty-(two-thirds) of these were in the anthracite district,<sup>7</sup> a section of the coalfield that possessed one-sixth of the collieries providing employment for one-sixth of the labour force. This is not, however, just a wartime phenomenon, for, in a thorough analysis of strikes in the South Wales coalfield between the years 1927-1939 W. J. Anthony-Jones found that one-half the strikes resulting in complete cessation of work and one-third resulting in partial stoppages were in the anthracite district. Six of the seven collieries which experienced more than 20 strikes were located in that area.<sup>8</sup>

The bias is even greater in the war years. Six pits experienced more than 20 stoppages, then, and five of these were in the anthracite district.<sup>9</sup> Many of the strike-prone pits of the 1926-39 period continued to be so in the war years. Indeed, Anthony-Jones noted himself that four of the most strike-prone centres of the inter-war years - Tarreni, Brynhenllys, Gelliceidrim

and Gwaun-cae-Gurwen - remained fractious even after nationalisation and were closed down by the N.C.B.<sup>10</sup>

This factor, plus the additional evidence that the most strike prone pits outside the anthracite district in the war years - Nine Mile Point, Marine Colliery, Ebbw Vale, and Glengarw were also prominent in the strike list of the 1929-1939 period,<sup>11</sup> would seem to indicate that local pit conditions and management-employee relationships were the main determinents of strikes taking place.

The high propensity of strikes in West Wales gave the area a reputation of some notoriety with the Industrial Relations Officers for South Wales, as the following extracts from their reports reveal.

Week Ending November 26th 1943.<sup>12</sup>

'Two disputes have occurred in the Garnant and Ystalyfera area. In that area past experience has shown that workmen are prone to use the strike weapon, notwithstanding the excellent conciliation machinery within the industry!'

Week Ending December 3rd 1943.<sup>13</sup>

'Again the centre of discontent is the anthracite area where 630 workers at 4 collieries are idle!'

Week Ending March 17th 1944.<sup>14</sup>

'It may be of interest to record that during discussions with the TGWU officials the Ammanford branch secretary expressed the opinion that as Ammanford was a



recognised storm centre in the South Wales coalfield, he could rely upon the support of the miners in the event of a strike'.

Week Ending June 23rd 1944.<sup>15</sup>

'Three stoppages of work have caused a ripple on the recently maintained calm surface of industrial relations..... The stoppages occurred in the Ammanford district, the scene of numerous strikes in the past'.

Week Ending September 15th 1944.<sup>16</sup>

'During the past week there has been a deterioration in the general situation, although from the anthracite coalfield, however, we continue to receive reports of strikes in Steer, Mardy and East pits, when at the beginning of the week, as soon as one dispute was removed from the field of controversy another arose. At the moment about 1,800 workers are idle'.

Week Ending June 22nd 1945.<sup>17</sup>

'The anthracite area of South West Wales is again in the picture, five stoppages having taken place at various pits involving 1,800 workers. Four of them occurred at collieries in the Gwaun-cae-Gurwen district, the scene of frequent strikes in the past'.

Within West Wales itself, the village of Gwaun-cae-Gurwen was the most strike prone place of all. Its three pits appear in the first four on the chart recording the number of strikes experienced in the war years. At Steer Pit fifty stoppages (total or partial)

were recorded, 26 at Maerdy and 25 at East Pit.<sup>18</sup>

At a meeting of the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee in May 1940 it was reported that when representatives had met the company in December 1939 they had been presented with a bill of damages amounting to £3,700 for eighteen stoppages without consent of lodge committees and that by the end of March 1940 there had been another 11 stoppages with damages of £2,300, all without the consent of the lodge committees.<sup>19</sup>

In September 1944 the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee discussed a strike that had begun at Steer Pit and then spread to the other two nearby collieries, East and Maerdy. The meeting passed a resolution refusing to recognise the strike because the proper procedure had not been adopted and it called upon the Gwaun-cae-Gurwen lodge 'to put its house in order'.<sup>20</sup>

Several days later the Central EC received a letter from the Ministry of Fuel and Power which described a long history of the disputes and strikes that had occurred at Gwaun-cae-Gurwen collieries in the last few years. The SWMF EC expressed considerable concern and resolved that three persons be appointed to make a full investigation into the problems of the lodge and to meet the committee and a general meeting of workmen.<sup>21</sup>

The Crisis of the Amalgamated Anthracite Company.

By 1939 the Amalgamated Anthracite Company almost had a monopoly over the coal industry in West Wales. It employed 17,400 men, which represented 66% of all those working in anthracite collieries. Its accession to a position of dominance in the region had taken place over a comparatively short period between 1923-28, but A.E.C. Hare, the author of a short article on the financing of the Anthracite Coal Industry, believes that the amalgamation movement was a failure from the start.

When the properties that made up the company had been bought up, they had been over-valued. Profits had been estimated on the basis of the years 1916-22, years when there had been an acute coal shortage abroad and prices had been high. Due to a series of factors, explained by Hare, the earning capacity of the Company never came up to the expected level and it had been unable to pay out a reasonable return to shareholders.

By the end of the 1930's a large part of the developed coalfield was facing exhaustion, the development of new mines was necessary and existing mines required extensive machinery. This required a high capital expenditure on behalf of the Company but because of over-capitalisation this was not forthcoming.

In relation to the rest of the coalfield, the anthracite area was years behind in terms of mechanisation.

This was a legacy of the past when the collieries had generally been local enterprises financed by local landlords and business men with only small capital at their disposal. This had resulted in the collieries being developed haphazardly without proper regard to layout and ventilation. The object had been to obtain anthracite by the easiest means from the outcrop without regard to the future or to the problems of ventilation, drainage and development that would arise when the colliery should reach a greater depth.

The necessary mechanisation was unpopular amongst the workforce who resisted its introduction strongly. They were aware that mechanical mining had led to large numbers of men being thrown out of work elsewhere, and whilst this was unlikely during wartime, most men were conscious of the dangers in the years after the war. Mechanisation also meant a speeding-up of the work process and with that a reduction of the individual miners control of the work-rate, and finally there was the attitude that a cut in the piece rates necessitated by the greater output achieved with the aid of the conveyors would rob them of any benefit that the introduction of machines might have.<sup>22</sup>

A further financial burden from which the Company suffered was the extent of the compensation payments it had to pay to silicosis victims, estimated at a loss of 1/- a ton.<sup>23</sup> Arthur Horner estimated that the

Amalgamated Anthracite Company paid out £1,000,000 in compensation in the years 1937-1942.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, despite the fact that the anthracite district had had almost continuous working since the First World War and had had relative prosperity compared with other parts of the coalfield, the industry went into the war facing enormous problems.

In April 1939 the Amalgamated Anthracite Company arranged a reorganisation of its capital, designed to remove a large part of its speculative over-valuation that had crippled the development of the industry in the past,<sup>25</sup> but the onset of war brought into play many abnormal factors beyond calculation.

By January 1940, the chairman of the company, Major Szarvasy complained to a joint meeting of his fellow directors and representatives of the Combine Committee that the company was 'feeling the pinch and getting into a bad position'.<sup>26</sup> He placed the blame on the fact that output was not increasing. Shortly afterwards the projected closures of Rhos and Tirbach collieries were announced. Again Szarvasy placed the responsibility in the hands of the miners;

'The problem must be placed before the men, whether they are prepared to increase their output so as to keep dying collieries going, or whether half a dozen pits should be closed'.<sup>27</sup>

A week later Szaevasy was continuing on his theme. He accused the workmen of lacking the spirit of

co-operation and their leaders on the Combine Committee of having no discipline over them. If output was increased, new collieries could be opened, but the Company did not have the money because the men would not work.<sup>28</sup>

Given the financial background, as expounded by Hare, this was a rather absurd statement to have made, as was pointed out by one of the Combine Committee representatives, Will Betty. Two thirds of the area, he said, was untapped, and the real problem was the shortage of capital to develop it.<sup>29</sup>

Given the financial state of the Company, Arthur Horner called upon the owners to go to the Government to get the money needed to keep the collieries open.<sup>30</sup>

The question of uneconomic collieries and threatened closures had the makings of developing into a major confrontation between the Company and the Combine Committee during these early months of the war. In July 1940 Szarvasy told the Combine representatives that he thought that joint meetings might as well be put to an end, as they were fruitless.<sup>31</sup>

Any confrontation was superseded by the much greater calamity of the Fall of France with its particularly devastating consequences for West Wales with the loss of the export market and the resultant unemployment. The issue of the financial solvency of the Amalgamated Anthracite Company was again the focal point of concern for the West Wales Community.<sup>32</sup>

The problem was exacerbated by the steady decline in the output per manshift, which was greater in the anthracite district than elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> After the introduction of the Coal Charges Account at the time of the Greene Award in June 1942 the Company, according to Arthur Horner was 'living on Government subsidies'.<sup>34</sup> By 1945 he claimed that it was being carried to a far greater extent than any other undertaking in Britain by the Coal Charges Account.<sup>35</sup>

Speaking to a Combine Committee meeting in December 1942, Arthur Horner painted a drastic picture for the future prospects of the anthracite area if a rapid solution was not found.

'If the situation developing in the anthracite area is allowed to continue until the end of the war the whole Combine could collapse. The mechanisation of this Company is miles behind the other parts of the coalfield. The Company cannot look to South Wales Coalowners for help. They make concessions here on the minimum wage, seniority, etc. which are not heard of in other parts of the coalfield. One asks why, if they are in this position they haven't stopped years ago. If there was a strike the Company would smash in a few months. I am satisfied that the anthracite coal industry can

be the strongest, the most secure, as well as the safest in the whole Coal Trade of Great Britain. This can only be achieved by the co-operation of all the workmen, and machinery. Without that the whole combination is doomed. By the time we get nationalisation, this place will be derelict ..... My own view is that the collieries will work until the end of the war and my policy is to see that they are kept at work after the war'.<sup>36</sup>

The fear of post-war dereliction prompted joint meetings again between the Company directors and representatives of the Combine Committee. The solution, felt Horner, had to be found at local level. This was because there was little sympathy for the anthracite area in London. It was a drain on resources and was regarded as a nuisance. Difficulties such as the problem of Silicosis and Pneumoconiosis and the Coal Charges Account would almost cease to exist if the anthracite area ceased to exist. Whilst the war continued, the coal was needed, but what would happen when the war was over?<sup>37</sup>

Horner viewed the crisis in its widest terms. If the collieries closed down it would spell disaster for the whole community. It was no use calling for new industries, he argued, that would only come if there were pits, therefore the pits had to be kept open.<sup>38</sup>



Whilst Horner recognised the shortcomings of the Company, he also believed that the attitudes of the men who worked in the area were of paramount importance if the pits in the area were to be saved. The only real solution to the problems was mechanisation and he was aware of the widespread opposition he would face from the rank and file on this issue, but he appealed strongly for their co-operation:-

' I am of the opinion that the only thing which can save the Anthracite area is good mining and safe mining - which means the latest techniques. I am aware there is resistance shown when applying it, not much hospitality. If there are any prejudices due to old habits of thought, past practices etc., on which ever side, they have to go. Means to this end must be found and quite frankly, because of my great concern about this matter, I have even proposed that I should ask the Executive to release me and enable me to come down here to work to this purpose. Price lists have got to be settled, other difficulties in the way must be settled. It means going to every colliery and seeing what is the matter'.<sup>39</sup>

When it next met on March 17th 1945, the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee decided to accept the substance of Horner's remarks at the

previous meeting and passed a resolution calling for the introduction of machinery with a view to increasing output.<sup>40</sup>

Horner's appeals for greater co-operation with the management did not meet a whole-hearted response from the workers, for although the AAC were generally considered to be one of the better companies to work for in the coalfield<sup>41</sup> there was still a strong antagonism and mistrust. This was not helped by the tendency of Major Szarvasy to make public statements chastising the workers. Often what he had to say was not that dissimilar from the criticisms of Horner, but Horner rarely made his views on the situation in the anthracite heard for public consumption, and in any case there was a difference in hearing criticism from a union leader as opposed to a Company Chairman. Most of Szarvasy's comments concerned the unwillingness of the workmen to change from their old methods of working and their reluctance to accept the extensive use of machinery.<sup>42</sup> Occasionally he would spice his remarks with sarcasm such as when he said that it was rather tragic that in their concern about their future security the miners placed so much faith in political propaganda compared with the much safer road which would be assured by diligent workmanship.<sup>43</sup> On one occasion he created a small furore by suggesting that the anthracite miners as a whole were deliberately restricting their output.<sup>44</sup> Such

was the displeasure caused by this remark that an immediate meeting between the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee and the SWMF EC was called.<sup>45</sup> The local Swansea Valley newspaper, the South Wales Voice jumped to the miners' defence on this occasion. 'All that was proved by Szarvasy's comments', it said, 'was his own ignorance of the actual working conditions of collieries'. The editor believed that whilst there were instances of some workmen operating 'ca'canny, 'it was totally different from suggesting that it was general.<sup>46</sup> What Szarvasy actually told his shareholders on this occasion was that the anthracite miner produced 6 cwts. a day less than his co-worker in the steam coal area - thus the implication of generalised restriction of output was made. He neglected to tell his audience some other rather important facts - that it was much harder to mine anthracite coal because of the geological conditions, that the steam coal area was more mechanised, and that higher prices were obtained for anthracite.<sup>47</sup>

Whilst the tenor of many of Szarvasy's remarks may have been just concerning the unwillingness of the area to change their methods of working his continued harping on the theme tended to deflect interest from other of the companies problems, and this may have partly been the purpose. This view

was shared by the editor of South Wales Voice.

On one occasion he wrote:-

'It is unfortunate that advantage should be taken of occasions like company meetings to criticise the workers. If the latter retaliated, quite a lot could be said of the contribution of over capitalisation and other causes well within the control of the owners, to the present position in South Wales'.<sup>48</sup>

Wherever the responsibility lay for the crisis in the anthracite coal industry the net result was that those who worked in it were preoccupied with its problems and particularly as the war drew to a close, when fear of post-war prospects began to arise. In the post-war world, however, the opposition of the workforce to change continued and the anthracite district was practically closed down in the 1945-70 period and mining concentrated in two master pits and a handful of others. The men of the anthracite district both during and after the war period paid little attention to the pleas for change whether it be from Major Szarvasy and the Amalgamated Anthracite Company, the N.C.B., or from their own union officials. Their sense of grievance and the hostility to the nature and dangers of their work made them fiercely protective of their established customs and produced a stubborn frame of

mind that would recognise no argument from higher authority. These men from a most distinctive area were insular by nature and the threat to the future of the industry and possible dereliction of the area reinforced that insularity. It is not surprising that their future, the future of their work, their homes and their homeland seemed much more important than the outside influences of world war, particularly, as is shown below, West Wales as a region faced decay as much as its staple industry.

#### The General Effects of the War on West Wales

The uncertainty of the future of the mining industry, the staple industry of West Wales, threatened with pit closures and consequent unemployment added to the anxiety already existing in the area over the state of the second most important industry, the tinsplate. This was in an even more positive state of decline being threatened by 1943 with virtual extinction.

The decline of the tinsplate industry had begun well before the war had started, but had accelerated rapidly once war had begun. By June 1943 over 70 tinsplate works had been closed in South Wales since the beginning of the war. The worst hit of all was the Amman Valley.<sup>49</sup> The two major factors in the decline were the establishment of a new strip



mill at Ebbw Vale which could turn out 70,000 boxes of tin a week, doing much of the work formerly done in West Wales, and the loss of export markets as a result of the British Government's 'lease and lend' agreement with the United States under which the Americans were given a free hand in the tinsplate foreign markets.<sup>50</sup>

In response to the closures and subsequent redundancies the Government had appointed the Essenden Committee to investigate the situation. This had decided that a large number of the closed down works should be used for storage purposes, and that ~~it~~ was impossible to install alternative industries.<sup>51</sup> This prompted a hostile response. There was anger that this decision meant that there was no local use for the skilled labourer that had been thrown out of work. James Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelli, criticised the Government for failing to utilise the resources of the area in the production drive,

'It is difficult to understand all the appeals for more tanks and guns when there are 50 idle works and thousands of men whose labour could be used'.<sup>52</sup>

A meeting of West Wales M.P.'s and representatives of local authorities was convened by the Mayor of Swansea to discuss the recommendations of the Essenden Committee. This meeting urged the Government to refuse sanction to the proposals unless satisfactory

arrangements were made for the substitution of some other form of industry whereby the works to be closed down could be maintained as going concerns.<sup>53</sup>

Despite further conferences, investigations and a number of appeals<sup>54</sup> in May 1942 the President of the Board of Trade decided to invoke the decisions of the Essenden Committee.<sup>55</sup>

The policy of closures brought with it a number of associated problems, the most contentious of which was the transference of those men made redundant. This had been an emotive issue in the coal industry at the time of the Fall of France but by June 1943, 14,000 tinsplate workers had been transferred from their home location.<sup>56</sup>

Transference became the focal point of a campaign by the Welsh Nationalist Party who compared the Government's policies to those of the Third Reich,<sup>57</sup> and a measure of their support is that they managed to receive 6,290 votes at a by-election in Neath in May 1945.<sup>58</sup>

It was more common, however, for the situation of closures, unemployment and consequent social problems to be compared with the hardships of the depression years.<sup>59</sup>

The Daily Worker described the region as being in turmoil,

'The depopulation of the area and the failure to bring in industries are the main topics of conversation in the streets, public

houses, chapels and endless articles in the local press'.<sup>60</sup>

Throughout the area local councils campaigned for new industries and complained to central government about the closures and transferences. One of the most active of these councils was that in Ammanford. Within a period of twenty years the Amman Valley had lost all its tinsplate works, except one, and twenty collieries.<sup>61</sup> In August 1942 the Council sent a resolution to the Government complaining about transference of workers from the area. Proposing the motion, Councillor W. Hitchings maintained that Ammanford had been 'kicked about' since the war and had suffered for being 'too patriotic'.<sup>62</sup>

These were harsh words but widely accepted within the community as all local organisations and churches joined in the protest.

There was little response from the Government, indeed in March 1943 the Regional Controller of the Ministry of Labour expressed his sorrow for the state of affairs in West Wales but announced that it could not be avoided as needs elsewhere were greater.<sup>63</sup> In May 1943, therefore, another Ammanford Councillor, Haydn Lewis, urged the people of the area to 'kick up a shindy' to bring new industries into the Valleys.<sup>64</sup> In April 1943 a second conference was convened by the Mayor of Swansea of representatives of local



authorities, M.P.'s, industrialists and trade unionists, 'to consider the continuously deteriorating position in the area due to increasing closures and transfer of men and women to the Midlands'.<sup>65</sup> James Griffiths urged that the conference should not be a requiem but a call to battle.<sup>66</sup> Several weeks later a deputation from the Welsh Socialist Group of M.P.'s made representations to the Ministry of Production to urge that more stress should be placed on the productive capacity of the region. They were told that South Wales would be the venue of a new factory for the manufacture of radiators and pressings at which 1,500 men would be employed.<sup>67</sup> Over the next couple of years promises of new industries to be developed in the region after the war were fairly common. In September 1944 it was announced that a new factory was to be sited in Ammanford<sup>68</sup> and in January 1945 that the upper Swansea Valley was to get a new industry - the manufacture of clocks and watches.<sup>69</sup>

Whilst these announcements went a small way to stemming discontent the scars of wartime experience had cut very deep. 'Watchman', the columnist in the Amman Valley Chronicle had written in June 1943 that the people of the region dreaded the day when war would end.<sup>70</sup> These small measures probably did

little to dispel those fears particularly as no steps towards the rehabilitation of the two staple industries of the area were in evidence.

When making a final analysis of the relatively high level of strikes in West Wales compared with other parts of the coalfield, absenteeism and ca'canny, it is necessary to try and understand the strains through which the miners' community were undergoing. It was experiencing a breaking up of its distinctiveness and its homelife, and fearing the prospects of future dereliction. In a community where men were being continually thrown out of work and were being transferred elsewhere, it becomes more easy to understand that for many miners the 'production problem' was not the most significant problem which they faced. For many indeed, such as Councillor Maldwyn Jones of Ystalyfera, they could not take the demands for more and more production seriously. Since the war had begun, in his village, two collieries and two or three tinworks had been closed down. Calls for greater production in these circumstances he considered were 'farcical'.<sup>71</sup> Finally, in comparing West Wales with other parts of the coalfield, there is one very important factor to bear in mind. In the depression years of the 1930's there was no decline in anthracite mining as there was elsewhere in the coalfield. The West never

experienced the same acute depression as other parts. Employment had remained remarkably stable during the worst years of the slump and only towards the end of the thirties was it beginning to fall.<sup>72</sup> Those employed in the East, with far more experience of unemployment, may have been more reticent to react against their conditions in the war years, thankful of continuous employment, whilst a comparatively new experience in the West provoked a militant reaction. For many the 'war' became the 'war' to save the West from dereliction, There were many who must have echoed Councillor John Harris of Pantyffynon, who proclaimed,

'I am still prepared to fight and if need to give my life for a better standard of living and conditions in the Amman Valley, which I love'.<sup>73</sup>

#### B - THE APPRENTICE BOYS' STRIKES

Within West Wales the most strike-prone group amongst the miners were the apprentice boys and during the war years their particular wage demands were responsible for two major outbreaks of strikes. With the exception of the Porter Award strike, these were responsible for the greatest loss of output attributable to strike action in the South Wales coalfield during the war years. The first outbreak took place in May and June of 1942, where 10,000 men and boys were idle for the equivalent of 28,000 days

and in October 1943 where 7,500 men and boys were idle for the equivalent of 35,000 days.<sup>74</sup>

Apprentice boys had long-standing grievances within the industry over their wages and work conditions and this fact would seem to be reflected by the decline in the figures for juvenile recruitment into the industry in the 1930's and the war years. Between 1930 and 1939 the number of young men under twenty years of age working in the industry declined by 40% as compared with 20% for the reduction in the workforce as a whole.<sup>75</sup> In 1931 youths aged between 14 and 20 represented 17.7% of mineworkers but by 1941 this percentage had fallen to 15.5%.<sup>76</sup>

In January 1942 the Labour Supply Officer for the coalmining industry in South Wales reported that many colliers required assistants and estimated that output would increase if such boys were available. As the situation was, however, the shortage had the effect on the colliers of making them indifferent.<sup>77</sup>

The Government considered the shortage of boys to be of such serious import that they established an enquiry into the problem. This was the Forster Committee. An examination of the submissions to this committee not only provides evidence of why recruitment figures were so low, but also gives an

indication as to many of the reasons why the boys were such a troublesome section of the workforce in the war years. The reasons lay largely within the history of the industry and it becomes difficult to disagree with the statement made by the Young Communist League to the Forster Committee that 'for years the needs of the lads have been ignored. Today 1942 this lack of attention to the problems of the young miners has borne its fruit'.<sup>78</sup> The main factors responsible for the fall in recruitment were as follows:<sup>79</sup>

a) Parent's Reluctance ; The Labour Supply Officer for the coalmining industry in South Wales questioned workmen affected by the shortage of colliers assistants concerning the reluctance of boys to enter the industry and he reported that many of them were of the opinion that having themselves worked underground for so many years they would try and prevent their own sons from entering the industry.<sup>80</sup>

In Miner's Day Bert Coombes illustrated from his own experience the feelings of anguish he felt when his own son went underground for the first time:-

'Have you watched someone of whom you are very fond walk away from you into darkness and into danger which he could not realise? I have, and it was a time which tugged at my senses. It was the day

when our boy started to work underground....  
 I thought, as do thousands more, why should  
 our boy have to work in this unnatural  
 place? Had he not the right to walk the  
 land and see the sky each day? Why should  
 his body be battered and his skin blemished,  
 or his lungs choked?'<sup>81</sup>

b) Mining = Social Failure

In between the two world wars there was a  
 relative increase in secondary education and children  
 looked forward to a brighter career than mining.  
 To many it amounted to social failure to have to go  
 and work in the mines. Bob Condon, secretary of  
 the Tower Lodge at Hirwaun for a number of years  
 during the war wrote a newspaper article in an  
 attempt to explain why 'pit boys were on the warpath'.  
 He described how many boys felt about the job that  
 they were doing.

'Most pit boys feel that they are Dead  
 End kids. Older miners with their own bitter  
 experiences behind them will not have their  
 boys sent down the mines for this very reason.  
 It is fatal for boys to feel that they are  
 doomed to do the jobs their fathers did, simply  
 because they are their father's sons'.<sup>82</sup>

c) Job Security

The instability of the mining industry with its  
 history of unemployment made the job appear unsatisfactory.

There was very little guarantee of job security. According to a memorandum from the Ministry of Labour it was 'the economic instability of the industry that was the root of the problem'.<sup>83</sup>

The pit boy was perhaps the most insecure worker of all. According to Bert Coombes a boy may only have training in one particular job in the mine, say, shovelling coal on a conveyor belt. When he reached the age when he was due for a man's wages the contractor would no longer wish to employ him as he was too dear. As he had not had training in any other aspects of minework he then became unwanted and surplus.<sup>84</sup>

Even for those training as colliers, there was a lack of opportunity for promotion from assistant to collier which gave the occupation a blind alley character. Shortage of places forced young men on to the dole, or to the necessity of continuing to work as a collier's assistant up to the age of 25 or even 30.<sup>85</sup> A very full explanation of the problem of shortage of places and possible remedies was written by D. J. Williams, a miner's agent in the Swansea Valley and a SWMF EC member during the war years, who later became the M.P. for Neath in the years between 1945 and 1964.<sup>86</sup> In his earlier years he had been a checkweigher at Gwaun-cae-Gurwen collieries. In July 1939 Major Szarvasy commenting

on the fact that large members of boys in the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine were thrown out of work at the age of nineteen insinuated that it was the workmen that were responsible for this situation.<sup>87</sup>

D. J. Williams responded by stating that it was the methods of working that were responsible for the displacement of labour and claimed that the policies that the A.A.C. had adopted in regard to the employment of boys had caused, and were continuing to cause havoc at anthracite pits. He pointed out that he had prepared a report on the position and prospects of boys at Gwaun-cae-Gurwen and had made nine proposals that would safeguard the employment of boys. These had never been taken up by the Company.<sup>88</sup>

d) Work Conditions

The main obstacle of all to recruitment was that of working conditions. Mining was considered to be a dangerous, dirty, degrading and underpaid occupation<sup>89</sup> and according to the South Wales Divisional Inspector of Mines the conditions in South Wales were worse than elsewhere. Boys in most coalfields started work on the surface and worked their way by stages to the face, whereas in South Wales they were often sent to the face when only fourteen years old.<sup>90</sup> Life in the pit was unpleasant for all, but for young boys it must have



particularly difficult and strenuous. Bob Condon gives a deep insight into their conditions in the following extract:

'I have not forgotten the terrific mental and physical turmoil of being turned into a mole. We who were reared free and wild on our loved mountain sides, we youngsters who had no cares, no knowledge of life, at an age when our ambitions were to be pirates or cowboys, suddenly found we had to be men. WE had to learn to be hard men, men who scorned cuts and bruises, men who could do gruelling work in cramped positions for hours on end. The learning of these things either warps or develops the mind ..... How can I tell that first day of endless other days, after. Of poor soft hands torn and lacerated by hard bright coal. Huge, red hot blisters. A back that ached as though broken. Shoulders, chest, stomach, scratched and cut. Knees sore and swollen through crawling over rough rocks for eight hours a day. Heads, sore and dizzy from endless thumping; eyes, nostrils and mouth full of coal dust.

When the sons of the rich were playing and visiting the tuck shops, our boyish fat was streaming down to wash the coal'.<sup>91</sup>

Pit boys suffered from the highest accident rates

in the mine, their inexperience made them the most susceptible to accidents. In 1940, 270 out of every 1,000 boys under 16 were either injured or killed working underground in British mines and 233 out of every 1,000 of those aged between 16 and 18.<sup>92</sup>

James Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelli believed that the youth of South Wales paid too high a price in bad health and premature death, that 'many young boys broke down under the strain', especially when their home was impoverished by unemployment, low wages and bad housing.<sup>93</sup> This belief was widespread and is the background to the substantial decline in youths entering the mines.

In the 1930's many young men left their mining environment which was dominated by high unemployment, poor housing and lack of leisure facilities, and went elsewhere to work in factories where wage rates and conditions improved at a faster rate. When the war came, and especially after the introduction of the Essential Works Order in May 1941, this line of escape became no longer possible and with the establishment of the munitions factories close to the mining areas, the disparity between the wages that could be earned in factories and those it was possible to earn in the pits became much more apparent. Pit boys, who possibly more than any other section of

workers in the industry, had a violent antipathy towards their job, based upon their father's experience and an upbringing during a period when the atmosphere surrounding the industry was particularly bitter, and their antagonism exacerbated by these two factors - being tied to the industry and being paid much lower wages than their contemporaries in the factories. They were a potentially explosive unit of workers.

#### General Behaviour of Boys in the Pits

The frustration of the boys and their aggressive feelings against the industry in which they were imprisoned, found expression in various ways. Many of the unofficial strikes involved just boys, and a large percentage of persistent absentees were the younger workers.<sup>94</sup> Much of the small scale sabotage in the pits was carried out by youths. Descriptions of their generally obstructive and belligerent attitude can be found from both management and from workers representatives. The first of the two accounts below is from the Editor of the Western Mail and the second is from Bert Coombes.

'Here is a story told to me by a very eminent mining engineer. He was down the pit recently at the beginning of the day shift. The men were supposed to begin at 7 a.m. All the older men were on the job or hurrying to the job underground when a crowd of youngsters came

out of the cages. The over-man walked behind them urging them to get to their stalls, but they deliberately lounged about and exasperated the over-man, almost beyond endurance. They used such filthy language that my informant, who himself can say a few strong words, turned on them and roasted them. Finally, they got to their work places by 8.15. They stripped at a leisurely pace, a few took up their stools, others went straight away to get a drink. The over-man began to urge them to get to work but he was met with a torrent of abuse and was called a 'bloody slave-driver'. A number of the older men were held up because of these youngsters and were thoroughly disgusted at their conduct'.<sup>95</sup>

'Inside the entrance, the refuge holes were crowded by youngsters averaging about 20 years of age. They are always disputing viciously, it seems. Their language is brutally profane. Girls, filmstars, miner's agents, politicians are all brought inside the bawling discussion and we are cast out besmirched as they pass on to condemn others, of whom their knowledge and conception must be very slight. Everything and everybody outside their group receives the same verdict of being 'no blasted good'. They

are just a section of our mining youth, not the largest section by any count, but their insolence and indifference to all discipline make them a problem in our work and in our future. They linger until the overman has reached them, they move inwards unwillingly, disputing and swearing as they go. The overman follows, knowing they will go only so far and so fast as he makes them. What mistake in environment and education has brought these young lads into this condition'.<sup>96</sup>

In a later extract Coombes himself goes part of the way to answering the question posed in that last sentence. He wrote,

'It seems to me that the years in which these lads saw their relatives idling about the street corners, or watching each hopeless day recede before the misery of the next, has left an imprint on their minds which it is difficult to erase'.<sup>97</sup>

Not only management was angered by the attitude of many boys, but the boys fellow workers were often antagonised by their actions. At one meeting of the A.A.C. Combine Committee one delegate raised the problem of the way in which boys were behaving and asked that it be considered that colliers who took on boys should be given a subsidy as compensation.<sup>97</sup>

In a report from Cwmgorse pit production committee at the time of the boy's strikes in October 1943,

it was stated that the colliery was more peaceable without the boys at Cwmgorse and that there was less sabotage taking place.<sup>99</sup> The boys at Cwmgorse were particularly strike-prone and on one occasion they acted most oddly. Forty-eight of them stopped work but told their lodge committee that the reason for their strike was a secret. Work was resumed the following day without any further disclosure taking place.<sup>100</sup>

The Boy's Strikes of May and June 1942.

The boy's strikes of May and June 1942 occurred in two separate outbreaks. One between 27 May and 6 June and the second between 15 June and 29 June.<sup>101</sup> The first phase took place arising out of the general campaign at that time within the industry for increased wages, specifically in relation to the differentials between mining and other industries. The second phase was a direct response to the Greene Award. Yet whilst dissatisfaction with wage rates was undoubtedly the occasion for these strikes, they must also be seen as a response to the particular grievances that the boys had which have been described above. Dai Dan Evans miner's agent in the Swansea Valley at the time of the strikes was very firm on making this point.

'Now when the boys came out on strike at this time it was not so much for higher wages. We had gone through a very very austere period for a long time and when the

boys came out at that time it was an accumulation. Whilst the wages question was in the problem which they struck, I would say the biggest thing in the problem which they struck was the austere lives they led. Couldn't get anything, see, you went to the pit, came out of the pit, and that was the end of the bloody day for you. See, you couldn't go down town, of if you went down town you wouldn't be able to buy anything or spend anything ..... there was nothing to be had anywhere, so it was a revolt you can see, against the conditions of life during the war, as much as the wages question'.<sup>102</sup>

The protest movement against the low level of boy's wages began in an organised way in the mid-Rhondda, led by boys who worked in the Cambrian Combine. Boys at Llwynypia lodge held a meeting which was 'invaded' by youths from other mid-Rhondda collieries. As a result of this a further mass meeting was held at Trealaw which was attended by between 800 and 900 youths. They established a Pit Boys Charter which had the following demands:-

1. An increase of £1-1-0 a week for all youths between 14 and 21.
2. Youths of 18-21 to receive full adult war bonus.
3. Adult pay for adult work.

4. Greater precautions to be taken underground in view of increasing accident rate. Periodical X-ray and medical examination for all. Respirators to be available when their use is practicable.
5. A guarantee that all youths will be trained to take a place at 21 and that a place will be available.
6. Adult labour to be employed to perform all timber carrying, dumping, tension and plough clearing in view of the arduous nature of the work.

They also demanded that no youth under 15 should go underground and called for the revision of the worker's compensation act so that in cases of fatalities, compensation would be paid at the same rates to mothers and other dependents of youths solely supporting the home as was paid to wives in respect of their husbands.

The meeting agreed to ask the SWMF EC to receive a deputation so that the boys could put their case. One youth and one adult from each of the four lodges were elected to form the deputation.<sup>103</sup>

The demands of the charter reveal the influence of the Young Communist League. The main points bear a striking similarity to the YCL submission to the Forster Committee. It was the



influence of Communist Party members at the meeting that channelled the agitation into official directions. Hence the approach to the SWMF EC. Jack Davies, miner's agent in the area and a member of the Communist Party addressed the meeting. Although, according to the 'New-Leader' 'his performance was punctuated by a chorus of booing',<sup>104</sup> his policy seems to have prevailed and the strikes which were about to take place in other areas of the coalfield were not to occur in the mid-Rhondda.

Support for the Pit Boys Charter was widespread throughout the coalfield, but many lodge committees, such as that at Lewis, Merthyr colliery,<sup>105</sup> voiced disagreement with using the strike weapon to press forward its demands. Typically it was in West Wales that strikes associated with the Charter began.

As in the mid-Rhondda, it was the Communist Party that were responsible for the initial agitation around the Pit Boys Charter. Several of their leading members in the area signed it and it was accepted by the delegates of the SWMF Area No. 1 Council.<sup>106</sup> Once they had begun the campaign, however, the Communist Party seem to have failed to channel the response into a constitutional direction, as had happened in the mid-Rhondda. At a meeting at Cefn Coed colliery addressed by one of

the Communist Party organisers, it seems that he was 'misunderstood',<sup>107</sup> and a strike began there on 21 May and this spread to Ynyscedwyn the next day.<sup>108</sup>

Arthur Horner came down to the area to address a mass meeting on the issue at Ystradgynlais on 26 May only to be violently criticised and howled down. The major result of his visit, seemingly, was that a rash of strikes began the next day in the Dulais, Swansea, Twrch, and Amman Valleys.<sup>109</sup> Over twenty collieries were involved and at some of them the adults went on strike, too, in sympathy with the boys. At seven other collieries the men were prevented from working.<sup>110</sup> According to one miner's union official the boys sent messengers from pit to pit, trying to spread the strike.<sup>111</sup>

The effect of the strike on other industries in the area was serious and the manager at the National Oil Refinery at Llandarcy reported major problems.<sup>112</sup>

The boys at Cefn Coed spent eight days on strike and those at Ynyscedwyn, seven. The other pits involved were on strike for four or five days. Towards the end of the week supporting strikes began to take place in other parts of the coalfield outside the West Wales area. Four pits in the Garw Valley struck for two days and there was a one-

day stoppage at Aberbaidon and Newlands collieries near Pyle, at Waunllwyd and Marine collieries, Ebbw Vale and at Risca in Monmouthshire.<sup>113</sup> The SWMF EC met to discuss the stoppage on 28 May and they decided that all miner's agents and executive members should endeavour to persuade the boys to return to work, emphasising that national negotiations over the Greene Award were already in progress.<sup>114</sup> In addition the Minister for Mines, D. R. Grenfell, sent the following telegram to all lodges involved in the dispute.

'Insist upon immediate return to work. Wages claims will be considered nationally. Present unconstitutional stoppage is causing direct injury to war effort. Men and boys in all coalfields must remain at work while negotiations proceed'.<sup>115</sup>

When the SWMF EC met on 2 June it was reported that only four pits were affected by the strikes. A deputation representing boys engaged at fourteen collieries attended this meeting, and this resulted in the EC promising to give full consideration to their demands in return for the boys on their part agreeing to suspend further action pending the results of the national negotiations.<sup>116</sup>

The results of those negotiations, the

Greene Award, was announced just over a week after the strikers had returned to work. Far from satisfying the majority of boys it stirred up more trouble. The award was considered meagre and strikes flared up again. This time they were more widespread throughout the coalfield. Only five pits were involved in the Anthracite district, Maerdy and Steer pits, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen, Cwmgorse, Gelliceidrim and Blaenhirwaun. The main areas where the strikes took place were the Garw Valley, Maesteg, the Afan Valley, Pyle, Ebbw Vale, Abertillery, Blaina and Blaenavon.

Glengarw, Aberbaiden and Newlands collieries struck work on 15 June and the other pits followed their lead on days between 20 June and 26 June. Glengarw was affected for nine days, but most of the other disputes lasted between three and six days. At some pits the boys struck only for a day. All the boys were back in work by 29 June.<sup>117</sup>

It would seem that there was no organisation behind the strikes. They spread by word of mouth and press reports. Their widespread nature can be interpreted as illustrating the general discontent that was felt throughout the coalfield by the boys. In the Garw Valley and other places that were covered by SWMF Area No. 2, the moving force behind the strikes was the Executive member for the Area, D. R. Llewellyn. Up until that

time he had been a member of the Communist Party. He was the only SWMF EC member to support the strikes. The general policy of the SWMF EC was once again to condemn the strikers and to insist that the Greene recommendations be accepted as a total package. At the SWMF conference on 28 June when the Greene Award was accepted a condemnation of 'the irresponsible and misguided actions of men who are misleading the youth of the coalfield' was issued and the boys were urged 'to resist inducements which are tantamount to deserting the youth now serving the country on land, sea and air'.<sup>118</sup>

The strikes involved angry meetings and demonstrations in various towns and villages of South Wales. However, there was no attempt at real co-ordination, and even at local level great disorganisation was apparent. Mel Thomas, a member of the lodge committee at Coegnant Colliery, Maesteg at this time has described this facet.

'I remember a meeting in the Town Hall, Maesteg when they attempted to elect a committee, but there was no leadership amongst the boys and the result was they would say, 'all right we will decide we will stay out on strike at all pits', but you only had to go to one pit and get up on a tram and say, 'come on boys, the best

thing you can do is to go to work', and they were in work'.<sup>119</sup>

Whilst this lack of leadership was apparent there are some cases of prominent future leaders in the coalfield emerging during these strikes of which the most outstanding example was that of Jim David in the Dulais Valley.<sup>120</sup> Possibly the most interesting aspect of these strikes is that the one significant part of the coalfield that was not affected by either outbreak was the Rhondda, where the agitation around the issue can be said to have begun. A delegation from the Cambrian Combine had attended an SWMF EC meeting on 2 June and its members reported back to another mass meeting in Trealaw, urging it to accept the guidance of the SWMF EC. The resolution passed at the meeting declared 'that it is time what the whole British community were made aware of the scandalously low wages we receive having regard to our calling, the terrible conditions under which we labour, the inhuman tasks we have to perform and the appallingly dusty conditions we toil in'. However, the resolution went on to maintain that because of the realisation that the war was at a vital stage it was not meant that their claims should 'point a pistol at the Coalowners and the Government' but if they were

dealt with fairly 'young miners would be stimulated to greater efforts to increase coal production, so vital for the prosecution of the war'. Finally, it called upon the SWMF and the MFGB to embark upon a campaign to obtain support for their demands.

As the resolution also included a phrase saluting the 'gallant youth of Soviet Russia', the New Leader detected the hand of the Communist Party behind the resolution.<sup>122</sup> This is almost certainly true, and it would seem that it was the Communist Party above all that had averted strike action taking place in the Rhondda.

Elsewhere, as happened in West Wales, they were not able to control the movement that their agitation had set in motion. According to Mel Thomas this happened to a certain extent in the Maesteg area, too. At Caerau colliery, the Communist Party had raised the points in relation to boy's conditions, but had then had to try and curb the effects of this. Speaking of Fred Thomas, a Communist Party member and also chairman of Caerau lodge, Mel Thomas said,

'He had more or less planted the seed as far as these boys were concerned and yet he was the one who had to go and break down the strike, you see, at the end'.<sup>123</sup>

In West Wales, the Communist Party attempted to place the blame for the cause of the strikes on the miner's agent, Trevor James, who was noted for his anti-war viewpoint. They issued a public statement condemning his actions during the boy's strikes and stating that his general attitude to the war 'played into the hands of Fascists and were against the best interests of the working class'.<sup>124</sup> The South Wales Voice, in which this statement was printed received several letters defending Trevor James, stating that whilst he had signed the 'Boy's Charter' so had several members of the Communist Party, who had in fact introduced the 'charter' into West Wales, and secondly that at the meeting in Ystradgynlais at which Arthur Horner had been loudly heckled, so had Trevor James.<sup>125</sup>

The attack on Trevor James by the Communist Party can only be interpreted as indicative of the bad feeling that was apparent in the area between prominent members of the Communist Party and the Labour Party which showed itself more often at times of election for posts such as SWMF Executive Council member and miner's agent.<sup>126</sup>

The boy's strikes had one particular result in the union, that is the decision by the EC to curtail aid to all union members charged with breach of contract, as many boys were, following



the strikes.<sup>127</sup> On a wider scale the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales thought that the actions of the boys had repercussions in other industries. Unofficial strikes outside the coalmining industry were a relatively rare event, but at the same time as the boy's strikes were in progress there were strikes taking place at the Merthyr Gas Company, Tondu Brickworks and St. David's Tinplate Works, Loughor. The strike at Tondu brickworks involved thirty-two boys and they openly stated that the 'success of the boys in the mines had relieved them of any fear of penalties'.<sup>128</sup>

The Boy's Strikes of October 1943.

In early September 1942, the Forster Committee which had been set up to examine the question of the recruitment of juveniles into the mining industry reported.<sup>129</sup> It made no recommendations as regards wage-rates, announcing its' intention to report separately on the matter, after discussions with both sides of the industry. It did, however, make several progressive recommendations on the issues of training juveniles, health examinations and welfare facilities, but moves to put those into practice were slow. In December 1942, the SWMF EC received a letter from the Gwendraeth Valley Consultation Committee asking that they press for

the immediate implementation of the reports proposals.<sup>130</sup> Yet in May 1943 a 'young miner' was writing to the South Wales Voice to ask why the proposals were still only 'on paper' and whether their implementation had been shelved until the end of the war.<sup>131</sup> In July 1943, consequent upon the Government's decision to direct young men into the mining industry, the MFGB unanimously passed a resolution calling for the immediate implementation of the Forster Report - over nine months after it had been presented. Arthur Horner spoke strongly on the issue:

'A great change has taken place.

Throughout their history the miners have been supplicants begging for work. Today the nation is begging for workers to go into the industry'.

'Recruitment to the mines is no longer the sole concern of the industry. The future of the country will be determined by this problem. The fact must be faced that mining is so discredited as an industry to work in that the majority of boys prefer the army with all the risks attached, rather than go down the mines'.

'I am prepared to accept the logic of the argument that if a boy can be directed to Sicily, he can be directed to the mines,

but if we accept this we have the right to demand the immediate implementing of the Forster Report'.<sup>132</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the Government's sluggishness in reacting to the needs of boy labour in the mines began to increase, and the situation was in no way mollified by the supplementary report on wages by the Forster Report Committee in May 1943.

It recommended that a national minimum wage for juveniles be established but added that the fixing of the rates should take place within the industry and by means of its own negotiating machinery, rather than by an external body.<sup>133</sup> This decision meant further delay and further exasperation for the boys. In June and July 1943 only firm action by the SWMF EC prevented a widespread outbreak of strikes taking place.

In early June strikes took place at Dillwyn and Brynteg collieries in the Dulais Valley, demanding increased wages for boys. The miners agent for the area, Trevor James reported to the SWMF EC that there was a possibility of the dispute extending to the Swansea Valley.<sup>134</sup> Although this did not happen, three weeks later boys at Cefn Coed, Gelliceidrin, Cwmgorse and the three Gwaun-cae-Gurwen collieries struck on the same issue, but particularly demanded that when they did adult

work they should be paid adult rates.<sup>135</sup> As a result of this strike the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee demanded of the SWMF EC that they once more press for the application of the provisions laid down by the Forster Report.<sup>136</sup> The SWMF EC decided that unless boys were paid adult rates for doing adult work they should be instructed by their lodges to refuse to do such work.<sup>137</sup> This militant stance on this issue seems to have headed off further strike action by the boys.

Boy's wages rates were finally referred to the National Tribunal that had been set up to investigate wages in the coalmining industry under the chairmanship of Lord Porter. Their award was announced on 4 September 1943. There were to be two scales of rates, one for underground workers and one for surface workers. Underground workers were to receive 32/- a week at 14, 52/- at 18 and 62/- a week at 20½. Surface workers were to receive 27/6 a week at 14, 44/- a week at 18 and 55/- a week at 20½. Rates were to increase at each half year of age.<sup>138</sup>

The rates proposed were just over half of those suggested by the 'Boy's Charter' drawn up by the Amman and Gwendraeth Valley 'Boy's Charter' Committee. Their proposals had been 70/- at 14,

increasing by 10/- for each year of age up to 120/- at 19.<sup>139</sup> Boys in this area, therefore, were greatly dissatisfied by the award. So, too, were their official leaders. Will Lawther, President of the MFGB followed the announcement of the award by cancelling a broadcast that he was due to make as part of the campaign to recruit juvenile labour into the industry.

'The Award' he stated, 'is one that will be of no use whatsoever in helping us to get the young manhood that is required to give the nation the coal it needs. Everyone in the industry is convinced that the job that youth is called upon to do is one that merits payment in accordance with the risks that they run'.<sup>140</sup>

Lawther then threatened to withdraw the MFGB's co-operation with the Government's recruiting campaign for the mines as a protest against the Award, but also made an assurance that it would be accepted, however much it was disliked.<sup>141</sup>

In South Wales the Award was debated at a special SWMF conference at which Arthur Horner called it an 'unfortunate decision'. The offer was in fact less than that made by the Owners. All it amounted to was an increase of 4d per day for one category of boys in coalfield. However,

whilst deploring the Award, Horner also expressed the hope that the boys would not take any action on their own volition.<sup>142</sup>

In West Wales, it was believed that the new minimum wage was below what many of the boys were already earning.<sup>143</sup> Anger was widespread and in order to try and prevent boys taking isolated action the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee decided to organise meetings in the area to explain the case of the SWMF to the boys. The feeling was that if the Combine did not act, the boys would do so on their own.<sup>144</sup>

The MFGB discussed the possibility of referring the Award to arbitration but decided against this and instead chose to make a demand for an increase in wages for all workers, hoping that the boy's wages would be increased proportionally with the increase made to adults.<sup>145</sup> This tactic obviously meant a further delay whilst the National Tribunal discussed the overall wage claim.

Events were moving far too slowly to satisfy the majority of the boys and in their eyes the SWMF was contributing to the pedestrian rate of progress. On 12 October just over twelve months after they had been promised a new national minimum wage and over five weeks after the minimum wage had been announced and declared inadequate by all the top officials of the union,

the boys at the three Gwaun-cae-Gurwen pits, Cwmgorse and Gelliceidrin, all struck work in the hope that their own actions might help to determine events.<sup>146</sup> Within three days, fifteen collieries were affected by the strike. 700 boys had withdrawn their labour and 5,200 men had either taken action in support of the boys or were unable to work due to the absence of the boys. The efforts of SWMF officials to obtain a resumption of work failed whilst the attitude of the Ministry of Fuel and Power was that 'a couple of weeks without pay will bring the irresponsible element to their senses'.<sup>147</sup>

All pits involved in the strike were in West Wales, and on 16 October the committee of SWMF Area No. 1 met to discuss the situation. They were in receipt of two letters, one from the Regional Fuel Controller, Mr. William Jones who described the strikes as a form of anarchy, and one from the SWMF EC. The SWMF EC explained that negotiations were taking place to discuss a general improvement of wages for the industry. The stoppages did not assist Federation officials as the union was charged with being unable to maintain agreements that had been freely entered into. Such strikes weakened the organisation of the union. The letter then went on to describe the international situation. Important offensives were being waged

to try and ensure a swift end to the war and millions of youths throughout the world were taking grave risks to try and ensure this. Their efforts should not be impeded because of a shortage of coal. No support would be given by the SWMF, and no defence provided for those 'responsible for the present anarchy of the coalfield'.<sup>148</sup>

The meeting passed a unanimous resolution recommending the immediate resumption of work and arrangements were made for miners agents, executives, committee members and lodge officials to address the boys that weekend.<sup>149</sup> The SWMF EC appeal was widely publicised but the response to it was mixed. At an SWMF EC meeting on 20 October it was reported that the majority of men involved in the stoppage had returned to work but only boys at two pits, Ammanford and Llandebie<sup>150</sup> had resumed. Furthermore, although several lodges had held meetings at which it was decided upon a general resumption of work, the boys in many cases had not abided by this mandate. Such was the case at the Gwaun-cae-Gurwen pits.<sup>151</sup> On October 22 it was estimated that there were 960 boys on strike and 1,460 men. Indeed, between the 19 and 22 of October the strike had extended to six more collieries - Pontyberem, Pwllbach, Ystalyfera, Cwmlllynfell, Ynyscedwyn and Llangennech.<sup>152</sup>



On 23 October the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee held a special meeting which condemned the action of the boys for ignoring decisions arrived at in their lodges<sup>153</sup> and two days later a delegate conference of the SWMF issued a similar condemnation.<sup>154</sup>

In the third week of the strike, however, the movement began to fizzle out, as boys at various collieries began to drift back to work, especially as the support of adults receded. By October 29th the only five pits, Cwmgorse, Great Mountain, Blaenhirwaun, Cross Hands and Pontyberem remained affected and the Industrial Relations Officer considered that it was safe to assume that the boys revolt against the authority of the SWMF would shortly die a natural death.<sup>155</sup> There was indeed a complete return to work by 1 November, although dissatisfaction with the award was given as the reason for isolated strikes at Steer Pit<sup>156</sup> Cwmllynfell<sup>157</sup> and Brynhanllys<sup>158</sup> during the following six weeks.

The strikes were totally confined to West Wales and apart from Hendy Merthyr in the Swansea steam coal district, to anthracite collieries. Whilst the strike was obviously provoked by the dissatisfaction with the Porter Award for youths, compared with the earlier boys strikes of 1942, those of 1943 seem to have contained a greater

element of wilful defiance of the union on the part of the boys.

The Reaction of the SWMF to the Boys Strikes

The leadership of the SWMF were concerned not only by the fact that the boys were challenging their authority, but also that they found it necessary to do so. It indicated, perhaps that there was a fault within the union structure and that there was some need for self examination. In his article, 'Pit Boy' Bob Condon considered that the union had not taken enough interest in the boys, although he did not believe that it was necessarily the fault of the leadership. He thought that Arthur Horner, for instance, had a 'lively interest' in the youth of the industry, but that these interests were not widespread enough throughout the lodges.<sup>159</sup> This is perhaps revealed by the fact that very many lodges did not have a youth representative on their committee and in the wake of the boy's strikes, several decided to make such an appointment, for example at Caerau Colliery, Maesteg.<sup>160</sup>

In their discussions on the issue the SWMF EC generally felt that there was a lack of understanding of trade unionism amongst their younger members and the remedy for this was that there should be a greater emphasis on education. At the Annual SWMF Conference in April 1944 Arthur Horner told his audience that the record of the

SWMF since its reorganisation in 1934 should become more widely known, especially amongst the young miners, who knew little about either the history, the past struggles and achievements.<sup>161</sup>

In July 1944 the SWMF decided to take the initiative and convene a conference in South Wales to organise a mass socialist youth movement.<sup>162</sup>

They readily accepted among themselves that the trade union and political movements had not taken the problem of the youth seriously and that the strikes over the Porter Award in October 1943 and the full coalfield stoppage of March 1944 had given them a 'rude shock'.<sup>163</sup>

The aims of the conference were:-

1. To interest and attract young people into the Trade Union movement and to raise the consciousness of trade union branches of the urgency of the problem.
2. To assist in the recruitment into, and the active participation in trade union work.
3. To educate and train youth in the history of the struggle of the working class organisation and of socialist thought.<sup>164</sup>

The conference met on 28 October 1944.

There were 442 delegates present, of which 342 were members of the SWMF. During the conference several criticisms of the SWMF were made which

mainly concerned the neglect of education and the lack of involvement of youth in the union. Quoted below is a small selection of such contributions:-

A. Walker: 'The Miner's Organisation should participate much more fully in the organisation of educational, cultural and recreational work amongst its members. This aspect of the work of our union is very sadly neglected. The union stands for much more than wages and working conditions, it should become part and parcel of the lives of its members'.

Andrews: 'I believe the Trade Union movement should cater for the cultural, educational, dramatic, musical and aesthetic tastes of its members generally if they are to expect the workers to take an active interest in the work of the union'.

Jones: 'Youth should be coached in the work of the movement by appointing youth representatives to the lodge or branch committees, and also allowing youth representatives to attend along with adult delegates at conferences of the union in order to train them for the great work of this movement'.

Styles: 'The Trade Union Movement should do everything possible to attract the youth into its ranks as active workers, herein lies the only hope for the working class in the future. In the past the official movement has been afraid of the youth; afraid of its turbulent nature'.<sup>165</sup>

The type of initiative taken in this instance by the SWMF<sup>166</sup> was repeated to a small extent at local level. It has already been noted that in some places youth representatives were added to lodge committees whilst in the Communist Party dominated Dulais Valley it was decided in the aftermath of the strikes of 1942 to set up a branch of the Young Communist League as it was generally felt that the strikes were a product of a lack of political education.<sup>167</sup>

Lack of political education and involvement in the union may have been important contributory factors responsible for the strikes, but they should not be seen as being more important than the grievances that the boys actually had, although they may go a long way to explaining why the strikes were of an unofficial nature. The immaturity of the boys obviously meant that their understanding of the important issues of the day was not as great as their elders and also meant that their response to grievances would be that

much more impetuous. The Industrial Relations Officer for Wales made an interesting comment about the boy's strikes that occurred in 1942.

'It is significant perhaps that the initiative is being taken by the youth of the industry. For several years past the disciplinary hold of the SWMF upon its members has been exemplary and the extent of unofficial stoppages that have taken place can be regarded as small. Presumably the Federation grip upon its older members is still very strong and the habit of constitutional action has become ingrained. It has been left for the younger element to throw off restraint and give vent to the exasperation they feel when they find their sweethearts and sisters receive bigger wages than they do'.<sup>168</sup>

It was not necessarily that their grievances were greater than those of other miners, but that their sense of grievance was greater. The wages question in the war years was seen as an insult to their emergent manhood, but more important perhaps, the bitterness of the upbringing had occurred at an impressionable age. It is important to remember the words of James Griffiths that they were 'the children of the depression, reared on the dole, thrown on the scrapheap and allowed

to rust'.<sup>169</sup> This experience had bred distrust, a distrust Bert Coombes has written, of anything with a suggestion of officialdom, of old political parties and religious bodies that they believed had failed them completely.<sup>170</sup> Above all, perhaps, the boys strikes demonstrated this distrust.

C - THE STRIKE WAVE OF 1943

The Apprentice Boy's strikes that occurred in October 1943 took place in the middle of the twelve months of greatest upheaval in the coalfield. During this period it seemed that the irritations associated with the wartime emergency were at their peak and discontent was rife. The atmosphere that had been generated in the months before the announcement of the Greene Award emerged once more,<sup>171</sup> only this time feelings were much stronger and dissatisfaction much greater,

At the turn of 1942 the relatively peaceful lull that had followed the Greene Award began to come to an end. There were several reasons for this. With the Allied victories in Africa, the Allies seemed, at last, to be on the certain road to victory with the result that both the people and politicians in Britain began to turn their minds to the problems of post-war. Henry Pelling quotes The Times as stating that 'The African triumphs have brought new force to the demand for timely and well-planned reconstruction'.<sup>172</sup>

This turning point in the war did not, however, have particularly beneficial effects on the domestic scene. Pelling believes that many workers, given time to think about life after the war was over, did not necessarily find the prospect encouraging.<sup>173</sup> Many thought at once of the unemployment and hardship of the inter-war years, with the result that they felt little need to hasten the victory which as far as their expectations went would only mean a return to low wages and unemployment.<sup>174</sup> George Orwell, expressed a similar viewpoint during 1943 itself. He considered there to be much cynicism about 'after the war' and that the 'we're all in it together feeling of 1940' had faded away.<sup>175</sup> In addition to this mood there was also a genuine war weariness which was beginning to have a telling effect. There had been a steady decline in industrial morale after the Battle of Britain and the longevity of the war had led to urgency being replaced by monotony and an inevitable slackening of enthusiasm.<sup>176</sup>

The atmosphere in the coalfields during 1943 has been described by Michael Foot as 'becoming uglier'.<sup>177</sup> Undoubtedly, complacency due to the African victories, monotony, war-weariness and cynicism about 'after the war' all played their part in creating such a mood, but more pertinent matters relevant to industry were



mainly responsible. The gloss of <sup>the</sup> Greene Award had been rubbed away and the wages question was in the forefront of most miners minds, and there was thorough disenchantment with the operation of Dual Control which had been introduced after the Greene Award.

At the time of the introduction of Dual Control, even the Minister of Labour himself, Bevin was pessimistic about whether it would be a successful exercise. He considered that the ills of the industry went too deep to be touched by piece-meal reforms.<sup>178</sup> It did not take long for those views to become justified.

From the miners point of view the main problem with Dual Control was that it was not nationalisation. The coalowners still remained and although the managers were now under the direction of Government officials their position was ambiguous, as they were still under the employ of the colliery companies and receiving their wages from them.

From the point of view of the coalowners Dual Control was a threat. Almost inevitably it would be a prelude to nationalisation. From the time of its introduction they became less co-operative within the industry. In the early years of the war there is every indication to illustrate that their policies were tempered by

fears of government intervention into the industry and the future possibilities of nationalisation.<sup>179</sup> Government intervention with the introduction of Dual Control removed this restraint.

The SWMF EC attributed the increased discontent in the coalfield in the early months of 1943 to a change of policy by the coalowners. The EC reported that deputations from four collieries had attended one of their meetings to report alleged deductions in wages as a result of cuts in allowances. It was also announced that 'very considerable disturbances' were being caused by what the SWMF considered to be a misuse of the Essential Works Order which resulted in men being punished twice for one offence.

These two factors, the EC felt, were bound to result in possible sporadic strike action, and although they were impressing upon lodges and individual members that it was important to stay at work despite provocation, they could not be held responsible for any possible consequences in the form of industrial disturbances if the position was not clarified. It was their contention that the union's general policy towards the war was being exploited by the owners to the detriment of the workers interests.<sup>180</sup>

This statement, issued in March 1943, was made publicly, said Arthur Horner, because at that time at least six important collieries were contemplating strike action in defence of their interests. The SWMF EC, he said, deplored such a deterioration in relationships.<sup>181</sup>

At the same time as making these statements the SWMF EC issued a circular to lodges in which precipitate action was discouraged.<sup>182</sup>

However, although the atmosphere in the coalfield was becoming increasingly tense and talk of unrest more common, against a background of increasing absenteeism and decline in output, there were no serious strike outbreaks until June, when twenty-four hauliers accused of 'canny' practices were found guilty, and given the option of a £20 fine or a month's imprisonment. Twenty chose imprisonment and a rash of sympathetic strikes followed.

i) The Sympathetic Strikes in Support of Twenty Imprisoned Tarreni Hauliers

The Ministry of Labour and National Service brought a case against twenty-four hauliers at Tarreni Colliery, Godre-graig in the Swansea Valley for committing a breach of the Essential Works Order (1943) by 'impeding work of the undertaking carried out at the colliery'. The

events that led to this development had quite a long history, reaching back at least twelve months to May 1942.

Tarreni Colliery had a reputation for being a militant pit. Dai Dan Evans who was once the miners agent in the Swansea Valley believed that the colliery put its stamp upon the men who worked there.

'Tarreni men were the most unholy men in the anthracite..... Tarreni men couldn't conform in any way at all. They were highly rebellious'. It was a very unconstitutional pit and in fact on the pay ticket, there was an item, damages, printed on. In other words, the Company anticipated the need to claim damages for such as unconstitutional strikes.<sup>183</sup> In the period between 1926 and 1939 there were more stoppages at Tarreni colliery than in any other in the coalfield.<sup>184</sup>

In the first years of the war, however, the colliery was relatively quiescent, but in May 1942 the colliery was on stop for five days. According to the management the hauliers had been operating a policy of ca'canny and the manager had called them together to obtain a guarantee that a reasonable days work would be done by them. Upon the men refusing to do this, the manager refused to let them go down and the whole colliery struck work.<sup>185</sup>

The hauliers had demanded increased remuneration because conditions had changed at the colliery, but management had insisted that a tonnage agreement had been made for the duration of the war. The matter was subsequently settled when the Company admitted that there had been a change in conditions that had not been anticipated when the agreement had been made.<sup>186</sup>

Friction began again, relatively quickly, however. In December of 1942 the colliery manager alleged that he had observed three hauliers going slow, pursuing a policy of ca'canny by restricting their efforts. When interviewed the men had said that they were selling their labour too cheaply. A fortnight later the go-slow policy had spread to all the hauliers in the pit and the policy went on for four months. The output at the colliery for the week ending 17 April, 1943 was 1,202 tons compared with a weekly average output in October and November 1942 of 2,000 tons. Management estimated that 12,000 tons had been lost because of the go-slow.<sup>187</sup>

The situation at the colliery had been viewed with concern by the SWMF EC. The dispute had been reported to them by the miners agent, Trevor James, in February, and they had passed a resolution expressing 'their most emphatic disapproval of the conduct of the men in the Anthracite area.'<sup>188</sup>

In March, Trevor James reported that the Regional Controller was discussing the possibility of closing the colliery. The dispute had broadened in nature as the Colliery Company was then refusing to meet the claims of the minimum wage. The E.C. resolved to send its officials to meet representatives of the Colliery Company and the workmen to try and find a way out of the impasse.<sup>189</sup> The following week Trevor James and the Vice-President Alf Davies, having attended a general meeting of workmen stated that the men had decided to hold a ballot to see whether the proposals of the Colliery Agent should be accepted.<sup>190</sup> This was done, and by a majority of 45 the lodge voted that there should be a return to normality.<sup>191</sup> The ca'canny policy continued however.

Next, the Regional Controller visited the colliery to investigate the fall in output and decided that 150 men should be withdrawn from the colliery and directed elsewhere, and that the number of shifts be reduced from three to two.<sup>193</sup> It was at this stage that the decision was taken to prosecute the hauliers.<sup>193</sup>

Twenty-four men were charged at Pontardawe Court with impeding output. They denied the allegations, arguing that they had worked diligently

and honestly. Nevertheless they were found guilty and were each fined £20, or, if they refused to pay they would be imprisoned for one month. The Chairman of the Court said that if he had the authority he would neither have fined them nor committed them to prison but would have sent them into the army. Twenty of the men were gaoled on refusal to pay the fine.<sup>194</sup>

The morning after the men had been sentenced, the rest of the men employed at Tarreni colliery decided not to work in order to express their sympathy with those prosecuted. This was despite the fact that before the case had gone to court a ballot at the colliery had decided that the men should not be supported.

The weekend following the court hearing was followed by Whit Monday and throughout the three days union officials worked hard to try and prevent any escalation of strike action. A meeting of the Swansea Valley lodges was held and it was decided that they would pay the fines of the men, so as to get them out of gaol. SWMF Vice-President, Alf Davies had gone down to the area with the necessary money but only one lodge Pwllbach had kept to the bargain to pay, so he returned to the union offices with the money.<sup>195</sup>

On the first day after the holiday break,

therefore, five pits were on strike in support of the imprisoned men, - Maerdy, Steer, Pwllbach, Ystalyfera and Tarreni. 1,200 men were idle.<sup>196</sup> They were followed the next day by the men at East Pit, Gelliceidrim, Cwmgorse, Ynyscedwyn, Brynhenllys and Brynteg.<sup>197</sup> Altogether 4,231 were idle.<sup>198</sup>

The strikers received no official support. Indeed the strike was against the specific recommendation of the Committee of the Swansea Valley Joint Lodges which had urged a return to work.<sup>199</sup> The press too, came out with some sharp criticism. The Western Mail said that the strike was one of the most serious that had arisen for a long time as it was not merely a colliery dispute or<sup>an</sup> example of lack of trade union discipline, it was a strike against the administration of the law. Trade unionists, it continued, could not be allowed to arrogate to themselves a position above the law. If they were allowed to do so it would lead to industrial chaos, and eventually to Fascism.<sup>200</sup>

The only people who defended the strikers were members of the Independent Labour Party who were opposed to British participation in the war effort. They found it to be ironical that amongst the strikers there were men from the village of Cwmgiedd who had shortly before starred in the film, 'Silent Village' which had reconstructed the martyrdom of the Czech village, Lidice. These men had been hailed in the British press as



representatives of the fine type of anti-Nazi fighters, now they were being reviled.<sup>201</sup>

On June 19th, three days after the strike had begun, a delegate meeting of the SWMF Area No. 1 to which Tarreni and the other striking pits belonged, was called to discuss the situation. Alf Davies, came down from the Central EC to speak. The issue was debated for three hours, and according to the 'New Leader' a proposal for a complete stoppage of all the seventy pits in the area was put, and was only defeated by a narrow majority.<sup>202</sup> What the meeting did decide, in fact, was to recommend a resumption of work and to urge the SWMF EC to make immediate representations to the Home Secretary with a view to bringing about the immediate release of the Tarreni hauliers. The SWMF EC decided to send a deputation which consisted of three miners M.P's D. R. Grenfell, James Griffiths and Sir William Jenkins, plus Arthur Horner, Trevor James, the miners agent from the area involved, and the chairman of SWMF Area No. 1, Councillor Oliver Havard.<sup>203</sup>

All the pits concerned in the strike immediately abided by the ruling to return to work except Tarreni who delayed their return by a day.<sup>204</sup>

On Wednesday 23 June, the delegate meeting

of Area No. 1 was reconvened. It was addressed by W. J. Saddler and Alf Davies who advised all workers to continue at work until a delegate conference of the SWMF had met on 5 July to discuss the application of the Essential Works Order. They then reported that the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, had deferred making a decision about the imprisoned hauliers until the end of the following week. This could be interpreted as a negative response, as by that time the hauliers would almost have completed their sentence. It is no surprise, therefore, that on the next day, the pleas of Saddler and Davies were ignored and a number of pits went on strike again. These were Tarreni and Ystalfera in the Swansea Valley and Blaenant and Dillwyn collieries in the Dulais Valley, which had not been involved in the previous outbreak.<sup>205</sup> By the end of the week, however, there was a decision to return to work.<sup>206</sup>

The sympathetic strikes in support of the Tarreni hauliers achieved nothing in terms of obtaining their release, they served the full term. On the other hand, no firm action was taken against the strikers, despite pleas for strong measures from the press. In practice it was proving to be the best policy to allow the strikes to drift on until there was a gradual return to work. In the

Tarreni dispute, for example, it was estimated that 28,000 shifts were lost which amounted to almost £25,000 in wages. In terms of coal production it meant a loss of between 15,000 and 20,000 tons.<sup>207</sup> In relative terms the loss to the strikers was probably much greater than the loss to national coal production.

The strikes, however, were a serious warning to all concerned with the industry as to the state of mind of many of the men in the coalfield and that there was a need to take resolute action to quell their grievances. At the same time as the Tarreni strikes there were threats of widespread action by apprentice boys.<sup>208</sup> and almost as soon as there had been a return to work on the Tarreni issue another pit in West Wales, Blaenant began a strike that lasted for ten days.<sup>209</sup> It seemed as if the coalfield was on the boil.

The SWMF held a delegate conference on 5 July. Ostensibly it had been called to discuss the operation of the Essential Works Order. In the event, however, delegate after delegate used the occasion to complain of the actions of employers and managers, claiming that the war-time emergency was being taken advantage of to adopt unreasonable and provocative attitudes that could precipitate strike action.

The SWMF EC took note of these protests but

firmly reiterated their condemnations of irregular strikes which were described as both a setback to the union and to the Allied cause. The delegates were told that their members must continue at work more strictly than ever if they were to play their full part in the Allied victory. For them the all important second front was in the collieries.<sup>210</sup>

During the speech to the conference, Arthur Horner, made a special point of rebuking those men in the anthracite district who had been involved in so much of the unofficial action in the coalfield and he warned them that there were sections of the Government who wanted the anthracite miners transferred to more prolific output areas.<sup>211</sup>

The leadership of the SWMF was acutely aware that the unofficial strikes and rebellious atmosphere in the coalfield were as much a threat to the SWMF as an organisation as to anything else, but according to Michael Foot the sermons on this point preached by the union leaders rather than breaching the problems merely tended to add to the resentment of the miners, compelled as they were to submit to conditions against which they had been rebelling since the last war.<sup>212</sup>

ii) The Penrikyber Strike, August 1943.

Just over a month after the Special Coalfield Conference of July 1943 at which the SWMF leaders

had tried to dampen down the turbulent atmosphere prevailing in the coalfield, another major stoppage began which provided a platform upon which the indignation apparent throughout South Wales miners could be paraded. This stoppage at Penrikyber Colliery was in the east of the coalfield in the steam-coal area. This was significant, because in terms of strikes, this area had been relatively quiescent since the beginning of the war. The collieries in this area were generally much larger than those in the West, on average employing over a thousand workers. From the point of view of production a stoppage was viewed as being far more disastrous.

The dispute at Penrikyber was essentially a local one, but it proved to be the occasion which brought to the surface the widespread discontent that had been simmering in the steam-coal area and especially those pits that were a part of the Powell Duffryn Combine. This area of the coalfield was that which had suffered the worst during the depression years and many of the men employed in these pits during wartime had spent as many as five or six years of the previous period, idle. The Rhymney, Aberdare and Rhondda Valleys however, were according to Arthur Horner, places where there was a much clearer political

consciousness and thus a greater understanding that the most important task that had to be fulfilled was the destruction of Fascism. There was also a great feeling apparent that something should be done to use the war situation to get some 'quid pro quo' for what they had suffered in the past.<sup>213</sup>

Penrikyber colliery was an unfamiliar centre for a coalfield crisis. Before April 1943 there had been no stoppage there, other than over non-unionism, for thirty-five years. The roots of the dispute lay in the change of ownership of the colliery from Cory Brothers to Powell Duffryn in 1942. The two companies adopted entirely different policies. In July 1942 Powell Duffryn's introduced a price list based on a yardage list to replace the old tonnage based list. They also introduced new methods of mining the coal. They contended that the new methods and the new price list made it unnecessary to continue paying old allowances but the withdrawal of these allowances had the effect of bringing a number of workmen below the minimum wage.

The Colliery Company then complained that the men were going slow and not producing their normal output of coal, and Arthur Horner was called in to intervene in the matter. He arranged for the settlement of the minimum wage disputes, but the

agreement broke down and strikes took place between 5 April and 9 April 1943.<sup>214</sup>

The mood had been explosive at the time of this strike and on two occasions mass meetings of the lodge rejected appeals from SWMF EC members and lodge officials to return to work, and a possibility arose of the strike extending to other collieries.<sup>215</sup> The strike was concluded, however, when the Regional Controller of the Ministry of Fuel and Power intervened and the minimum wage claim was settled.<sup>216</sup>

Following this strike, the arbitrators under the Joint Conciliation Board Scheme, Arthur Horner and Iestyn Williams agreed upon a new yardage list. The workmen refused to accept the award as it did not include the old allowances that had been paid by Cory Brothers.<sup>217</sup> They decided to pursue a go-slow policy to which the colliery company responded by pressing for damages over breach of contract during the April strike.<sup>218</sup> Relationships at the colliery quite clearly were extremely strained.

When the SWMF EC met on 27 July a deputation from Penrikyber lodge attended with a complaint that the Colliery Company had refused to pay the minimum wage in 21 cases. Two EC members, Jack Davies and Idwal Penhallurick were asked to investigate the allegations.<sup>219</sup> Upon examining

the seam they found that the places were abnormal and that allowances should be paid to make up the wages of the workmen in the seam.<sup>220</sup>

The local miners agent E. A. Bennett reported failure to get an agreement locally and the SWMF EC decided to inform the coalowners that they would call upon the Regional Controller to intervene again if the deadlock was not broken.<sup>221</sup>

On 9 August the workmen at Penrikyber accepted that the Controller should carryout an enquiry,<sup>222</sup> and on 17 August it was reported that he had agreed to do so.<sup>223</sup> That week, however, a number of workmen found that they were again short of their minimum wage and on 20 August 104 men stopped work. The next day 1,100 men, the rest of those employed at Penrikyber followed their example.<sup>224</sup>

The strike set in motion a whirl of activity amongst company and union officials. Almost immediately the local M.P. George Hall intervened and arranged for a meeting to take place between the general manager of the Company, the colliery agent, the chairman and vice-chairman of the lodge, and the miners agent.<sup>225</sup> At this meeting the Company agreed that if work was resumed on the Sunday evening, they would meet the miners agent on the Monday morning to settle the minimum wage



claims, and an assurance was forthcoming from the Regional Controller that he would immediately begin his inquiry.

In the light of this agreement the SWMF EC decided to recommend that work be resumed at colliery on the Sunday evening,<sup>226</sup> but on the Sunday afternoon a meeting of the Penrikyber lodge voted to continue the strike, despite the urges of Arthur Horner and the lodge committee. At this meeting, however, only 336 men out of the 1,370 employed at the colliery attended. The vote to continue the strike was 208 in favour to 128 against. As this was considered to be an unrepresentative opinion because of the poor turnout it was decided to hold a second ballot on the Tuesday.<sup>227</sup> When this ballot was taken the result remained the same as on the Sunday afternoon. The strike was upheld by 578 to 294.<sup>228</sup> The men of Penrikyber had decided to stand firm in defiance not only of their employers and the Regional Controller, but also of the SWMF EC and their own lodge committee.

The next evening the Powell Duffryn Workmen's Committee met to discuss the strike. Forty-one lodges were represented on it and it was decided that the delegates should report back to their lodges for a mandated vote for future action as to

the best way to support the Penrikyber miners.<sup>229</sup>

The miners at Cwmcynon gave their mandate very quickly and assertively the next day. They came out on a sympathy strike.<sup>230</sup>

That day, Thursday 27 August, there was a specially convened meeting of the Joint Conciliation Board at which Arthur Horner described what he felt the atmosphere in the coalfield was like. Penrikyber, he said was like 'a cauldron', the feeling of resentment was tremendous, it was something you couldn't measure. He posed the possibility of all forty-one Powell Duffryn collieries being out on strike as discontent was swelling.

'It is not the Penrikyber issue that is going to be the thing' he said, 'it is going to be everybody in every colliery who has some little troubles they will decide that this is the time to produce them'. The Owners were unmoved. They refused to negotiate until the men had returned to work.

'To my mind,' said Sir Evan Williams, 'there is something far more important in this than the settling of the Penrikyber issue, and that is yielding to an insurrection of this kind.'<sup>231</sup>

Following this meeting the SWMF EC decided to call a rush conference for the next day at which they would recommend the Penrikyber men to resume work so that an inquiry could proceed with the

Regional Controller to negotiate settlement of the outstanding wage disputes.<sup>232</sup>

The SWMF conference backed their E.C. by a large vote despite the appeal for the conference to call a coalfield strike from the Penrikyber delegate Councillor Jack Bath. The attitude of the workmen at Penrikyber was such, he asserted, that they would not work unless they were assured the payment of their minimum wage claims.<sup>233</sup>

The recommendation of the conference was taken back to a packed meeting of Penrikyber workmen on the Sunday following and by an almost unanimous vote it was turned down.<sup>234</sup> Their determination for a showdown with the Powell Duffryn management could not be curbed and on the Monday morning in addition to those at Cwmcynon, the miners of Abercynon and Albion collieries came out in sympathy with the Penrikyber men. Over 4,000 miners in all were on strike.<sup>235</sup>

That Monday saw another emergency meeting of the Conciliation Board, which was attended by the Regional Controller, William Jones. Sir Evan Williams opened the meeting by stating the opinion that with the rejection of the SWMF Conference decision by the Penrikyber men, a situation of anarchy reigned in the coalfield. He was followed by Arthur Horner.

Horner explained that it was easy to misunderstand the conference vote. In effect, it was really just an expression of confidence in the SWMF EC, but in every speech that had been made from the floor there had been an expression of discontent and extreme dissatisfaction.

'Penrikyber was not the issue, but the opportunity to express all grievances especially for those in Powell Duffryn collieries'. He described incidents which he considered to be contributory causes to this mood, such as those at Penalta where men had arrived too late at work to descend and had been taken to court and fined<sup>236</sup> and at Lewis Merthyr where men told to carry lights had been fined.<sup>237</sup> There were situations such as these at every colliery, he said, and things were coming to a head. Anger and resentment was so deep that as soon as the opportunity came to express it, it would be taken to unleash all the discontents that existed. He explained that it was one thing for himself and the executive to talk to delegates in a conference about the long term aims of the war and another for those delegates to talk to the masses and persuade them to take the same long term view, especially when they wanted immediate redress of grievances.

Feelings were particularly intense within the Powell Duffryn Company. The Company was

generally thought to show a lack of elasticity of understanding. The attitude amongst the men was that they would not go back to work if the getting of them back took the form of capitulation to Powell Duffryn. Horner urged that managements should take more care and exercise more flexibility, for coal had to be provided and it could only be provided by those already in the mines.

'We have had four years of war' he went on, 'and the men in these valleys have had four years of the most drab and sordid existence, with nothing to do and nowhere to go, except work. I tell you, that if you ignore the fact that there is a certain measure of war-weariness, tiredness and frustration about at this critical time, you are making a mistake!'

In his seven years as President of the SWMF Horner claimed that this occasion was the most serious that he had encountered. For the first time he felt frustrated and incapable of finding a solution to a problem. 'I have never met anything like what I met in Penrikyber. It is the first time in my twenty-five to thirty years experience that I have been turned down in a mass meeting'.

During the discussions Horner suggested that the Regional Controller should take over the colliery for a month and conduct an immediate

investigation,<sup>238</sup> but this suggestion was not taken up, although it was eventually decided that the Regional Controller should carry out his investigation. Both parties agreed that his decision should be final and binding.<sup>239</sup> This decision was in a sense a victory for the strikers who had now got an investigation without there being a condition that they should return to work.

That same evening the Powell Duffryn Workmen's Committee met once more to receive the mandates from lodges concerning sympathetic actions with the Penrikyber men. It was decided that fourteen days notices should be tendered and that in the meantime the strikers should return to work. The advice to the strikers was intended as evidence that there was no desire to hamper the efforts of the Regional Controller, but to give him a fair opportunity to effect a settlement. The decision to tender notices was a declaration of support for the Penrikyber men.<sup>240</sup>

Despite this call that the men should return to work, the next day in fact saw an extension of the strike as three more lodges, Deep Duffryn, Tower and Abergorki, took sympathetic action. Over 5,000 men were on strike.<sup>241</sup> This was the day that the Regional Controller held his inquiry with

three members of both management and union being present as assessors.

The initial investigation was over swiftly, the Regional Controller finding in favour of the men and deciding that they should be paid their minimum wage. The owners representatives offered no evidence in opposition to the claims, stating that because so much time had elapsed<sup>since</sup> the cases had arisen that they could no longer be properly investigated as conditions in the seam would not be as they were at the time of the dispute.<sup>242</sup> The lack of evidence from the Owners was taken by those sympathetic to the miners cause as admittance on their part of their responsibility for the strike, and led to demands that they should be prosecuted.<sup>243</sup>

On the afternoon after the Regional Controller had reported, Councillor E. A. Bennett, who had presented the miner's case at the inquiry, reported back to a mass meeting of the workmen. They agreed to return to work that evening provided that the twenty-five men who had not been paid the minimum wage, were paid immediately. The manager agreed and the men were paid at the colliery office after the meeting.<sup>244</sup>

#### The Significance of the Penrikyber Strike

Throughout its reporting of the Penrikyber strike the Western Mail voiced vehement opposition.

The action of the strikers was described as 'wanton',<sup>245</sup> and they were accused of having a 'contemptuous disregard of the nation's need for coal'.<sup>246</sup> It called for firm legal action to be taken against the men. Conncillor Jack Bath of the Penrikyber lodge was asked to elucidate the men's grievances in the newspaper, but although it was accepted that genuine grounds may have existed for grievance, it was still maintained that nothing could extenuate, still less, excuse the strikers in their action which was 'manifestly a dastardly' blow at the heart of the nation at the height of its most crucial struggle for survival and victory.<sup>247</sup>

There was no attempt in the reporting of the Western Mail to wrestle with what must have appeared to most people as the stark paradox within the mining industry in the war years. This was the fact that a large percentage of miners did not agree that it was necessarily an incompatible act to strike to redress grievances or to try add improve conditions, whilst maintaining a thoroughly patriotic stance concerning the outcome of the war. On the day after the Penrikyber strike ended the SWMF held a special conference to discuss the war situation. The resolution passed there called for the launching of the Second Front and pledged the miners 'to full participation in the



productive effort to make victory the outcome of these battles.<sup>248</sup> There would hardly have been a miner who participated in the Penrikyber strike who would not have agreed wholeheartedly with those sentiments.

The Aberdare Leader had a much closer understanding of the mentality of the miners,

'To brand them as traitors is of no help. Obviously the men's grievance must be a formidable one, for most, if not all of these miners must surely want victory and peace as wholeheartedly as anyone; probably nearly all of them have kin or friends in the fighting forces. They must regard this dispute very seriously'.<sup>249</sup>

Aberdaria, the columnist who wrote this paragraph returned to the same theme the following week:

'To accuse all these men of lack of patriotism is futile, the trouble goes deep. Repeated disputes and stoppages at Penrikyber temporary settlements, then more trouble would have undoubtedly affected morale on the Home Front in this valley..... the time had come for a showdown between the miners of the Powell Duffryn Combine and the Company ..... Penrikyber had become like a

hollow tooth, forceps not aspirin tablets are necessary ..... This column does not know where the blame lies, it does know that the men have shown that they would like a solution'.

Aberdaria made another pertinent point. Although it was important to discuss strikes, he said, it should not be allowed to let the efforts of the majority of colliers who were producing the coal to fade into the background. He pointed out that during the second week of the Penrikyber stoppage, three pits in the valley, Abergorki, Werfa and Cwmnedd had all passed their output targets and increased their production upon the previous week.

'Balance this', wrote Aberdaria, 'against the now terminated stoppage and see the miners actions in its true perspective'.<sup>250</sup>

Within South Wales the Penrikyber strike became the focal point around which the problems of the coal industry were discussed, especially those pertaining to production and the attitude of the workforce. Arthur Horner's contributions at the Conciliation Board meetings during the strike are important in that they go a long way towards giving an understanding of the complex mood of the workforce. They outline how war fatigue, hostility to the introduction of more

penal measures, badgering about production and a drab environmental existence led to a preoccupation in the miners mind with his own workplace situation rather than with the wider aspects of the war. This also tended to explain, admitted Horner, the divergence that there often seemed to be between the rank and file miners and the SWMF EC.<sup>251</sup>

The ability to understand the situation, and demonstrated by both Horner/Aberdaria, did not, of course, necessarily lead to any answers about how to resolve the dilemma, and both readily accepted this. In the circumstances it was a much more sensible approach to take than the more mechanical one as applied by the Western Mail, whose suggestions were always to propose much firmer retaliation by the Government. This could only have aggravated and inflamed matters and the Government, to their credit, seemed well aware of this. As has been noted with both the Tarreni strike and the Boy's strikes allowing men to drift back to work was more effective than relying on penal measures and from the end of 1943 the Government more or less dropped prosecution as a policy.<sup>252</sup>

The Penrikyber strike took place early on in one of the most turbulent nine months in the history of the South Wales coalfield, and it is possible that the outcome of the strike partially

contributed to the events that followed. There is no doubt that the strike was a victory for the miners involved, especially from the stage where it was agreed to hold an investigation into the minimum wage cases whilst the men were still on strike. Few other strikes that had taken place in the coalfield prior to that at Penrikyber could claim similar success. A victorious strike, carried on against the advice of the union executive and even the lodge committee represented a defeat for those who advocated working through the official machinery of the union, - even if the union officials did feel the cause of the Penrikyber men to be just. The implications of the victory were perturbing for future industrial relations in the coalfield and for the accepted authority of the union. This, Arthur Horner again explained;

'We are up against a difficult position... We (the SWMF) have taken a stand, and our stand has been that the men should return to work so that we can negotiate a settlement. We are quite conscious that if a result is now obtained without a return to work, we shall have been proved wrong, and all the people who have said, "stop the wheels to get a settlement" will be proved

to be right. The consequences of that is something I could not measure, but I should think that it will convey to the average mind that the way to get settlements is to cease production".<sup>253</sup>

As Horner said, the consequence of a Penrikyber victory without a return to work would be difficult to measure, but it could be that a determining factor that encouraged people to stop work during the coalfield strike over the Porter Award six months later was the memory of Penrikyber and the lesson that results could be quickly achieved by a determined show of industrial strength.

Whilst accepting that the Penrikyber strike victory did involve a defeat for SWMF policy it would be wrong to suggest that there was a strong anti-union motivation in the strike.<sup>254</sup> The prime factor most likely in determining why the men were so insistent in remaining out, despite all official union requests was what Horner had suggested at one of the Conciliation Board meetings, that they wanted to give no sign of capitulation to the Powell Duffryn Company.

One direct result of the strike was that the SWMF EC carried out an investigation into the conditions prevailing at Powell Duffryn collieries. This initiative was taken after the chairman of

Powell Duffryn had written to Horner concerning Horner's criticisms of the company during the Conciliation Board meetings. Three officials of the union were appointed to have discussions with members of colliery company concerning disputes continually occurring at the collieries.<sup>255</sup>

A meeting was then held of miners agents whose responsibilities included the Powell Duffryn lodges, the purpose of which was to prepare a case to substantiate the charges of harsh treatment to be submitted to the Company. This committee produced a report outlining the criticisms of the Company. These included the lack of consultation with the men or their representatives, especially over the introduction of new methods of work and payment, and the fact that their Colliery Agents had no power to arrive at settlements on questions of principle without the prior consent of their superiors, to whom the miners or their representatives had no access. The Company, it was concluded, carried out the Conciliation Board Agreement rigidly, with no elasticity, in fact, oppressively.<sup>256</sup>

It is quite clear that the support that the Penrikyber men received from other collieries, represented not only a show of solidarity but also a deep hostility to the Powell Duffryn Company.

In the weeks after the Penrikyber strike that hostility was contained by the promise of the

investigation. Those weeks were, however, to see the building up of a generalised campaign in the coalfield for higher rates of pay, a campaign that was to lead to an explosion of strikes throughout the coalfield, an occurrence that was to justify the impressions of Arthur Horner, at the time of the Penrikyber stoppage, that the strike there was just the tip of the iceberg.

1. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of Ministry of Fuel and Power, 1946. Table XXX p. 57.
2. W. J. Anthony Jones op.cit. p.2-3.
3. See various tapes at South Wales Miners Library.
4. See H. Francis, 'Disturbances in the South Wales Coalfield 1925-36' pub. Llafur Vol. 1, No. 2 1973.
5. W. J. Anthony Jones op. cit. p. 2-3.
6. Chris Evans interviewed by Stuart Broomfield 9.2.73.
7. See Appendix VIII. p. 713.
8. W. J. Anthony Jones op. cit. p.84,
9. See Appendix VIII p. 713.
10. W. J. Anthony Jones op. cit. p. 84.
11. COLLIERIES WHICH EXPERIENCED MORE THAN FIVE STRIKES 1927-1939,

| No. | Colliery        | Location  | Complete Stoppages | Partial Stoppages | TOTAL |
|-----|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------------|-------|
| 7   | MARINE          | EBBW VALE | 11                 | 13                | 24    |
| 8   | NINE MILE POINT | YNYSDDU   | 8                  | 11                | 19    |
| 14  | GLENGARW        | BLAENGARW | 9                  | 4                 | 13    |

Figures taken from Table 1 of W. J. Anthony Jones op. cit. These three collieries were respectively 10, 2, and 11 in the comparable table for 1939-45.

12. LAB 10-369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 26 November 1943.



13. 'Ibid' 3 December 1943.
14. LAB 10-446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 17 March 1944.
15. 'Ibid' 23 June 1944.
16. Ibid., 15 September 1944.
17. LAB 10-550 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 22 June 1945.
18. See Appendix VIII. p. 713.
19. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes, 4 May 1940.
20. Ibid., 16 September 1944.
21. SWMF EC Minutes 19 September 1944.
22. A.E.C. Hare, 'The Anthracite Coal Industry of the Swansea District'. Social and Economic Survey of Swansea and District. Pamphlet No. 5 published by University of Wales Press Board 1940. pp.40-54, 66, 69, 75.
23. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee Minutes 30 March 1940.
24. Ibid., 7 December 1940.
25. Hare op. cit. p. 52.
26. AACC Minutes, 8 January 1940.
27. Ibid., 23 March 1940.
28. Ibid., 30 March 1940.
29. Ibid., 23 March 1940.
30. Ibid., 13 April 1940.
31. Ibid., 1 July 1940.
32. In his booklet which was published in November 1940,

A.E.C. Hare had been relatively optimistic about the future of the Amalgamated Anthracite Company. His concluding sentence read - "There is no reason to suppose that the very good record of employment and steady demand for the product of the industry will not be maintained. A review on the South Wales Voice 7 December 1940, commented. "These words make ironical reading in the light of circumstances today, when the area is the most stricken part of the South Wales coalfield".

33. See above Section I Chapter III pp 137-140.
34. AACC Minutes 7 December 1942.
35. Ibid., 3 March 1945.
36. Ibid., 7 December 1942.
37. Ibid., 3 March 1945.
38. Ibid., 7 October 1944.
39. Ibid., 3 March 1945.
40. Ibid., 17 March 1945.
41. Arthur Horner told one meeting of the AACC that 'the heads of this Company are easier in access than any other Company in the coalfield. They are more humane'. AACC Minutes, 7 December 1942.
42. e.g. South Wales Voice 8 July 1939 and 22 August 1944.
43. Ibid., 22 August 1944.
44. LAB 10-366 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales 20 April 1940.

45. News Chronicle 18 April 1940.
46. South Wales Voice, 27 April 1940.
47. Daily Herald, 20 April 1940.
48. South Wales Voice, 8 July 1939.
49. Wynne Samuel 'Transference Must Stop' Welsh Nationalist Party Pamphlet, 1943. These figures were not just 'party propaganda' the Western Mail quoted the figures of 64 closures by April 1943 - 19 April 1943.
50. Daily Worker, 22 May 1943.
51. Western Mail, 20 September 1941. Wynne Samuel op. cit. p. 6.
52. Ibid., 22 September 1941.
53. Ibid., 30 September 1941.
54. See Western Mail, 5 November 1941, 3 December 1941, 3 February 1942 and 11 April 1942.
55. Ibid., 20 May 1942.
56. Wynne Samuel op. cit., p. 6.
57. Ibid., p. 9.
58. Western Mail, 17 May 1945.
59. Ibid., 19 April 1943.
60. Daily Worker, 22 May 1943.
61. Amman Valley Chronicle, 13 May 1943.
62. Ibid., 6 August 1942.
63. Western Mail, 3 March 1943.
64. Amman Valley Chronicle, 13 May 1943.
65. Western Mail, 19 April 1943.

66. Ibid., 22 April 1943.
67. Ibid., 3 June 1943.
68. Amman Valley Chronicle, 7 September 1944.
69. South Wales Voice, 20 January 1945.
70. Amman Valley Chronicle, 3 June 1943.
71. Western Mail, 6 September 1941.
72. M.P. Fogarty op. cit. p.115.
73. Amman Valley Chronicle, 6 August 1942.
74. N. Barou op. cit. p.263-6 Appendix XVII  
'Important Unofficial Strikes 1940-6.
75. LAB 8/444-L- Submissions on Coalmining to the  
Forster Committee 1941-2. 'The Future Manpower  
of the Coalmining Industry' Memo submitted by  
the Ministry of Labour.
76. LAB 8/444-G - Note on Manpower Statistics  
February 1942.
77. LAB 8/444-L - Extracts from Coalmining Labour  
Supply Officers Monthly Reports on the  
Recruitment of Boys.
78. LAB 8/444-J - A policy for Young Miners - a  
YCL Leaflet May 1942.
79. The headings are actually those used in his  
notes by the Labour Welfare Officer for the  
Northern Region. LAB 444-E - 29 April 1942.
80. LAB 444-I - Extracts from Coalmining Labour  
Supply Officers Monthly Reports on the  
Recruitment of Boys, January 1942.

81. Coombes, 'Miners Day' p.78-9.
82. Reynolds News, 31 October 1943.
83. LAB 8/444-L - 'Future Manpower of the Coalmining Industry' Memo of the Ministry of Labour.
84. Coombes 'Those Clouded Hills' p.58.
85. LAB 8/444-J - A Policy for Miners a YCL Leaflet May 1942.
86. D. J. Williams, 'The Condition of Boys in the South Wales Mines' Cardiff 1935.
87. South Wales Voice, 8 July 1939.
88. Ibid., 15 July 1939.
89. LAB 8/444-E - Notes by the Labour Welfare Officer of the Northern Region 29 April 1942.
90. Minutes of the South Wales Branch of the NACM in the Transactions of the National Association of Colliery Managers, 17 December 1939.
91. Reynolds News, 31 October 1943.
92. LAB 8/444-Y - Accidents to Boys and Youths, 1939-40.
93. Western Mail, 1 April 1939.
94. See above Section II Chapter II pp 308-312.
95. POWE 20/55 Letter from D. R. Prosser, Editor of the Western Mail to Major Lloyd-George. 15 October 1942.
96. Coombes, Miners Day p.7.
97. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p.65.

98. AACC Minutes 20 January 1943.
99. Minutes of Various Pit Production Committees December 1943. In the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Collection.
100. LAB 10/367 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 21 September 1941.
101. The Ministry of Labour Gazette, July 1942.
102. Dai Dan Evans interviewed by Hywel Francis 5.12.72. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
103. Western Mail, 25 May 1942. New Leader 6 June 1942.
104. New Leader, 6 June 1942.
105. Lewis Merthyr Lodge Committee Minutes 30 June 1942.
106. South Wales Voice, 22 August 1942.
107. Ibid., 15 August 1942.
108. Records of stoppages without Notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Record Collection.
109. South Wales Voice, 15 August and 22 August 1942.
110. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 30 May 1942.
111. Daily Express 29 May 1942.
112. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales 6 June 1942.
113. Record of Stoppages Without Notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Record Collection.

114. SWMF EC Minutes 28 May 1942.
115. Western Mail, 3 June 1942.
116. SWMF EC Minutes, 2 June 1942. Western Mail  
3 June 1942.
117. Pits involved in the second outbreak of strikes were as follows: Glengarw, Aberbaidon, Newlands, Bryn, Ffaldau, International Waunllwyd, St. Johns, Marine, Vivian, Rose Heyworth, Beynons, Garn Drift, Kays Slope, Big Pit (Blaenavon) Duffryn, Rhondda Glyncorrwg, Caerau, Nantwlaeth, Coegnant, Cwmtillery, Celynen North and Tydraw. Records of the stoppages without notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Collection.
118. Western Mail, 28 June 1942.
119. Mel Thomas interviewed by David Egan and Stuart Broomfield 29.5.73. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
120. Chris Evans, interviewed by Stuart Broomfield 9.2.73.
121. Rhondda Leader, 13 June 1942.
122. New Leader, 13 June 1942.
123. Mel Thomas interviewed by David Egan and Stuart Broomfield 29.5.73.
124. South Wales Voice, 8 August 1942.
125. Ibid., 15 August and 22 August 1942.
126. For an example of the hostility between Communist and Labour Party members within the SWMF in

the Swansea and Amman Valley areas see reports in the Amman Valley Chronicle during November and December 1942 at the time of an election for representation on the SWMF EC.

127. SWMF EC Minutes, 26 June, 1942.
128. LAB 10/365 Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, 13 June and 20 June 1942.
129. The Ministry of Labour Gazette, September 1942. p. 161.
130. SWMF EC Minutes 29 December 1942.
131. South Wales Voice, 15 May 1943.
132. Daily Worker, 21 July 1943.
133. Ministry of Labour Gazette, May 1943.
134. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales 12 June 1943.  
SWMF EC Minutes 8 June 1943.
135. Western Mail, 30 June 1943.
136. SWMF EC Minutes, 29 June 1943.
137. Ibid., 5 July 1943.
138. Ministry of Labour Gazette September 1943.
139. SWMF EC Minutes, 19 October 1943.
140. Western Mail, 7 September 1943.
141. Ibid., 8 September 1943.
142. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 11 September 1943.
143. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, 15 October 1943.



144. AACC Minutes, 9 September 1943.
145. Ibid., 6 October 1943, SWMF EC 7 October 1943.
146. Western Mail, 13 October 1943, Record of Stoppages Without Notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Collection.
147. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales. 15 October 1943.
148. Western Mail, 18 October 1943.
149. South Wales Evening Post, 16 October 1943.
150. SWMF EC Minutes 20 October 1943.
151. Western Mail, 18 October 1943.
152. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales 22 October 1943.
153. AACC Minutes 23 October 1943.
154. Western Mail, 26 October 1943.
155. LAB 10/369 Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales 29 October 1943.
156. Ibid., 26 November 1943.
157. Ibid., 3 December 1943.
158. Ibid., 10 December 1943.
159. Reynolds News 31 October 1943.
160. Caerau Lodge Minutes, 25 June 1942.
161. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes April 1944.
162. SWMF EC Minutes 15 July 1944.
163. Ibid., 16 January 1945.
164. Ibid., 26 July 1944.
165. SWMF EC Minutes of Youth Conference held at Cory Hall, Cardiff 28 October 1944.

166. The SWMF EC decided at its meeting of 16 January 1945 that the Welsh Regional Council of Labour should have responsibility for organising future conferences.
167. Chris Evans interviewed by Stuart Broomfield 9.2.73.
168. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, May 30 1942.
169. See above Section II Chapter II p 310
170. Coombes, 'Those Clouded Hills' p. 65.6
171. See above Section II Chapter III p. 372.
172. H. Pelling op. cit., p. 167.
173. Ibid., p.159.
174. Ibid., p. 250.
175. George Orwell, 'The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol. 2 'My Country Right or Left, 1940-3''. p.318.
176. Pelling op. cit., p. 252.
177. M. Foot op.cit., p. 397.
178. A. Bullock op.cit., p. 165.
179. That the Coalowners moderated their policies in the early years of the war in the hope of staving off nationalisation is illustrated by the following extracts from the minutes of meetings between Representatives of the Coalowners on the Conciliation Board.  
25 September 1939 - The Non-Unionist Question.  
Sir Evan Williams said that it was quite clear

that unless some arrangement was made there would be non-unionist strikes and that the Government would intervene. The owners concluded that it would be better to have an understanding with the workmen's representatives.

9 October 1939 - Workmen's Application for an Increase in Wages to meet the Rise in the Cost of Living. The whole position has to be taken into account in an endeavour to prevent trouble in the industry and more particularly any interference by the Government (Sir Evan Williams).

1 July 1940 - Present Position of the Industry following the Fall of France.

Sir Evan Williams said that there was a real danger that the Government would take control of the industry having regard to the patchy position of trade unless the Owners themselves took action to meet the position. He knew the Secretary and Under-Secretary for Mines were thinking on these lines..... Once the industry was controlled during the war he despaired of it ever again being de-controlled or being able to prevent nationalisation.

3 November 1941 - New Conciliation Board Agreement

Sir Evan Williams stated that the Owners must endeavour to prevail upon the men to accept the position that no change shall be made in the

Conciliation Board Agreement unless by mutual agreement. If that was disputed and there is the likelihood of a stoppage, the Ministry of Labour will intervene.

180. Western Mail, 24 March 1943.
181. Ibid., 27 March 1943.
182. SWMF Circular to Lodges 19 April 1943.
183. Dai Dan Evans interviewed by Hywel Francis of 5.12.72. and 7.8.73. Tapes at South Wales Miners Library.
184. W. J. Anthony Jones, op.cit. Table I.
185. LAB 10/368 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, 9 May 1942.
186. Letter of 18 May 1942 to Sir Evan Williams from the Joint Secretary of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association concerning stoppages during April and May 1943.
187. South Wales Evening Post, 12 June 1943. Western Mail 14 June 1943, South Wales Voice 19 June 1943.
188. SWMF EC Minutes, 9 February 1943.
189. Ibid., 23 March 1943.
190. Ibid., 30 March 1943.
191. Ibid., 6 April 1943.
192. Ibid., 20 April 1943.
193. AACC Minutes, 17 June 1943.
194. South Wales Voice, 19 June 1943.
195. AACC Minutes 17 June 1943.
196. LAB 10/369 Weekly Reports of the Industrial

- Relations Officer for South Wales 18 June and  
26 June 1943, Western Mail 17 June 1943.
197. South Wales Evening Post, 17 June 1943.
198. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial  
Relations Officer for Wales 18 June 1943.
199. SWMF EC Minutes 16 June 1943.
200. Western Mail, 17 June 1943.
201. New Leader, 26 June 1943.
202. Ibid., 17 July 1943.
203. SWMF EC Minutes 21 June 1943.
204. South Wales Evening Post, 22 June 1943.
205. Ibid., 24 June 1943.
206. Ibid., 28 June 1943.
207. South Wales Voice, 10 July 1943.
208. See above Section II Chapter IV p <sup>431</sup>
209. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial  
Relations Officer for Wales 2 July 1943.
210. SWMF Special Conference Minutes 5 July 1943.  
South Wales Voice 10 July 1943. Western Mail  
6 July 1943.
211. Cefn Coed Lodge Minutes, 5 July 1943.
212. Michael Foot, op.cit., p.446.
213. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation  
Boards on 'Stoppage at Penrikyber Colliery  
27 August 1943.
214. Minutes of Special SWMF Conference held on  
28 August 1943. Information from a factual report  
of the dispute detailed by Arthur Horner. The

intricate details of the causes of the strike can also be obtained from Horners report to the Conciliation Board in the Minutes of the Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards, 27 August 1943, and in statements to the Western Mail by Councillor Jack Bath, Secretary of Penrikyber Lodge, 31 August 1943.

215. Western Mail 5 and 7 April 1943, Aberdare Leader 10 April 1943.
216. SWMF EC Minutes 13 April 1943.
217. SWMF Special Conference Minutes 28 August 1943.
218. SWMF EC Minutes 11 May 1943.
219. Ibid., 27 July 1943.
220. SWMF Special Conference Minutes 28 August 1943.
221. SWMF EC Minutes 5 August 1943.
222. Western Mail, 9 August 1943.
223. SWMF EC Minutes 17 August 1943.
224. Minutes of Special Conference of SWMF, 21 August 1943, LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 20 August 1943.
225. This intervention by George Hall was, in fact, criticised at a Divisional Labour Party Conference in January 1944. Aberdare Leader 22 January 1944.
226. Aberdare Leader 28 August 1943.
227. Western Mail, 23 August 1943.
228. Ibid., 25 August 1943.
229. Ibid., 26 August 1943.

230. SWMF EC Minutes 27 August 1943.
231. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards 27 August 1943.
232. SWMF EC Minutes 27 August 1943.
233. Minutes of SWMF Special Conference 28 August 1943.
234. Western Mail, 30 August 1943.
235. Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Records.
236. See above Section II Chapter III p 355
237. See above Section II Chapter III p 357
238. This proposal was discussed during an adjournment in the Conciliation Board Meeting in which the Workmen's representatives considered the position. A point of view was expressed that it would be the worst form of capitulation because it would be used as the one remedy for all the ills obtaining at the several collieries in the coalfield. It seems, however, that this was a minority position as Horner recommended the measure during the meeting. (Minutes of Workmens Representatives on the Conciliation Board during the adjournment of the Conciliation Board meeting, 30 August 1943.)
239. Minutes of proceedings Concerning Conciliation Board, 30 August 1943.
240. Western Mail, 21 August 1943.
241. Ibid., 1 September 1943, LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales,

3 September 1943.

242. Western Mail, 1 September 1943.
243. For example see above Section II Chapter IIIp 363
244. Aberdare Leader 4 September 1943.
245. Western Mail, 30 August
246. Ibid., 23 August 1943.
247. Ibid., 31 August 1943.
248. SWMF EC Minutes 1 September 1943.
249. Aberdare Leader, 28 August 1943.
250. Ibid., 4 September 1942.
251. See above Section II Chapter IV pp 464-465
252. K. J. Knowles op.cit., pp.115-119. Knowles produces figures on the prosecution of strikes during World War Two - from these it would seem that there was a distinct change in Government policy in 1944, if not before, as regards prosecuting offenders. His figures are from Criminal Statistics 1939-45, Comd. 7227 and are as follows, 50 in 1941, 538 in 1942, 1,279 in 1943, 0 in 1944.
253. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards, 30 August 1943.
254. Reports in the New Leader tended to do this, e.g. 11 September 1943.
255. SWMF EC Minutes, 14 September 1943.
256. Ibid., 11 October 1943.



CHAPTER VTHE PORTER AWARD STRIKE - MARCH 1944Background to the Strike

The successful conclusion of the Penrikyber strike did nothing to quell the widespread restlessness in the coalfield. According to the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales trade union officials were finding significant difficulty trying to induce unruly elements to accept advice and guidance. Many of the matters over which disputes were arising appeared to be of a trivial nature, but they were indicative of a general restiveness.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of September 1943 there had been a danger of a complete coalfield stoppage as a result of the Winding Enginemen's refusal to enter into a new agreement with the coalowners following the conclusion of their five-year Conciliation Board Agreement, but this had been averted.<sup>2</sup> The Industrial Relations Officer felt that there was more talk, in September and October 1943, of strike action in the coalfield than there had been at any other time.<sup>3</sup>

During the October the apprentice boys struck once more and it was following the announcement of the award that had led to these strikes that the MFGB decided to put forward a demand for an overall increase in wages.<sup>4</sup> The claim was for a minimum wage of £6 a week for adult workers underground and £5-10-0 for surface workers, plus appropriate revisions of rates for youths and for the adjustment of piece-rates so as to preserve the conventional

differentials between the wages of one worker and another.<sup>5</sup>

A week after the claim had been submitted, a two-day debate was held in Parliament on the coal question in which the Ministry of Fuel and Power had to explain why, just twelve months after Dual Control had been introduced output was continuing to slump, why manpower was still so short and why industrial relations in the coalfields were so explosive.

Inevitably during the debate, the issue of nationalisation was raised from the floor of the House and it was decided by the War Cabinet that to emphasise the Government's position that whilst the improvement of the Dual Control system would be sought, it would be short of any measure that might raise political issues, the Prime Minister should be brought into the debate.

Churchill spoke to the maxim that the guiding principle of the Coalition Government was; "Everything for the war, whether controversial or not, and nothing controversial that is not 'bona fide' needed for the war". Nationalisation of the mines, he maintained, was not a necessary step to be taken towards the winning of the war.

Professor Court considered that Churchill's intervention should be regarded as one of the most successful efforts of throwing oil upon troubled

waters that Parliament saw that year. For, although, the revived demand for the nationalisation of the coal industry was killed off in the House of Commons for the duration of the war, Churchill's stance stirred up the existing restlessness in the coalfields even more.<sup>6</sup> The day after Churchill's speech the Daily Worker led its front page with an article entitled 'The Great Coal Scuttle', Aneurin Bevan believed that Churchill's rooted refusal to contemplate the abolition of private property in the coal mines in that speech was a deep cause of the crisis in the coalfields that eventually erupted in the Porter Award strike.<sup>8</sup>

It is hardly possible to substantiate Bevan's assertion, but in the months after the speech there was a distinct upturn in strikes. Churchill's speech most probably alienated miners a few degrees more from the Central Government than had previously been the case. More pertinently, however, the ruling out of the possibility of nationalisation during the war had a very important effect. The only way open to the miners seeking a betterment of their conditions was through an improvement in their economic status. A satisfactory wage award was now the only way open to the Government to placate this essential body of men. After the boys' strikes of October, November was a relatively quiet month in the South Wales coalfield with the exception of a seven day stoppage

at the small North Rhondda colliery, Glyncorrwg<sup>9</sup> but it was at this time that the colliery managers began to make their complaints about increased indiscipline in the pits and threatened to withdraw from the pit production committees.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore impatience was building up over the tardiness of any response to the MFGB wage claim and at the end of November the Cwmgorse colliery struck for two days as a protest against the delay.<sup>11</sup>

Within the MFGB, the SWMF was one of the most aggressive districts in pursuit of the claim. At an MFGB conference on 4 November the SWMF delegates voted against a resolution expressing regret that negotiations had not reached a stage approaching finality and instructing the EC to continue negotiations to a speedy conclusion. The SWMF delegates' objection was that the motion was not strongly worded enough.<sup>12</sup>

Within South Wales, the SWMF EC was also energetic. In early December they began a campaign to propagandise their demands. They had huge posters printed, approached a film company to produce a ten minute film on their case for use in cinemas, and called upon each area of the SWMF to organise meetings in their valleys. In addition they called upon the EC of the MFGB to arrange meetings up and down the country in towns and cities so as to mobilise public opinion in support.<sup>13</sup>

In the middle of December the MFGB called upon the coalowners to discuss the wage claim, as a matter of urgency at their meeting of the Joint Negotiating Committee on December 16th.<sup>14</sup> When no settlement was made at that meeting the matter was referred to the Porter Tribunal.<sup>15</sup> To accommodate the wishes of the Tribunal the MFGB deferred their delegate conference set for 14 January by a fortnight. Sensitive to the impatience already being generated in the coalfield, the SWMF EC passed a motion registering 'their most emphatic protest at the postponement'.<sup>16</sup>

Tension was building up throughout December, as was the polarisation of forces. On the one hand the colliery managers were being as militant in their complaints against the indiscipline of the miners, as the miners were being about their wage claim, on the other.

On 28 December the SWMF EC issued a press statement, warning the Ministry of Fuel and Power of the intensity of the discontent in the coalfield and of the dangerous mood caused by the inadequacy of wage rates. Another potentially large stoppage concerning the non-payment of the minimum wage at Penrikyber colliery, once more, was narrowly averted at this time when the Company made the payments in the face of threats from all the pits in the Aberdare Valley to support the Penrikyber men with strike action.

This occurrence, again at Penrikyber, prompted the SWMF EC to call a special meeting to discuss the situation pertaining in the coalfield.<sup>17</sup>

Arthur Horner opened the meeting with the following statement:-

'We are now in the third day of the year (1944) and already we have two strikes in big pits in this coalfield.<sup>18</sup> This is a clear indication that something is radically wrong in the mood of the coalfield at the present. There is a feeling abroad that the war is already won and now is the time for the workers to redress long-standing wrongs they have endured for years. In fact, the next few months will be the most momentous in the history of the war. Thousands upon thousands are due to die in the great onslaught that is to be made on the Continent of Europe'.<sup>19</sup>

As a result of the meeting a statement was circulated to lodges emphasising the gravity of the war situation, and whilst recognising that the miners were deeply conscious of the great wrongs they had suffered in the twenty years before the war, when they were the unwanted men of industry, kicked and buffeted about by all and sundry, and that the strikes in the coalfield were primarily an expression of a deep sense of frustration arising out of a sense of inferiority due to the unsatisfactory conditions in which they

worked and the relatively low wages they were being paid, they called upon their members to cease all unofficial action and put forth a maximum effort in the struggle against Fascism.<sup>20</sup>

These pleas, seemingly, made little impact. Throughout the month of January 26 collieries were on stop at one time or another, involving at least 7,000 men.<sup>21</sup> In the last week of the month, 2,700 men were out for the equivalent of 7,800 working days,<sup>22</sup> and in the month as a whole it was estimated that 20,000 tons of coal were lost.<sup>23</sup>

The largest of these stoppages took place in the Garw Valley when the men of the Glengarw, Garw, International and Ffaldau collieries struck for six days in protest against the award to the miners by Lord Porter's tribunal which was announced on 23 January.<sup>24</sup>

The award was for a minimum wage of £5 a week to miners underground and £5.10.0 to surface workers. This was £1 less in each case than had been the MFGB claim.<sup>25</sup> This was a source of dissatisfaction alone, but an even greater source of discontent was that the men whose rates were previously different, now found themselves receiving the same rates for entirely different work, particularly in the more poorly paid coalfields, such as South Wales.<sup>26</sup> Special allowances of the past, such as those for working difficult places and the privileges of the head of a family

receiving a supply of cheap housecoal were not to be reckoned in the assessment of the minimum wage. The effect of this and its practicalities were explained with more clarity in an analysis of the award that appeared in the Aberdare Leader.

'The award penalises the household miner as compared with the single man, the experienced miner as compared with the optant (Bevin Boy), the skilled repairer who buys tools as compared with his assistant, the haulier working in water as compared with the haulier in a 'dry' pit.

'In all cases these anomalies affect workers on the minimum; miners (such as piece-workers) earning above the minimum £5 are not affected, though they get nothing from the award.

#### SOME OF THE ANOMALIES

HOUSE COAL: Both sides of the industry in South Wales agreed on 1/6 a week as the figure to be taken into consideration in respect of the privilege of cheap housecoal which miners get, in helping to make up wages to the Porter minimum, Anomaly: Surface worker who is a householder earning the minimum of £4.7.8 gets 1/6 against his coal and receives a cash advance of 10d. Single man who doesn't get coal gets 2/4d.

Underground labourer (min. £4.7.8): Married householder under same principle gets 10/10d. advance, single man 12/4, up to £5.



WORKING IN WATER: Haulier in a dry pit, previously on minimum of £4.10.4 will get actual advance of 9/8<sup>9</sup> take him to £5. Haulier in wet pit, who received a 6/- allowance in addition to the minimum (£4.16.4) will have this taken into consideration in assessing his new minimum wage, and will receive only on advance of 3/8. If they get housecoal they will get 1/6 less.

REPAIRERS: Experienced underground repairer householder, with a present minimum of £4.15.6 who has to buy tools and get housecoal taken into consideration will receive an advance of 3/0 to £5. His assistant who doesn't buy tools and is on a minimum of £4.10.4 will receive an advance of 9/8 (to £5).<sup>27</sup>

South Wales had more miners working on the minimum wage than any other area, but as the article indicates those on piece-rates earning over the minimum received nothing from the award as the tribunal refused the claim for increased piece rates.<sup>28</sup>

The expectations in the coalfield of the Tribunal had been great. It was seen as an opportunity for the Government to pay tribute to the contribution that the miners had made to the war effort and a recognition that the miners, as much as the coal they mined, were of national importance. With the clear statement having been made several months earlier that nationalisation could not be considered during the war, the Porter Award was the only means through which

most miners could see any improvement in their conditions being made during the war. The award failed to meet up to the expectations of the mining workforce and the immediate reaction of one member of the SWMF EC was that it represented without question, 'a colossal blunder'. 'What is certain', he wrote, 'is that it has thrown the South Wales coalfield into turmoil. Every miner is disgusted with it, discussions which are now taking place at every pit, without doubt spell trouble'.<sup>29</sup>

The rest of the executive were equally aware of the tremendous dissatisfaction in the coalfield and reacted quickly in an attempt to head off any precipitate action, at pit level. A statement was issued, condemning the award, but saying that the issues raised be dealt with through the constitutional machinery.

'General opinion in the coalfield is that the award is unsatisfactory. Firstly, it has failed to provide the increase which we asked for. The demand has not been conceded for a percentage increase to piece-workers so that their wages could bear the same relation to the new minimum for day-wage men as was the case previously. This is certain to discourage the actual coalgetters and we consider this is a mistake'.

'The council considered the terms of the award

as a temporary expedient which will give opportunity for the wage structure to be thoroughly reviewed in conjunction with general conditions. This is the greatest importance and we propose at the national conference on Thursday to propose that it should be expedited.

'We are aware of the discontent in the coalfield about the award, but we urge all miners to continue at work so that anomalies can be dealt with as speedily as possible. Isolated action taken without complete information as to the significance of what has been obtained can only upset the negotiations and discredit those conducting them'.<sup>30</sup>

This lead given by the executive was generally followed, with the exception of the four pits in the Garw Valley and thirty-eight boys at Cwmgorse colliery who struck for two days.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, it is notable that in the week following the announcement of the award coal production was the lowest recorded for any week since the start of the war<sup>32</sup> and the week after that production was even lower.<sup>33</sup> Output continued to be low throughout the rest of the month in which there were 22 fresh stoppages involving 5,750 men.<sup>34</sup>

Two of the disputes that took place in February were only narrowly prevented from extending widely. One concerned the Gwaun-cae-Gurwen lodge where a dispute arose at East Pit over the non-payment of the minimum

wage to several men whom the Company alleged, were committing ca'canny. The two other Gwaun-cae-Gurwen pits struck in support as did the men at Cwmgorse and Gelliceidrim 2,000 men in all were involved.<sup>35</sup>

The Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee discussed the matter and decided that if the minimum wage had not been paid within a week they would reconvene with a view to the whole Combine ceasing work.<sup>36</sup> This meeting was held and was addressed by SWMF Vice-President Alf Davies who announced that during the negotiations taking place following the Porter Award it had been decided that the minimum wage be paid to all underground workers unconditionally. As the situation had changed the strikers were recommended to return to work.<sup>37</sup>

The other controversial dispute concerned a very small colliery, Talyclun in Llangennech, but was significant for two reasons. One, was that it was owned by Sir Evan Williams who was both chairman of the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association and the Coalowners Association of Great Britain, and the other, possibly as a result of the first reason, was that it was widely reported in the national newspapers. The strike itself lasted 10 days and a sympathy strike at Morlais colliery owned by the same company, lasted for 6.<sup>38</sup> The reason for the excessive publicity, however, was not due to the causes of the strike, but because of its reportage in the Daily

Herald, which was considered to be libellous by Sir Evan who sued the paper.<sup>39</sup>

The SWMF Area No. 1 discussed what steps should be taken to support the strikers but eventually the SWMF EC decided that arbitrators should be appointed to settle the price of the seam at the source of the dispute.<sup>40</sup>

Whilst these strikes had their own intrinsic causes, there can be little doubt, that, in a situation of profound disappointment, disillusionment and disgruntlement, there was a much greater readiness to strike. The dissatisfaction was manifested in other ways, as the decline in output bears witness to. Also there were a large number of motions pouring into the SWMF offices from lodges calling for action to be taken directly against the Porter Award. Penallta lodge tendered 21 days notice in early February only to be told to withdraw it by the SWMF EC.<sup>41</sup> Evidence of the number of lodges that were calling for sterner action to be taken by the SWMF EC can be gleaned from the fact that the EC sent out a standard circular to lodges explaining that it would be unwise to call a special coalfield conference to reject the award as negotiations were still in progress.<sup>42</sup>

At official levels amongst the Ministry of Fuel and Power, coalowners and the union officials, February was a hectic month as they attempted to rectify the blunder that the Porter Award had turned

out to be, and to prevent the rumblings in the coalfields from erupting.

At their conference on January 28 the MFGB, conscious of the hostile feelings to the Porter Award amongst the rank and file in the coalfields on the one hand, and sensitive to public opinion given the impending opening of the Second Front, on the other, decided to accept the award with the proviso that the Coalfield Conciliation Board and the National Negotiating Committee met to iron out the anomalies.<sup>43</sup> In South Wales two days later the SWMF delegate conference decided to adjourn for a fortnight to await progress.<sup>44</sup>

Two days later the South Wales Conciliation Board met and issued an agreed statement that both sides of the industry fully recognised that adjustments would have to be made to remove the anomalies created by the award.<sup>45</sup> Lord Porter's efforts had not engendered much support from the coalowners, either, as the following statement from Sir Evan Williams illustrates:-

'The award has not brought peace, but a sword, It is such a radical intrusion on the part of people who have no conception at all of the effect of what they are doing that it seems to us that it would be disastrous if it were allowed to take effect without some attempt on the part of the two sides in the industry to adjust things

in a way that would avoid so far as possible, trouble arising from it'.<sup>46</sup>

The National Conciliation Board met on 3 February and agreed that negotiations should be opened up in all the various districts to settle the anomalies.<sup>47</sup> These negotiations took place in South Wales and reached a stage where agreement was almost reached on proposals that would have eliminated the anomalies, when the Government made an announcement that totally disrupted the threads of such an agreement. It was stated that it could only be responsible for providing the cost of implementing the original award alone out of the Coal Charges Fund, the system under which the proceeds of increases in the price of coal were paid into a pool from which profits, wages and certain other charges were distributed on a national instead of a regional basis. Any adjustments to the award would have to be paid for locally. The Government's view was that it could not ask the consumer to shoulder a further financial burden and that further increases to the wage bill should be met within the industry. At the same time as this announcement was made it was also stated that requests to reconsider the decision to reject an increase in piece-rates had been refused.

These decisions caused an uproar in South Wales, as the owners had made it clear to the SWMF that it

would be impossible to apply an agreement until the Government had indicated that it was going to meet the cost of the operation of the award and of its adjustments.

Just as a solution had seemed near, the whole situation was thrown back into turmoil once more. Will Lawther, President of the MFGB told the Government that their decision was very 'grave' indeed.<sup>48</sup>

The SWMF EC urged their members to stay at work and accept the position as it was and called upon the MFGB to 'go forward forthwith to negotiate a complete change in the wages structure of the industry'.<sup>49</sup>

Despite this they must have been of a similar opinion as Harry Pollitt who concluded that the Government's decision had created such a mood in the industry that 'only a spark was necessary to set the coalfields ablaze'. "If the Government and the coalowners had been deliberately trying to provoke a national strike throughout the coalfields", he wrote, "they couldn't have been going about it in a better way".<sup>50</sup> In the event, however, there was no immediate militant reaction, but several days later the South Wales District Conciliation Board announced that as its tentative<sup>agreement</sup>/reached for the adjustment of anomalies had been based upon the assumption that the money would come from the Coal Charges Fund, and as this money was not available, the agreement could not be applied. The Coalowners stated that the money could not be



provided from other sources, as their existing profits were limited and the Government had refused to increase the price of coal, so they had decided to put the Porter Award into operation as soon as was possible.<sup>51</sup>

The SWMF continued to have talks with the Ministry of Fuel and Power concerning the anomalies and in the coalfield<sup>52</sup> it seemed that there was a general acceptance that they should remain at work and place their hopes around early discussions of the overall wages structure. There was above the average strike activity in the third week of February but the last week of the month was comparatively quiet. In his report at the end of that week, on 3 March the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales made the following comment:-

'No strikes are in progress at this date.

There has been a comparative calm in the coal-mining industry and only one stoppage involving forty-seven colliers occurred during the week.<sup>53</sup>

It would be presumptuous to suggest that this indicates a change for the better in the industrial relations in the industry'.<sup>54</sup>

Presumptuous it would have been, for when he returned to work after the weekend he would have discovered that on that Monday morning, 6 March, 10,000 miners mostly from the Western Valleys of

Monmouthshire had come out on strike. The largest strike during wartime, up until that date, had begun.

#### The Course of the Strike

The Porter Award strike in South Wales began, just over six weeks after the Porter Award had been announced and over three weeks after the Government had said that it was not prepared to finance any adjustments made over and above the award to iron out anomalies. Frustration with the pedestrian rate at which events concerning the wage claim had travelled since the MFGB had first lodged the claim in October 1943 was prompted by two events. Most importantly the SWMF had held a conference on the previous Friday at which Horner had reported on the current state of negotiations. He announced that no change could be made to the decision that House Coal was to be taken into account in the assessment of wages.<sup>55</sup> Giving their reasons for their action the strike leaders stated that this was a particular issue about which they felt strongly, plus the fact that special allowances for working difficult places were also to be reckoned in the assessing of wages. They were also angry at the refusal of the Government to allow the tentative agreement reached between the SWMF and the South Wales Coalowners Association to go ahead.

A second element occasioning the strike was that on Tuesday, 7 March discussions were due to begin on the overhaul of the wages structure. It could be

that the strike was designed to pressurise that meeting by indicating the extent of discontent.

On the first Monday morning of the strike between ten and twelve thousand men came out on strike, which indicates that there was some form of unofficial organisation behind the initial act. Most of the strikers came from collieries in the Western Valley of Monmouthshire, but some pits in the Vale of Neath were also involved.<sup>56</sup>

It is somewhat surprising that the strike had begun in Monmouthshire. Up until that date it had been the quietest part of the coalfield with no strikes of any consequence having taken place there. Having acted responsibly for so long, their frustration may well have been the greatest, also it does seem that there was some dissatisfaction with the organisation of the SWMF in the area and this may have contributed to the willingness to become involved in unofficial action.<sup>57</sup>

On the Monday afternoon of the first day of the strike delegates from twelve lodges involved in the stoppage travelled down to Cardiff to meet Arthur Horner and the Regional Fuel Controller, William Jones, to put their case. Horner assured them that 'no miner under any circumstances would suffer a reduction of a fraction of a penny by the effects of the Porter Award'. He urged them to return to work as he considered that their stoppage would impede, rather than help the

negotiations due to take place the following day on the overhaul of the wages structure.<sup>58</sup>

Bert Coombes described Horner's first statement, and similar ones from other union leaders as 'rather a queer claim'. "We do not", he continued, "usually ask for wage increases with the intention of being worse off".<sup>59</sup>

The SWMF EC met to discuss the strike. As the award had been accepted by a specially convened conference of the MFGB it automatically applied to the SWMF. They pointed out that thousands of miners received varying increases under the award and that the National Minimum Wage had been increased. The award was regarded as a definite advance in the struggle of mineworkers to improve both their status and their income. The stoppage on the other hand, placed in jeopardy the principle of the national minimum wage, threatened the unity of the SWMF and if developed, could drive a wedge between South Wales miners and the rest of mineworkers in Great Britain.

All lodges were urged to bring about an immediate resumption of work and a special conference was called for the following Saturday.<sup>60</sup>

In the coalfields miners agents and lodge officials spent a strenuous day addressing meetings urging men to remain at work,<sup>61</sup> but by the end of the day 60 collieries and 40,000 men were on stop. The strike had extended to the Aberdare Valley, the Evans-Bevan

Combine in the Dulais Valley and Powell Duffryn pits in the Rhymney Valley. The Abergorki colliery in the Aberdare Valley which had broken its production target for forty consecutive weeks came to a standstill.<sup>62</sup>

By Wednesday 8 March the strike had spread to 150 pits and involved 80,000 men. It had also spread to North Wales.<sup>63</sup> In South Wales the striking miners had been joined by men from the Rhondda, the Tredegar area, the Pontypridd area and the Swansea steam coal district. The areas least affected by the strike were the Afan Valley and Port Talbot district and West Wales.<sup>64</sup> This was considered to be surprising given the amount of strikes that had previously taken place in that area and also that it was thought that the cutback in special allowances would affect the anthracite pits especially.

In response to the SWMF EC appeal that all men should return to work lodge meetings were held throughout the coalfield. At Pontypool, a mass meeting of 3,000 Monmouthshire miners rejected the advice,<sup>65</sup> and in fact only one lodge voted to return to work. This was the Brittanica lodge at Gilfach but despite their decision only 307 of the 619 miners normally employed there turned up for work on the Thursday, and only a handful arrived on the Friday.<sup>66</sup>

It was estimated that over 70,000 tons of coal were being lost a day and soon local industrial

undertakings were being affected by the stoppage. It was reported that boilers and producers at one electricity power station had been exhausted and that supplies of domestic coal were dwindling.

On the Wednesday evening the Ministry of Fuel and Power released a statement following a meeting of the National Joint Consultative Committee. He said that the Government was ready to consider all grievances when the miners returned to work. They had accepted to pay allowances to individuals working in excessive dust and in water, and for certain ambulance services, in addition to the Porter Award minimum wage. The Minister also undertook to Consider allowances peculiar to South Wales, once the men had returned to work.<sup>67</sup>

Several concessions desired by the strikers had been made, although nothing was mentioned about housecoal, although that presumably was covered by the phrase 'allowances peculiar to South Wales'. No positive response was forthcoming, from the miners, and the strike extended again the next day. Thursday saw 175 pits on strike and 90,000 men whilst 14 pits in Scotland became affected too.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps a typical response to the Minister's statement was that of Obadiah Evans, miners agent for SWMF Area No. 8.

'The Government's attitude seems to be typically ambiguous and indefinite. Our men do not want 'ifs' and 'buts' and 'whens', they want

to know exactly what the Government intend to concede before they return to work'.<sup>69</sup>

Most of the pits that joined the strike on the Thursday were from the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine and the Afan Valley, although there was not a uniformity of action by all pits in the area. Some still remained at work and at some, Cefn Coed colliery, Crynant, for example there was no uniformity of action between shifts, the night shift deciding to work after the day shift had struck.

In the Swansea area local industry was becoming affected and a Briton Ferry works was threatened with closure.<sup>70</sup>

Friday, 10 March was pay-day. It was a special pay-day as it was the first time that the Porter Award was to be put into operation. The resolve of the strikers was probably strengthened as they began to receive first-hand knowledge of the injustices about which they were striking. Bert Coombes has described the experiences at his colliery.

'Friday came bright and fresh..... We had our first payment under the award. I gained three shillings a week and my son Peter got four shillings advance. George (an optant) now gets exactly the same as myself'.

'Then the problems came in with a flood. Imagine a case when it is the custom to promote

engine drivers in their turn to bigger engines until the final stage is one of the big outside engines. Under this award that promotion would have been a penalty, as the outside worker is given four pounds ten as against five pounds for the inside worker, yet that outside engine is a far more responsible job....'

'Then we had the rope riders doing extra work, such as shackling, loading timber, bringing out late journeys, loading steel arches and other jobs on which it used to be the custom to employ extra men. For that work they were given an extra shift a week and the company avoided employing special men for the jobs. This award merged that payment into the total to make up the minimum, and the riders felt and said that 'Lord Perter had best come and do the shackling himself'.<sup>71</sup>

The first payment of the award was of little help in clarifying the situation. One lodge official remarked that 'it would take a Philadelphian lawyer to understand some of our pay packets', and an Aberdare Valley miner said that even with the increase he would find it difficult to make ends meet. Because there were a lot of factory workers in the area the cost of those things that were not controlled was based on their high wages. People such as miners found it difficult to keep out of debt.<sup>72</sup>

That Friday, only seven pits in the coalfield



were not on strike - Jubilee, Ammanford, Gelliceidrim and Maerdy<sup>73</sup> in the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine, Abercrave and International pits in the Swansea Valley, and Penllwyn\_gwent colliery in the Ogmore Valley<sup>74</sup> Two of the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine collieries struck on the Saturday. The strike was almost total.<sup>75</sup>

The strike met with attitudes of hostility from all quarters, and this was accentuated by the fact that the Second Front was thought to be imminent. This was the military strategy that most people foresaw as necessary to bring the war to its conclusion. This was played upon, particularly as the SWMF had been at the forefront of the campaigning that the Second Front be opened up. The strikers' critics were quick to note the irony of the situation.<sup>76</sup>

It became known, after the strike that the opening of the Second Front had indeed been threatened by the strike.<sup>77</sup>

In South Wales, the Western Mail was particularly hostile to the strikers. In one editorial it claimed that the strike had begun 'without apparent cause, and as though a malaise had suddenly descended on the valleys. No one knew why, but in a few days "grievances" were produced and magnified until the whole coalfield decided that the beautiful spring weather was as good a time to strike as any'. In another editorial it charged the strikers with "wanton

wickedness for which there is no extenuation" and maintained "that nothing Nazi propoganda had concocted to frustrate the Allies could do as much mischief as this dastardly attempt to hold the British people to ransome on the eve of invasion and in one of the greatest crises".<sup>79</sup>

Other newspapers took a more restrained approach, such as the Aberdare Leader, which accepted that there was a cause for grievance but questioned the tactic of the strike action. One of its editorials read as follows:-

'With home fires burning low, now in late winter, the demands of the war factories and the Second Front preparations increasing, the coal reserves dangerously down, men on the battlefronts and the population generally, including sympathisers with the miners case will find their patience sorely tried by the actions of thousands of colliers in coming out on strike over the Porter Award.....'

'..... The miners have a right to resent the Porter Award, the provocative nature of the anomalies are clear - but have they the right to stop work now on the eve of the greatest development of the war in the West?'<sup>80</sup>

The Welsh novelist, formerly a miner of twenty-six years experience underground, Jack Jones, wrote an open letter to the miners in a simila<sup>r</sup> vein:-

'I agree as thousands unconnected with the mining industry will readily agree that you have a grievance, and that the anomalies arising from the recent award stand out a mile. We are also ready to admit that the Government's handling of the latest phase of the wartime mining situation has been irritating.

'But what neither I, nor anyone else, other than yourselves will admit is that your present grievance is such as to warrant you doing what you have done. It is not the mineowners or the Government you are striking against, but against the people who are fighting this people's war, and in the long-run striking against yourselves' <sup>81</sup>

The South Wales Evening Post took up this line of thinking when it told the miners that they were throwing away the 'very real national sympathy and understanding that have been built up during the war'. <sup>82</sup>

This is a view that is supported by Professor Court who considered that the effect upon public opinion of the dispute was bad. Whereas it had been sympathetic to the miner's case in 1942 it was less readily so, in 1944. The change, he thought, stemmed from the extreme tension of mind in 1944, produced by the impending military and political events and the irritation of distraction from these. Secondly, there was a belief that in 1944 the miner was markedly better

off than he had been in 1942.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, there had been an indication of a lack of public support for the miner's wage claim before the strike started. In its campaign to canvass support for their claim the SWMF Production Committee had hoped to organise a Conference of Trade Unions in South Wales at which the claim would be justified. The idea had been abandoned however, when the desired response from the other trade union was lacking.<sup>84</sup>

Whilst it is true that public opinion was against the striking miners, it must be remembered that the mass media was totally against them, and this is what largely moulded attitudes. Within the mining community itself, traditional loyalties held fast. The Aberdare Leader quoted the words of a local housewife as a fairly representative view:-

'I don't like to think that we are letting the men in the forces down, and I do believe that the men should have put in fourteen days notice. But on the other hand we have seen very hard times and we don't want to go back to them. Perhaps, it sounds a bit like blackmail, in wartime, but I have had eight years on the dole, and you don't realise how that memory keeps cropping up'.<sup>85</sup>

It was a favourite tack of these critical of the strikers to charge them with letting down those

fighting in the army. This argument out little ice, though, there being as many miner's sons brothers, and friends in the forces as there were anybody else. The press received correspondence expressing both points of view. When his colliery discussed strike action, Bert Coombes, says that the argument that to strike would let the soldiers down, was the main bone of contention. It was eountered by those men with sons and brothers in the forces who, so they claimed, had urged them to fight and maintain their customs and privileges. They argued that they must retain something for those absent ones to come back to.<sup>86</sup>

By the end of the first week of the strike the attacks against the miners centred around the increasing awareness that war production was being affected. Two small factories at Treforest Trading Estate were closed down<sup>87</sup> and other establishments had their supplies of gas cut off because of a shortage of coal at the gas works. The Ministry of Fuel and Power restricted the supply of coal to domestic and other controlled premises in the counties of Brecon, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Pembroke and Radnor, and there was a strong possibility that electricity supplies as far as Oxford would be cut off. The steel and tinplate industry of West Wales was also threatened and several firms gave seven days notice to their workmen.<sup>88</sup>

These facts appeared in the press on the day after the War Cabinet had discussed the situation and

it is probable that they were released as a tactic to influence the miners in voting for a return to work, especially as the day this appeared in the press was the day of the Special SWMF Conference. At the Cabinet meeting, the Minister of Production, Lyttleton, had maintained that if the strike were to continue into a second week there would be a reduction of 50% in industrial power in the area. The proposed policy, which was endorsed, <sup>was</sup> that production should continue at full rate until such a time as work in particular factories had to be stopped, owing to the shortage of coal. Coal should not be sent to South Wales for if factories stopped work it would have the advantage of bringing home to the miners the effects of the stoppage on essential production.

In addition to all these arguments ranged against the strikers there were those of their own leaders, which also appeared daily in the press. Arthur Horner stated that the strike had held up negotiations with the Government to the extent that time which should have been given to a more detailed analysis of their proposals had been taken up by the attention given to the situation in South Wales. He insisted that the strike need never have occurred as the Government already had in hand a scheme for the removal of most of the grievances. These, he was adamant, would only be considered when the strike weapon was withdrawn.

Horner, reiterated, however, that no progress could be made on the housecoal question, largely because the principle of the valuation of cheap coal supplies to householders in assessing the minimum wage had been established in 1942 under the Greene Award and had been operated in other areas without objection. It could not be altered.<sup>90</sup> It was the issue of housecoal, however, that was the most immediate factor in influencing the men to strike, as was the case with Bert Coombes:-

'That one and sixpence deduction for coal was a bitter pill: Cheap coal has been our privilege, about our only one. Most trades get their privileges in the way of cheap clothes or travel or some allowances, cheap coal was ours. My ton load cost me about fifteen shillings at the door, and I get an average of eight loads a year. Lord Porter has assessed an added value of three pounds eighteen shillings a year on that coal - running near to ten shillings a ton'.<sup>91</sup>

The Aberdare Leader too, considered the Porter Award an erosion of customs, as the prime motivating factor behind the men!-

'More than anything else the men came out because they resented interference with old customs... the men feel these "customs" for which their

grandfathers fought and for which they are prepared to fight today, are "sacred".

'The economic consequences of the new principle can be seen - cheap coal is necessary for the miner - fires have to be maintained all day, hot water is necessary for washing and drying'.<sup>92</sup>

In the final analysis, however, the cause of the strike was much more than a response to single grievance or to the tardiness over the settling of a wage claim. It was the translation of an intense and longstanding dissatisfaction into widespread militancy. The 'New Leader' came near the mark when it stated:-

'This strike was the result of the pent-up feelings and bitterness of 25 years. The Porter Award was simply the spark which set this feeling aflame'.

'Even the Government's behaviour towards the industry during the war, however, does not explain why the miners feel as they do today. It goes back long before 1939. It is all very well for the Government to ask for the past to be forgotten; the miner cannot forget it, for it has left its scars too deeply'.<sup>93</sup>

The Aberdare Leader agreed with this viewpoint; once on strike, embittered memories of 'ill-treatment' and 'injustices' at the hands of the coalowners in the inter-war years strengthened their resolve, and



furthermore the "idiocy" of certain anomalies created by the award made them question the method of control of the industry.<sup>94</sup>

This latter point was of relevance to Bert Coombes, also, he felt that the men were disgusted that other men who knew nothing of a miner's work or his ideas were making decisions that affected their lives and families.

Once, he had returned to work, Coombes thought that his action in striking was possibly wrong in view of the circumstances, but the decision to strike had not been taken lightly.<sup>95</sup> It was totally unfair to argue as had the Western Mail that the miners grievances were manufactured and that the strike was about trivialities. If anything, their attitude in the press only served to harden the attitudes of those on strike, as is witnessed by the following angry response from the lodge chairman and secretaries of the Tower and Treherbert lodges.

'A great deal of unjustified abuse has been slung at the miners. A number of writers have dared in the National press to slander 90,000 hard working miners. "Irresponsible", "wanton", and whisper it not, "traitors" are the epithets bestowed on us lavishly.

"90,000 men do not strike for fun".<sup>96</sup>

Aneurin Bevan was another who took up the defence of the striking miners in an article in 'Tribune' entitled "Are Miners Different" he criticised the

allegations that he thought were implicit in most of the newspapers that "half a million miners suffered from a kind of mental malady which isolated them incurably from the rest of the community".

"Is it conceivable", he wrote, "that half a million men and their womenfolk can get so much out of step with the rest of society so as to earn the reputation of social lepers".

He believed that because the miners were as much in favour of the war effort as anybody, their striking was a testimony to their stark economic conditions. The timing of the men's action showed, not a wanton disregard for the war effort, but that their action was intimately associated with substantial grievances.<sup>97</sup>

On Saturday 11 March, a special delegate conference of the SWMF was held to discuss the strike. Two hundred and thirty delegates from lodges descended on Cardiff to hear the views of the union executive backed by the miners agents and thirteen miners M.P's. A resolution was put forward urging a return to work. It was, said Arthur Horner, "a decision of the unanimous industrial and political leadership of the district".<sup>98</sup> The following reasons were put forward:-

1. The war would be prolonged and British soldier's lives in consequence would be endangered if the stoppage was continued. Moreover, the reserves set aside for the invasion of Europe were being encroached upon to meet immediate urgent needs.

2. The situation with regard to industrial and non-mining sections of the community was hourly becoming more critical and could be calamitous.
  3. There were several grievances peculiar to South Wales. Some of these had already been settled, but the remainder were to be immediately considered.
- The resolution continued,

'Following upon the receipt of the Porter Award and the anomalies disclosed, the MFCB together with the coalowners met representatives of the Government and certain proposals were received from them which will have the effect of stabilising wages until June 1948, except for fluctuations in the cost of living. These proposals improve the position for piece-rates. In the circumstances we urge all our members to return to work in the national interest of our class and our country to preserve the support of public opinion for our just and reasonable cause'.

The resolution was put forward by James Griffiths, M.P. for Llanelli and Will Arthur.

According to a report in the New Leader exceptional opportunities were afforded for the expression of opinion by delegates, and the general tone of the contributions from the floor were highly critical. Their reporter maintained that because the executive was afraid of being forced to recognise the strike, they carefully refrained from taking a vote.<sup>100</sup>

Confirmation that this viewpoint was correct comes from a letter written by the Minister of Fuel and Power to the Prime Minister.

'No decision was reached in the coal dispute today..... Mr. Horner could not risk taking a vote as he knew that a number of delegates had mandates to continue the strike. They were therefore sent home to attend the lodge meetings tomorrow where it is hoped that they will persuade a vote in favour of going back to work'.<sup>101</sup>

Sunday was a hectic day in the coalfield, especially for the SWMF EC members and miners agents who stomped the valleys stating the case for a return to work. A typical meeting was described in the Aberdare Leader, of the Aberaman, Fforchaman, Cwmnedd and Werfa Dare lodges. The audience included dozens of factory workers (ex-miners) and a sprinkling of service men, including one U.S. soldier. The most sore point with the miners present was the inclusion in the Porter minimum of 1/6 a week in consideration of the cheap housecoal. The miners agent D. Emlyn Thomas addressed the meeting for two hours. He told it bluntly that there was no prospect of having this principle changed. He agreed that the parent body, the MFGB, had accepted this in 1942 and that South Wales alone was striking against it. If they persisted to do so it might mean a probable break between the SWMF and the MFGB, when the preservation of a strong and united miners union for the post-war years was vital.

The decision at this meeting went against a

return to work, as indeed did all the lodges in the Aberdare area.<sup>102</sup> When it came to make a count of the total votes, however, the Aberdare area was in a minority. The executive's resolution was supported by 60,983 votes to 43,248, a majority of 17,715. Along with the Aberdare area, the western valleys of Monmouthshire was another area strongly against a return to work, whilst in the eastern valleys 28 lodges voted to return, against 11.<sup>104</sup> Many of those lodges that supported a return to work called upon the SWMF EC to issue from between seven and twenty-one days notice of strike action if a satisfactory solution was not arrived at.

On the Sunday night shift a drift back to work began. Bert Coombes described the reaction at his colliery to the decision:

'Over the weekend our mass meeting decided that we would return to work. The old situation had arisen again. Month after month passes whilst a dispute is rolled back and forth, then the men strike in weary desperation. Instantly they are informed that nothing can be done whilst they are idle. If they return to work negotiations will be hurried. In this case, as in many others the hurry should have taken place before the stoppage. We felt we had made our protest and there was a relief in returning to work'.<sup>105</sup>

This however, was not the reaction everywhere, especially in those areas that had voted against the

return to work. On the Monday morning a situation of total confusion began to emerge, as many pit-head meetings decided not to carry out the majority decision. The Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales described the process of resumption as "not as speedy as might have been expected, throughout the week curious incidents were reported of men arriving at the pit-head, ready for work, but returning home after a brief meeting. At some pits men actually worked a whole shift, but on learning that the following shift had decided not to work refused to return until a day or two later."<sup>106</sup> Will Paynter, in his autobiography, applied an apt metaphor to the situation, when he wrote:

'The second week was one of complete chaos with some men on strike and some working, and some men going in and out like a concertina'.<sup>107</sup>

The SWMF leaders announced that a majority of men had returned to work on the Monday, but this is difficult to ascertain. In fact, the South Wales Evening Post claimed that two-thirds of the men were still idle. There was no clearly defined area of strike action; there being many cases of the ballot result being opposite in adjacent collieries. What was holding back the return to work was that the general disposition of the strikers was to see what the next valley was doing. In several cases miners who, on the Sunday had accepted a 'back to work'

decision, held meetings on the Monday morning and decided to stay out of work. The bright spot in the return to work was considered to be the anthracite area, where two-thirds of the pits were working.<sup>108</sup> The Western Mail gave a more comprehensive run-down of the situation. No pit worked in the Aberdare area, whilst most of the collieries in the Western Valley of Monmouthshire were not working whilst those in the Eastern Valley were. In the Rhymney Valley nine collieries resumed and three decided to stay out. More men were idle in the Tredegar Valley than were at work. In the Rhondda Valley 5,000 men at six collieries worked but 6,000 men at seven collieries did not. In the Pontypridd area, two lodges with 2,550 men resumed work whilst four others with 3,300 men stayed out. The position was at its best it was thought, in the mid-Glamorgan area where 10,000 workers had returned to work along with all those in the region of Port Talbot and the Afan Valley. In the anthracite district the situation was fairly even, and of the eight collieries in the Dulais Valley six had restarted.<sup>109</sup>

The situation represented one of the most serious affronts to the authority of the SWMF in its history. They issued a circular to lodge calling upon the membership that had recorded their votes against the executive to accept the voice of the rank and file as represented by the conference decision, fall in

line and resume work.<sup>110</sup> This reasoned approach contrasted markedly with the rather hysterical response from the editor of the Western Mail, whose attitude was more likely to be detrimental to the efforts of the SWMF EC.

'The outrage cannot soon be effaced. The nation will not forget it when the war is over, and then the miners will find that it will take a lot of living down. Having made an egregious and criminal blunder by which they have forfeited every vestige of sympathy in the mind of the public, the least they can do is stop haggling and malingering and obey the order and get back to work'.<sup>111</sup>

The state of affairs differed very little on the Tuesday from those on the previous day. According to figures from the Ministry of Fuel and Power, 107 collieries worked and 102 did not. Twelve collieries that had been out on strike on the Monday had restarted, but twelve of those that had worked were now back on strike.<sup>112</sup> One of the pits that struck on the Tuesday was a surprising addition. It was the Abercrave colliery which had been one of a handful of pits that had taken no previous part in the strike. It was managed by T. P. Rose-Richards and had formerly been in the Amalgamated Anthracite grouping but had been acquired and developed with the help of the



Nuffield Trust and contributions by workers who later ceased to be members of the SWMF.<sup>113</sup>

This massive defiance of the unions ballot decision was once more a witness to the deep felt sense of grievance throughout the coalfield. At the root of the events thought Brinley Evans, a reporter for the Daily Worker was a clash of loyalties. Loyalty to democratic decisions or loyalty to comrades still on strike.<sup>114</sup>

On the Wednesday of the second week of the strike a large Royal Ordnance Factory was closed down because of a shortage of coal<sup>115</sup> and in West Wales over a dozen steel furnaces were also made idle.<sup>116</sup> Throughout the day, however, the situation swung much more towards a full resumption of work as SWMF officials continued to campaign for a return up and down the coalfield, especially in areas considered to be 'black spots'. One crucial meeting was that of the lodges of Area No. 8 the Western Valley of Monmouthshire, where forty pits were still out on strike. On the Tuesday evening the men of the Crumlin Valley lodge had decided by a large majority to return to work and to propose this to the Area No. 8 meeting. The Crumlin Valley resolution was accepted and the wheels began to turn in that area on the night shift.<sup>117</sup>

At the end of that day Alf Davies, SWMF President felt able to announce that 'the back of the strike is broken'. Thirteen Amalgamated Anthracite pits were

still out, in the Aberdare area only 1,000 out of 8,000 men were still out, two pits employing a total of 1,000 men were out in the Rhondda, Nine Mile Point employing over 1,000 men in the Sirhowy Valley was out,<sup>118</sup> after having returned to normal on the Tuesday and there were still between four and five thousand men out in the area around Tredegar<sup>119</sup> which had now become the main centre of trouble.<sup>120</sup>

The overall picture clarified on the Thursday, there being just two distinct pockets of strike action. The largest concentration was around Tredegar and the northern end of the Rhymney Valley, and the other was in West Wales where seven pits were still out. The Abercrave pit was still on strike, too, as was a small colliery in the Swansea steam coal district, Darren Colliery, Clydach. Ninety per cent of the coalfield were back at work.<sup>121</sup>

A new strike, however, related to the Porter Award, broke out in the Rhondda, but was contained. It related to practices concerning pit boys at Fernhill and Tylorstown collieries. Before the Porter Award these boys had received tips or "trumps" from the men with whom they worked, and the men had claimed income tax relief in respect of the payments. Under the award, the boys now had these "trumps" assessed in their income-tax. 250 boys were involved but as many men could not work in the boy's absence, they were laid off.<sup>122</sup>

The strike position was unchanged on the Friday, a mass meeting having been held at Tredegar at which the men had decided to resist again all appeals to return to work.<sup>123</sup>

The strikers met again on the Sunday 19 March. There were three meetings, one at Markham addressed by Aneurin Bevan and Oswald Edwards, secretary of Markham lodge, one at Blackwood addressed by miners agent Sydney Jones and Dai Dan Evans and one at Tredegar, addressed by Bevan and Walter Price, chairman of Tredegar Combine lodge. At all, there was almost a unanimous vote for a return to work, only three voting against resumption at Markham, five at Blackwood and thirty at Tredegar.<sup>124</sup>

On Monday morning 20 March the South Wales coalfield was back to work, there being only one colliery on strike, Saron in West Wales and that was because of a domestic dispute.<sup>125</sup>

#### Was the Strike Inevitable?

Coal losses during the Porter Award Strike were estimated at being over 500,000 tons<sup>126</sup> and as a result of this there followed a post-mortem as to where the responsibility for the strike lay. Whilst the strike had been in progress Harry Pollitt of the Communist Party had suggested in the Daily Worker that the strike might have been deliberately engineered by the Government and the coalowners. Never before, he argued, had such stupid blunders been made in the history of wage negotiations. The refusal of the

Government to pay for the deal agreed by the coalowners and the SWMF in regard to the anomalies had had the effect of an exploding bomb.

"Can it be", he asked, "that there are certain forces in this country who are trying to prevent, or delay, the opening of the Second Front by resorting to tactics that can lead to mass strikes in decisive war industries and thereby afford the excuse that we are not yet ready".<sup>127</sup>

On March 21 in reply to a question in the House of Commons, the Ministry of Fuel and Power declared that the coalowners had been informed before district negotiations had commenced on 4 February, that the Government could not undertake the cost of removing the anomalies. This refuted remarks by the Director of the Mining Association, Mr. W. A. Lee, that the owners had no prior knowledge of the Government's decision.<sup>128</sup> If the statement from the Minister of Fuel and Power were true, it thus meant that it was the coalowners who did not pass this information on to the miner's union leaders. Margot Heinnemann in her book, "Britain's Coal" considered this to be evidence that the strikes 'were deliberately provoked by the owners'.<sup>129</sup>

Whilst the owners could have had a motive, in that they wished to discredit miners generally and Dual Control particularly, as part of their efforts to stave off nationalisation, it is difficult to understand why the Government should be interested in delaying the

Second Front, as was suggested by Harry Pollitt.

Certainly, the persistent refusal of the coalowners to make any contribution towards payment of the Porter Award contributed to the unhealthy atmosphere in the coalfield and the eventuality of the strike, but to suggest a conspiracy theory on their part is probably overstating the case. This was more a case of a misguided authority. This was particularly true of the Government.

The strike was the culmination of a series of blunders, with the decision of the Government to refuse to pay for the district agreements out of the Coal Charges Fund, the one which put 'the fat in the fire'.<sup>130</sup> The main blunder of all, however, was the Porter Award itself, which stoked the fires of discontent. It was not sensitive to the regional vagaries within the industry or to the mood prevalent within the industry at that time. In late January, D. R. Llewellyn, an SWMF EC member likened the coalfield to 'a volcano about to erupt'. He forecast that if the Tribunal failed to handle the situation in a realistic way they would precipitate an eruption.<sup>131</sup> Ultimately, this seems to have been the case.

Both Bert Coombes and Professor Court felt that the major mistake was in the Porter Award itself. Coombes, the working miner, thought that Lord Porter had made a sincere attempt to solve the wages problem of the industry, but did not truly understand the industry:-

'The mistake was in not recognising that there is a skill in mining. You cannot expect a miner to give the experience of thirty years for nothing, any more than you can a doctor. If he has to take responsibility he wants to be paid for it. If he has to buy twenty pounds worth of tools and maintain them in good condition he needs a bit more than a man who has only to purchase a shovel'.<sup>132</sup>

Court on the other hand saw the faults stemming from weaknesses within the Ministry of Fuel and Power. It was not organised to advise the Minister on National Wage Negotiations, there were traces of confusion in the Ministry's policy and a failure to keep pace with events. It was strange he thought, nevertheless, that the effects of the award in areas like South Wales were not foreseen. The reasons for the inefficiency of the Government and the Tribunal as he saw it was that they saw the award as primarily a temporary expedient giving time for a general overhaul of the wages structures of the industry, to take place. It was hurried through because of the prevailing temper in the coalfield and had had the object of settling the industry in the short term. The result of the award was, therefore, exactly opposite of that which the Tribunal had intended.<sup>133</sup>

Another different view was taken by Jock Haston, leading spokesman for the Revolutionary Communist Party. His analysis implicitly rejected the assessment that the

Government was inefficient. He maintains that the anomalies in the award were designed with a purpose, which was to divert the miners from their main demand of a £6 minimum into the secondary issued of wage differentials between miner and miner, thus splitting the miners.<sup>134</sup>

Whilst this may have been an apt description of events, as they took place, and the concentration of the strikers themselves on the anomalies meant that the new minimum wage was accepted without any great debate, the record of events from the first Porter Award to the apprentice boys in October 1943 bears witness for more to an ignorance of the industry and to inefficiency accentuated by a hasty desire to placate the coalfields, than to a contrived deviousness on the part of the Government.

There is also a case to suggest that the inefficiency was not limited to the Government alone, but that the union leadership did not have a totally clean slate in this respect. This was the view of the chairman and secretaries of the Tower and Tirherbert lodges who believed that the SWMF EC did not act as frankly as they should have done in revealing all the anomalies.<sup>135</sup> It was a criticism that the SWMF EC were prepared to accept. In a monthly bulletin to members issued for the first time in October 1944, as a response to the unrest amongst the rank and file

miners and intended as a channel of communication<sup>136</sup>  
they placed on record the following piece of  
self-criticism.

'It is clear now that the main cause for the misunderstandings that led to the stoppage of work throughout the coalfield, early this year was lack of information'.

'We are satisfied that had the members been fully informed of the full significance of the changes which were then in process of being made and been conscious of the plans and purposes of the M<sup>F</sup>G<sup>B</sup>, such a breakdown of faith in the members own organisation could never have occurred.<sup>137</sup>

#### Who Led the Strike and How was it Organised?

The South Wales strike over the Porter Award was probably one of the most spontaneous expressions of discontent seen in the coalfield. It spread across the coalfield in a totally disorganised manner, a chain reaction following upon the first outbreak in Monmouthshire. The initial move came from a delegate meeting to SWMF Area No. 8 which covered the Western valley of Monmouthshire, and it is significant that shortly after the end of the strike on 3 April the SWMF EC called for an investigation to be made into the running of the area's organisation.<sup>138</sup> It would seem that no alternative organisation or method of communication was established to co-ordinate the strikers and as the New Leader reported, the strikers depended upon London daily newspapers to tell them what their fellow miners just over the mountain in the



next valley were doing. The New Leader which supported the strikers argued that the strike had failed partly because of the inability of the strikers to improvise machinery to co-ordinate the strike. Towards the end of the strike a Militant Miners' Committee was set up in Merthyr Vale with the intention of rallying behind its leadership, a campaign for the £6 minimum wage.<sup>139</sup> It seems to have had little effect or influence. Throughout the strike, its spontaneous nature was generally accepted by the press, but rather than recognising that this in itself was indicative of a widespread grievance, it was preferred to try and give substance to the belief put forward by the Economic League that the failure of the SWMF to maintain discipline was 'undoubtedly due to the pernicious propaganda of certain defeatist and subversive organisations.'<sup>140</sup>

In the absence of the Communist Party who deplored the strike, believing that it played into the hands of the miners' enemies,<sup>141</sup> and who issued a directive to their members in the industry to exert their influence to bring the strike to an end,<sup>142</sup> the only 'subversive organisation' that could be found were the small Trotskyite group, the Revolutionary Communist Party, which had a national membership of about 250 people.

Prior to the strike there is no evidence of activity on their part in the coalfield. At a meeting of the Joint Conciliation Board at the time of the

Penrikyber strike, Arthur Horner mentioned that their paper Socialist Appeal had been sold in the Lanarkshire and Yorkshire coalfields but had not been heard of in South Wales.<sup>143</sup>

The RCP had been active around a strike in the North East shipyards concerning apprentices protesting against the Bevin scheme of balloting entrants into the coal industry. On 5 April the police swooped upon their headquarters and arrested four of their leading members and accused them of encouraging strikes. On the morning of 8 April the Western Mail's main headline revealed 'Trotskyist activity in South Wales'.

It was reputed that 'a young man and a young woman spent a considerable amount of time whilst the South Wales coal strike was on, endeavouring to sell copies of Socialist Appeal to the men coming and going to meetings at Tredegar and Blackwood'. They had little success even though their paper stated that '100,000 Miners can't be wrong' - although it was the Tredegar area that stayed out on strike until the very last. It was believed that Jock Haston, one of those arrested on 5 April had been in Tredegar and other towns, and another representative of the Trotskyists had appeared outside the Albion Colliery, Cilfynydd to sell papers and that a man had been seen near the canteen at the Park Colliery, Treorchy offering papers for sale.

The same edition of the Western Mail also included

a long statement from the South Wales Branch of the Communist Party, attacking the Trotskyists and revealing more information about their activities:

'There are only a few scattered Trotskyists in the Welsh coalfield. They have no real influence in the miners lodges, but the genuine grievances over the Porter Award which led to the recent coal strike gave the Trotskyists their chance to exploit the strike for their own ends and to slander the elected leaders of the miners especially, Arthur Horner, the president.

Their main activity during the strike was centred in a few pits, notably Merthyr Vale and Penallta. One of their leaders lives at Troedyrhiw, Merthyr and appears to have the support of some members of the Independent Labour Party'.

Thus it can be seen that areas in which they operated were limited and hence their influence can at most have been infinitesimal. They did produce a special strike edition of their paper but this most probably appeared in the coalfield after the start of the strike. Jock Haston, the national organiser of the RCP told the press that they did not initiate the strikes, but supported workers after they had come out on strike.<sup>144</sup> Their reasons for coming to South Wales most likely was to try and build a base for their organisation rather than trying to influence the course of events.<sup>145</sup>

In an assessment of the activities of the RCP during the war years Jim Higgins, a sympathiser, has concluded that it would be quite wrong to suggest that the RCP started any strikes. 'The role of the RCP in strikes was only important in so far as they gave assistance after the accomplished fact of the strike.'<sup>146</sup>

Around the Penallta and Merthyr Vale collieries it is more likely that it was the I.L.P. that had a small degree of influence rather than the RCP. In the Troedryhiw area they had three councillors and a small base of support. The I.L.P. newspaper, the New Leader, also supported the strikers and attacked the SWMF leadership. One of the people who contributed to this paper during the period surrounding the strike was an SWMF executive member, D. R. Llewellyn who wrote an article 'Miner's Leaders Without a Plan'<sup>147</sup> for which he was castigated in the Western Mail. Such articles they claimed had the effect of creating mistrust in the union leaders.<sup>148</sup> This is a doubtful assertion. D. R. Llewellyn may have had considerable influence at ground level, although the area which he represented as Executive Member was one of the least involved in the strike, but certainly not through the New Leader which did not have a very wide circulation. Their circulation was limited to the areas where they had local bases, and here they may have had genuine influence. The Militant Miners Committee only mentioned in their

paper was most likely set up at their instigation and its success or failure, and it is not mentioned again even in the New Leader, may indicate a fair assessment of their strength.

One finds it difficult to disagree with the conclusions of Aneurin Bevan, who maintained that it was an insult to the miners to claim that the RCP or any other organisation had influenced their actions.<sup>149</sup> In searching for the causes of the Porter Award strike one need go no further than examine the reasons why the mood in the coalfield was one of such thorough discontent and disgruntlement.

#### The Effects of the Porter Award Strike

##### a) The Four Year National Wage Agreement of April 1944.

During the whole period of the Porter Award strike, the MFGB, the coalowners and the Government were in the process of working out a new national wage agreement for the industry. Further meetings took place in the week after the conclusion of the strike and a new agreement was signed on 20 April.<sup>150</sup>

The speed with which this agreement was carried out was due primarily to the Government. They knew that D-Day and the invasion of Normandy was planned for several weeks hence and that the operation would demand a massive quantity of coal. Faced with large-scale industrial unrest<sup>151</sup> and a marked decline in output, it was essential that the mining industry was pacified. W. H. B. Court believes that there is no reason to

think that the union leaders and the coalowners would have carried out such reforms as were made, independently.

The aims of the agreement were to reduce the number of local disputes, and as a step in this direction it was proposed to have the agreement signed in each of the districts. Secondly, it was designed to simplify the wages structure.

The scheme also intended to remove another source of complaint by suspending the ascertainment system, an attempt at profit-sharing that had miserably failed, especially as it had excluded the profits from the coke industry and the manufacture of by-products.

Finally, the agreement was intended to meet the miner's needs for security. This, it hoped to do by making it that the revised rates and the Porter Award minimum should continue until December 1947 when it could be amended or terminated by either side at six month's notice. It was thus, a four-year agreement which was likely to extend beyond the war and protect the miners from wage reductions immediately after the war.<sup>152</sup>

The scheme did not have an easy passage towards acceptance. The owners were sceptical<sup>153</sup> and some areas of the MFGB wanted a rejection of the National Wage Negotiations because their district obtained no immediate benefits. Some of the richer coalfields, such as Nottinghamshire, had, since the operation of Dual

Control and the establishment of the Coal Charges Fund, been in effect subsidising areas like South Wales since their contributions to the Coal Charges Account was so much greater.

In South Wales there was a rift on the Executive, not so much on the principle, but on the terms and indeed the Executive recommended that a delegate conference on 1 April reject the Agreement.<sup>155</sup>

The conference was first addressed by Arthur Horner who outlined the progress that had been made eradicating the anomalies produced by the Porter Award. Five services were to be paid for in addition to the Porter Award minimum - sharing turn, breaking in fresh horses, ambulance duties, working in water and dust and working during mealtimes,<sup>156</sup> but he was followed by Alf Davies proposing on behalf of the SWMF EC that the proposals should be rejected. Two particular reasons were stated:-

1. They did not give effect to the recommendations of the Porter Tribunal in regard to the general overhaul of the wages structure.
2. It failed to satisfy the claims of skilled workmen (other than craftsmen) to be paid wages commensurate with the skill for their work.<sup>157</sup>

This resolution was supported and referred to lodges where the vote in favour was overwhelming. When only 60% of the votes had been collected the decision of the coalfield was without doubt.<sup>158</sup>

Other MFGB districts reached the same decision as South Wales, so the MFGB Executive met representatives of the Ministries of Labour and Fuel and Power to warn them of a possible rejection of the Government plan. The Ministers said that they were prepared to recommend to the Cabinet that a sum of money that would enable the removal of anomalies contained in the Porter Award should be paid by the Government.<sup>159</sup> On 12 April, Ernest Bevin offered another £1,750,000 to meet the anomalies.<sup>160</sup> The MFGB decided to recommend to their delegate conference acceptance of the Government plan, maintaining that the outstanding points could be subject to negotiations after the agreement had been accepted. A special meeting of the South Wales delegation to the National Conference decided by a substantial majority to vote for acceptance of the Government's terms,<sup>161</sup> and next day the agreement was accepted by a majority of more than 5 to 1.<sup>162</sup>

The original decision taken by the SWMF EC to vote against accepting the National Agreement was not arrived at without a degree of acrimony. One miners agent Tal Mainwaring, wrote to the Western Mail alleging that those who had supported acceptance of the National Agreement at that stage, had been 'gagged' at the SWMF conference. These included the SWMF representatives on the MFGB EC, Arthur Horner, Will Saddler and Will Arthur.<sup>163</sup>

This allegation was refuted by D. R. Llewellyn who pointed out that Horner had in fact given a full



report of the national negotiations. He then went on to elaborate upon the reasons for rejecting the Agreement at that stage. Foremost amongst these was that payment for extra skill, responsibility and the costs of repairers and other skilled workers were not provided for.<sup>164</sup> This reasoning illustrates a particular sensitivity to the feelings of rank and file union members on this point, in the aftermath of the Porter Award strike. The most likely factor in determining the decision to propose rejection of the proposals by the SWMF EC was that members considered it undesirable to fly in the face of their members feelings so soon after the strike. The over-riding motive of Horner throughout this period, however, is his determination to strive for national unity amongst the miners. When the Porter Award had been announced, Horner had supported it critically noting its distressing features but realising that it implicitly recommended a national unified industry which he had always seen as an ideal. Some of those who were critical of the 4-year agreement were so precisely because it did not fulfil the implications of the Porter Award, as separate district agreements were maintained.<sup>165</sup> However it would be consistent with some of Horner's arguments during the Porter Award strike that the SWMF should follow MFGB recommendations in order to maintain national unity amongst miners.

The conclusion of the agreement had two effects.

The first was that it placed mineworkers amongst the leading wage-earners in the country. In the years between 1938 and 1944 they had risen from 81 in the list of highest wage-earners to 14. The average miner in 1938 had earned £2.15.9 per week, by 1944 this average had almost doubled to £5.9.4. The second effect was that the Government's intention of trying to quieten the coalfields largely succeeded.<sup>166</sup> In his report of 21 April 1944 the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales wrote that 'an atmosphere of comparative calm reigned',<sup>167</sup> and in the middle of May, William Jones, the Regional Fuel Controller, spoke of a much better general atmosphere in the coalfield and of prospects of increased output as a result.<sup>168</sup> The invasion of Normandy in June sealed the effect, although, as has previously been illustrated output did not continue to increase and towards the end of 1944 an air of unrest was returning to the coalfield.<sup>169</sup>

The month between the end of the Porter Award strike and the signing of the National Agreement had been a restless one in South Wales. Several lodges had attempted to persuade the SWMF EC to make a more militant stance over the Porter Award anomalies. The Dowlais Joint lodges circulated a motion to lodges calling for the immediate summoning of an SWMF conference to tender 21 days notice if the anomalies were not removed,<sup>170</sup> and Rose Heyworth lodge called for

a special conference to discuss exclusively problems in regard to surface workers. The SWMF EC believed that a movement was afoot to organise opposition to the Porter Award anomalies, and ruled that no sectional conference should be held and that no executive member or miners agent should attend any unofficial meetings.<sup>171</sup>

In addition to these attempts to put pressure on the SWMF EC there was also a number of unofficial stoppages which were justified by dissatisfaction with the Porter Award. These took place at Maindy and Eastern colliery, Llanerch, Blaensychan and Felinfran collieries.<sup>172</sup> Two weeks after the Porter Award strike had ended, the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales reported that industrial relations in the coalmining industry showed no signs of improvement.

'The mental condition of the rank and file is seemingly like that of a sick patient, who, in the stages of a long, troublesome illness, displays restlessness, querulousness and general unreasonableness.<sup>173</sup> This mood was quelled to a degree by the signing of the four-year agreement, but as W. H. B. Court has written, it was not succeeded by a particularly happy mood,<sup>174</sup> and Will Lawther, president of the MFGB could write shortly after the four year agreement had been made that although there was a promise that wages would be stabilised until June 1948 the coalfields

were still seething with unrest.

'A point has been reached where I frankly declare that the miners are in a mood of sullen resentment and anger in relation to their industry, a mood so deep that no matter what proposals are made in regard to wages and working conditions, their confidence in the industry will never be restored until it has been taken over by the state'.<sup>175</sup>

It would seem that the Agreement was seen largely as an interim measure by the miners for the duration of the war. It could not remove a generation of grievances, and its effectiveness in quietening down the industry was aided, greatly by the course of the war. For a short period, the spirit surrounding the Normandy landings was uppermost in the coalfields of Britain.

b) The Effect of the Strike on the SWMF

The Porter Award strike was undoubtedly a profound shock for the leadership of the SWMF. With the exception of the coalfield strike of 1915 it was unknown that almost every miner in every pit should stop work in defiance of their elected representatives. Yet in the wartime situation when the TUC had agreed not to support any strike, it cannot have been an unexpected turn of events. The SWMF had warned the Government and owners often, of the mood prevailing in the coalfield, a mood that had been building up

since the start of 1943. They must have found themselves in an utterly compromising situation, largely sympathetic to the demands of their members and yet thoroughly committed to the demands of the war effort.

It may well be that some of the EC members and miners agents were involved in encouraging strikers as was suggested by a Communist Party statement in the Western Mail<sup>176</sup> and some may well have agreed with the view expressed by Jock Haston that if the leadership had been prepared to conduct a struggle against the coalowners and the Government the miners would have won hands down. Haston believed that even the threat of strike action by the official leaders could have brought the Government into line and that there would have been no strike at all.<sup>177</sup>

If they had felt that way there were a number of other considerations to make. If the SWMF EC had authorised strike action, they would have been the first trade union to breach the agreement made between the TUC and the Government in July 1940 whereby it was accepted that for trade union officials to call a strike was illegal. This would have necessitated conflict not only with the Government, but also with the rest of the trade union movement, and particularly the MFGB within which the SWMF was at the forefront of a campaign to establish one national union of mineworkers. Conflict with the Government was not

considered to be desirable, not only because of a genuine desire not to disrupt the war effort, but also because it would discredit the union and weaken its bargaining position in the post-war world, and it would weaken the hand of the members of the Labour Party in the Coalition Government. Most of the SWMF EC members were in the Labour Party and those in the Communist Party were trying to get that party affiliated to the Labour Party.

Faced with such a dilemma, the conflict between recognition that their members had genuine grievances and a wider commitment to the war effort, the executive chose to try and influence the strikers to return to work. Reports of some meetings indicate that there was a great hostility towards them, but any published criticism only appears in the anti-war press such as Socialist Appeal and the New Leader which accused the SWMF EC betrayal.

The New Leader did document some of the hostile reaction to be found in many of the pits. It reported that one lodge had called for the resignation of Arthur Horner,<sup>178</sup> and that resolutions had been sent in from West Wales, where he had once been miners agent, that he should be given three month's wages in lieu of notice and be sacked immediately. The Merthyr Vale lodge passed a resolution to the effect that if the SWMF leaders opposed the strike because of their support

for the war, then the union should withdraw that support and concentrate on the fight for the miners.<sup>179</sup> The only evidence of a similar such motion from available lodge minutes comes from Nine Mile Point Colliery where, on the same day that they decided upon a return to work a resolution was also passed, unanimously calling for the resignation of the entire E.C.<sup>180</sup>

As the strike ended with its haphazard drift back to work with no tangible gains having been made it is not surprising that smouldering resentment should express itself in such resolutions, but the serious intent behind them can be questioned. They were an outlet for frustration as much as anything else. When the Dowlais Joint Lodges circulated the coalfield for support for their motion for a recall conference to be convened to issue 21 days notice for further strike action, they required twenty lodges to achieve their end. Support to that extent was not forthcoming.<sup>181</sup> Of course, it can be argued that given the exhaustion following a fortnight's strike, in which the men had received no pay, it was too much to expect further action, but it is more likely that most men felt that they had made their feelings felt and that was enough. Whilst they might express dissatisfaction with their leaders there was no real will to pursue the matter.

The threat to the authority of the SWMF in the South Wales coalfield during the Porter Award strike

was more apparent than real. The SWMF controlled all the propaganda circulating in the coalfield and at many collieries a strong assertion of its authority was enough to ensure a return to work. There was no real desire to confront the union, just the need to make a thorough going protest about the dissatisfaction and frustration. The strike came at the end of twelve months of particular restlessness and turbulence in the coalfield, and although discontent began to fester once more, soon after the invasion of Normandy, manifested by a continuing fall of output and a rise in absenteeism, the intensity of feeling was not to be repeated during wartime. The Porter Award strike was the last major wartime agitation in the coalfield. The last nine months of the war were dominated by the discussion of prospects for the post-war world and whilst some strikes were prompted by the fear of a decline in living standards as soon as the war ended, the predominant themes within the union were to ensure the election of a Labour Government and for the establishment of nationalisation. These campaigns were controlled by the SWMF leadership.



1. LAB 10/369 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 10 September 1943.
2. Ibid., 1 October 1943.
3. Ibid., 8 October 1943.
4. See above Section II Chapter IV p. 434
5. Court op. cit., p. 254.
6. Ibid., p. 247-8.
7. Daily Worker, 14 October 1943.
8. M. Foot, op. cit., p. 446.
9. Record of Stoppages Without Notice in the South Wales and Monmouthshire Coalowners Records.
10. See above Section I Chapter III p. 217
11. LAB 10/369. Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 3 December 1943.
12. SWMF Minutes, 2 December 1943. R. Page Arnot believes that the SWMF attitude was indicative of the feelings of frustration in all coalfields at this time.
13. SWMF Minutes 2 December 1943.
14. Western Mail, 16 December 1943.
15. Ibid., 17 December 1943.
16. SWMF EC Minutes, 21 December 1943.
17. Ibid., 28 December 1943.
18. Oakdale and Anthony Collieries. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 7 January 1944.
19. SWMF EC Minutes, 3 January 1944.
20. Ibid., 4 January 1944.
21. Compiled from the figures in the Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales -

- 7, 14, 21 and 28 January 1944. LAB 10/446.
22. Ibid., 25 January 1944.
  23. Ibid., 25 February 1944.
  24. Ibid., 28 January 1944.
  25. Western Mail 24 January 1944.
  26. Court, op. cit., p.255.
  27. Aberdare Leader, 11 March 1944.
  28. Court, op. cit., p. 254.
  29. New Leader, 29 January 1944.
  30. Western Mail, 27 January 1944.
  31. LAB 10/446 Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 4 February 1944.
  32. Western Mail, 11 February 1944.
  33. Ibid., 16 February 1944.
  34. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer to South Wales, 4, 11, 18 and 25 February 1944.
  35. Western Mail, 21, 22, and 25 February 1944.
  36. AACC Minutes, 19 February 1944.
  37. Ibid., 26 February 1944.
  38. LAB 10/446 Weekly Reports of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 4 February and 11 February  
Western Mail, 8 February and 11 February 1944.
  39. The libel case was heard at Glamorgan Assizes, Swansea on the days 18 - 21 July, £7,000 in damages were awarded to Sir Evan Williams. Western Mail, 19 - 22 July 1944.

40. SWMF EC Minutes, 25 February 1944. The dispute was to continue to be a running sore. In November 1944 there was a six day strike at the colliery (Records of Stoppages Without Notice in the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Records) and in December 1944 Alf Davies reported to the SWMF EC that the efforts of the arbitrators had broken down because the Company refused to agree to any changes as they alleged that the men were not working normally. (SWMF EC Minutes, 5 December 1944) A further strike took place at the turn of the year (SWMF EC Minutes 2 January 1945). To pre-empt any widespread supportive action on behalf of the Talyclun men the Central EC decided to take the matter into their own hands (SWMF EC Minutes, 23 May 1945). The dispute was unresolved at the time war ended.
41. SWMF EC Minutes, 8 February 1944.
42. SWMF Circular to lodges 18 February 1944.
43. Western Mail, 29 January 1944.
44. Ibid., 1 February 1944.
45. Ibid., 4 February 1944.
46. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards, 31 January 1944.
47. R. Page-Arnot op. cit., p. 395.
48. Western Mail, 12 February 1944.
49. SWMF EC Minutes, 12 February 1944.
50. Daily Worker, 14 February 1944.
51. Western Mail, 19 February 1944.

52. Ibid., 23 February 1944.
53. At Nine Mile Point
54. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 3 March 1944.
55. Western Mail, 4 March 1944.
56. Pits involved in the first outbreak were: Cwmtillery (Nos. 1 & 2) Roseheyworth, Beynons, Llanerch, Hafodrynys, Aberbeeg, West Blaina, Glyntillery, Waunllwyd, Marine, Six Bells, South Celynon, North Celynon, Graig Fair, Llanhilleth, Red Ash, Llanhilleth Steam, Tirpentwys, Mynydd, Maen, Rhiw, Colbren, Vivian, Arrail Griffin, Rock, Rhigos, and Aberbergwm.
57. See below Section III Chapter II p. 623-624
58. Western Mail, 7 March 1944, South Wales Evening Post, 6 March 1944, South Wales Argus, 6 March 1944.
59. Miners Day, p. 22.
60. SWMF EC Minutes, 7 March 1944.
61. Aberdare Leader, 11 March 1944.
62. Western Mail, 8 March 1944, South Wales Evening Post, 7 March 1944. Aberdare Leader, 11 March 1944.
63. Western Mail, 9 March 1944.
64. South Wales Evening Post, 8 March 1944.
65. The Free Press of Monmouthshire, 10 March 1944.
66. Pontypridd Observer and Glamorgan Free Press, 11 March 1944.
67. Western Mail, 9 March 1944.
68. Ibid., 10 March 1944.
69. South Wales Argus, 9 March 1944.

70. South Wales Evening Post, 9 March 1944.
71. Bert Coombes, Miner's Day p. 25-6.
72. Western Mail, 11 March 1944.
73. Maerdy pit had been recently threatened with imminent closure which might explain the unreadiness to strike at this time. (Western Mail 22 November 1943).
74. Western Mail, 11 March 1944.
75. South Wales Evening Post, 11 March 1944.
76. See Appendix IX pp 714-716
77. Arthur Horner stated this at a meeting of the Cardiff Publicity Clubs, 25 July 1944. (Western Mail, 26 July 1944).
78. Western Mail, 6 April 1944.
79. Ibid., 8 March 1944.
80. Aberdare Leader, 11 March 1944.
81. Western Mail, 10 March 1944. This letter was reproduced in the second part of Jack Jones' autobiography, 'Me and Mine' (London December 1946) Jack Jones justified reproducing it "as I think that it helped to bring about an early return to work it goes in here as an important bit of wartime industrial history and not as padding".

It is difficult to substantiate this claim and it would seem to be rather pretentious.
82. South Wales Evening Post, 8 March 1944.
83. Court, op. cit., p. 262.
84. SWMF EC Minutes, 19 January 1944.

85. Aberdare Leader, 18 March 1944.
86. Coombes 'Miners Day' p. 24.
87. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, 12 March 1944.
88. Western Mail, 11 March 1944, South Wales Evening Post, 11 March 1944.
89. PREM - 9/4 Prime Ministers Confidential Papers. Miners Wages June 1942 - March 1944.
90. Western Mail, 10 March 1944 and 11 March 1944.
91. Coombes, Miners Day, p. 26.
92. Aberdare Leader, 18 March 1944.
93. New Leader, 18 March 1944.
94. Aberdare Leader, 18 March 1944.
95. Coombes, Miners Day, p. 25.
96. Aberdare Leader, 19 March 1944.
97. M. Foot, op. cit., pp 440-453.
98. Western Mail, 13 March 1944.
99. SWMF EC Minutes, 11 March 1944.
100. New Leader, 18 March 1944.
101. PREM 4-9/3 Prime Ministers Confidential Papers, 'The 1944 Miners Strike'.
102. Aberdare Leader, 18 March 1944.
103. SWMF EC Minutes, 13 March 1944.
104. South Wales Argus, 13 March 1944.
105. Coombes, Miners Day p. 27.
106. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 17 March 1944.

107. Will Paynter, 'My Generation' (London 1972) p. 123.
108. South Wales Evening Post, 18 March 1944.
109. Western Mail, 13 March 1944.
110. SWMF Circular to lodges 14 March 1944.
111. Western Mail, 14 March 1944.
112. SWMF EC Minutes, 14 March 1944.
113. South Wales Evening Post, 14 March 1944.
114. Daily Worker, 14 March 1944.
115. The Free Press of Monmouthshire, 17 March 1944.
116. South Wales Evening Post, 15 March 1944.
117. The Free Press of Monmouthshire, 17 March 1944.
118. The minutes of the Nine Mile Point Lodge are revealing on this question. The in/out confusion seems to have arisen over a division of loyalties as to whether to abide by the SWMF Conference decision or to await a decision from the Ocean Combine Committee, to which Nine Mile Point belonged.
119. The Minutes of Oakdale Lodge are available and record votes. On Wednesday 15 March the day the 'back of the strike was broken' Oakdale Lodge was still very much in support of strike action. Two meetings were held for Oakdale workmen, one for those who lived locally, which voted against resuming work by a large majority and one at Tredegar for men who lived there. The vote at Tredegar was 269 for continuing the strike and 9 against.
120. South Wales Evening Post, 15 March 1944, Daily Worker, 15 March 1944.

121. LAB 10/446. Weekly report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 17 March 1944. Pits still on strike around Tredegar and in the Rhymney Valley were Oakwood Steam Coal, Pochin, Ty Trist, Markham, Islwyn, Wyllie, Britannia, Pengam, Elliots North and South, Pidwellt, Penallta, and Bargoed. Those out in West Wales were Ystalyfera, Varteg, Ynisedwyn, Pontyberem, Blaenhirwaun, Pentremawr, Brynhenllys.
122. South Wales Argus, 17 March 1944.
123. Ibid., 18 March 1944.
124. Ibid., 20 March 1944.
125. The Saron men were on strike for 10 days in all 15-27 March. LAB 10/446(Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, March 24 1944). The dispute concerned violation of customs at the Colliery and at one stage the Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee threatened united action unless the dispute was settled within a week. (AACC Minutes, March 23 1944).
126. Western Mail, 18 April 1944.
127. Daily Worker, 10 March 1944.
128. Ibid., 22 March 1944.
129. Margot Heinnemann op. cit., p. 60.
130. R. Page-Arnot, op. cit., p. 398.
131. New Leader, 22 January 1944.
132. Coombes, Miners Day p. 37.
133. Court, op. cit., 254-257.



134. Socialist Appeal, Special Mid-March Supplement  
(included in Ministry of Labour file 'On the  
Apprentices Strikes in the North East' LAB 10/451).
135. Aberdare Leader, 18 March 1944.
136. See below Section III Chapter II p. 623
137. Western Mail, October 11 1944.
138. See below Section III Chapter II p. 623
139. New Leader, 25 March 1944.
140. Western Mail, 11 March 1944.
141. Daily Worker, 8 March 1944.
142. Ibid., 9 March 1944.
143. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards,  
30 August 1943.
144. Western Mail, 8 April 1944.
145. In the following twelve months or more, the RCP  
remained active in South Wales and especially in  
the west after they had decided to contest the  
Neath by-election held in May 1945. Jock Haston  
was their candidate.
146. Jim Higgins, "Ten years of the Locust - British  
Trotskyism 1938-1948". International Socialism  
No. 14.
147. New Leader, 25 March 1944.
148. Western Mail, 8 April 1944.
149. See above Section II Chapter III p. 350
150. Full details of the proposals appear in the SWMF EC  
Minutes, 28 March 1944 and a detailed synopsis in  
R. Page-Arnot op. cit., p. 397-8 and the Western  
Mail 25 March 1944.

151. An even larger strike in the Yorkshire Coalfield followed that in South Wales almost immediately as the South Wales Strike finished.
152. Court op. cit., p. 261-5.
153. Ibid., p. 261.
154. Cefn Coed Lodge Minutes, 14 March 1944.
155. Western Mail, 29 March 1944.
156. Ibid., 3 April 1944.
157. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 1 April 1944.
158. Western Mail, 6 April 1944.
159. SWMF EC Minutes, 11 April 1944.
160. R. Page-Arnot op. cit., p. 398.
161. Western Mail, 13 April 1944.
162. Ibid., 14 April 1944.
163. Ibid., 9 April 1944.
164. Ibid., 2 April 1944.
165. Aberdare Leader, 8 April 1944.
166. Court, op. cit., p. 265-268.
167. LAB 10/446. Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for Wales, 21 April 1944.
168. Western Mail, 16 May 1944.
169. See above, Section I Chapter III p<sup>146</sup> and Section II Chapter III p 345-346
170. SWMF EC Minutes, 28 March 1944. New Leader 25 March 1944.
171. Ibid., 4 April 1944.
172. LAB 10/446 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 27 April 1944.

173. Ibid., 31 March 1944.
174. Court op. cit., p. 267.
175. Will Lawthers Introduction to Margot Heinnemann's  
'Britains Coal'. p. 7-9.
176. Western Mail, 8 April 1944.
177. Socialist Appeal, 'Special Mid-March Supplement' 1944.
178. New Leader, 18 March 1944.
179. Ibid., 25 March 1944.
180. Nine Mile Point Lodge Minutes, 14 March 1944.
181. SWMF EC Minutes 28 March 1944.

SECTION III

THE SWMF ITS POLICIES AND ACTIONS DURING  
THE WAR YEARS

## CHAPTER I

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE WAR

Throughout the 1930's the SWMF had been keenly critical of the policies of the National Government on international affairs. It had been most vociferous in its opposition to the non-interventionist policy in Spain, but also to the Government's policy on the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, its participation in the dismemberment of the state of Czechoslovakia and with its repeated refusals to enter into meaningful negotiations with the Russian Government.<sup>1</sup>

Criticism had not only been limited to the Government, but had also been aimed at the ineffectiveness of the Labour Party opposition. In the months before the declaration of war the policy of the union on international affairs could be described fairly accurately as being of alignment with the extra parliamentary left in British politics and with left wing rebels within the Labour Party, amongst whom the most prominent was the SWMF sponsored M.P., Aneurin Bevan.

At the Annual Conference of the SWMF in April 1939, a motion was passed calling for the reinstatement by the Labour Party of Sir Stafford Cripps, George Strauss and Aneurin Bevan, all of whom had been expelled for their attempts to organise an effective Popular Front organisation of Labourites, Liberals, Communists, unaligned socialists and progressives. The resolution went on to protest strongly against "the pro-facist policy of the National Government" and demanded that "the Labour

Movement initiate the broadest possible Popular Front alliance as a means to secure the Government's defeat.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after this conference, conscription was introduced and made compulsory. Initially the SWMF placed itself four-square in opposition to it. It was, in fact, the immediate response of most trade union and socialist organisations, most of which argued that conscription could not be supported unless it was accompanied by the conscription of wealth and measures against profiteering.<sup>3</sup> The SWMF, in opposing the measure re-affirmed its lack of confidence in the Chamberlain Government, which it held largely responsible for the deplorable international situation because of its appeasement policy. It questioned the motivation of the Government and its intention to ever oppose the forces of reaction. Conscription, it was maintained, was a measure that interfered with the people's liberty. Finally, it called upon The General Council of the TUC to convene a special conference to decide upon measures of resistance to the Bill.<sup>4</sup>

In his speeches on the issue, Arthur Horner spoke of the possible need to resort to a General Strike to defeat the Bill, an attitude for which he received the accustomed whiplash of a Western Mail editorial.<sup>5</sup> However, when a conference of the executives of all national trade unions met and decided not to take industrial action against conscription, and indeed, to take part in the national service to meet the dangers arising out of the

international situation, the SWMF tailored their policy accordingly. It decided that conscription was not an issue upon which it should adopt a policy contrary to the rest of the trade union movement. It did, however, pledge itself to work for the defeat of the Government and declared the readiness of the union to render services necessary for the defence of the country under a Government which pursued a policy of resistance to Fascist aggression coupled with an enlightened policy at home.

These decisions were made at a Special Conference to discuss the act and the resolution in addition to stating these general policies, also included clauses concerning the protection of those SWMF members who would be subject to the operation of the act. They were still to remain members of the union, and lodges were to keep in touch with them to report any incidents of alleged ill treatment or victimisation so that the SWMF could seek redress on their behalf. The SWMF was also instructed to seek an immediate agreement with the Coalowners to ensure the right of their re-employment without loss of status on return and to prevent the families of absentees being prejudiced in respect of domestic housecoal.<sup>6</sup>

The same resolution also included a clause condemning the National Government in its negotiations with the Soviet Union and congratulating the U.S.S.R. on its firm stand for a pact 'which would safeguard the peace of the world'. The call for such a pact had been a

consistent stand within the internationalist policy of the SWMF and when the Soviet Union announced its ten year non-aggression pact with Hitler's Germany the SWMF urged that an Anglo-Russian pact had become more important than ever. 7

When on September 4 war was finally declared, it was a matter of supreme interest throughout South Wales as to what policy the union, which represented the highest number of workers in the area, would adopt towards it, especially considering their past record on international issues and some of their most recent pronouncements.

The internationalist policy of the SWMF was undoubtedly the product of an influential 'broad-left' grouping on the executive consisting of Communist Party and left-wing Labour Party members. More often than not SWMF policy found itself in accord with whatever CPGB line was current. How deeply the membership of the union was committed to the various policy statements, it is difficult to discern. Debate on all resolutions passed did not infiltrate down to all lodges, although those lodges that had Communist Party members and Labour Party activists amongst their membership could almost be guaranteed a debate. Resolutions of a left-wing nature did infiltrate upwards from rank and file level to the executive and this was to be the case with the anti-war resolution that led to the holding of a Special Conference to determine



the Federations' policy on the war.

Initially, however, as soon as war broke out, the SWMF was remarkably non-committal in its attitude. To some extent this must have reflected the uncertainty with which the Communist Party and its fellow travellers viewed the situation. Having announced support for the war because of the necessity to fight Fascism, a rapid about turn took place when the official assessment reached King Street. The pamphlet 'How to Win the War' was withdrawn from circulation and its author Harry Pollit was demoted within the Communist Party hierarchy. In South Wales, the district committee of the Communist Party met on 12 October over five weeks after war had begun, and gave their approval to the new position.<sup>8</sup> Shortly afterwards resolutions from lodges calling upon the SWMF to take up a position either for or against participation in the war began to arrive at the SWMF headquarters in Cardiff.

On 20 October Area No. 6 of the SWMF, Rhymney Valley and East Glamorgan declared 'emphatically, that the war was being fought for purely imperialist aims and that responsibility for the outbreak rested equally on all powers taking part in it'.<sup>9</sup> Days later the Powell Duffryn Combine Committee representing fifty lodges sent a resolution to the SWMF EC calling upon it to break its silence on the subject of the war and to define its policy.<sup>10</sup> This was to be the start of a thorough-going debate on the subject.

Despite these early demands for a conference, it was not until December that the SWMF EC decided that one should be held. According to the News Chronicle the decision resulted from pressure emanating from what were termed moderate elements. The chagrin of orthodox Labour Party members had been provoked by the number of resolutions sent to the Government calling for a pact with Russia and condemning the war. The Russian invasion of Finland had finally prompted the "moderates" to act, and they had called a meeting of the SWMF EC and the Welsh miners' M.P's.<sup>11</sup> This meeting was finally adjourned after protracted discussion<sup>12</sup> but a fortnight later the EC decided to call a Special Conference to discuss the war.<sup>13</sup>

In December, January and February there was tremendous activity in most lodges around resolutions concerning the war, and most areas of the SWMF organised conferences to discuss the issue. It can be ascertained from various sources, that amongst those supporting the anti-war position which was commonly referred to as backing a 'peace resolution', were Powell Duffryn Combine Committee, Area No. 3 SWMF, (Ogmore, Maesteg, Garw and Gilfach Valleys), Area No. 4 SWMF (Pontypridd District of the Rhondda), Area No. 5 SWMF (Aberdare and Merthyr), Area No. 6 (Rhymney Valley and East Glamorgan), Bedwas Unemployed Section, Merthyr and District Unemployed, Tylorstown and Ferndale lodges.<sup>14</sup>

In the event twenty-two lodges supported the anti-war resolution, drawn up by Communist Party members. This was enough, according to the constitution of the SWMF to determine that a Special Conference should be held,<sup>15</sup> and it was decided to hold such a conference on 17 February 1940, although a decision on what motion should be put was deferred.<sup>16</sup> There were two motions put forward for discussion, that drafted by the Communist Party and one by members of the Labour Party.<sup>17</sup> The EC finally decided to put both to the conference.<sup>18</sup>

Arthur Horner was accused in some quarters of engineering the situation<sup>19</sup> but he explained to his critics that it was on his casting vote at the EC meeting that it was decided that both resolutions should be put, without a specific recommendation from the EC. in favour of one or the other. If he had voted according to his own party's policy only the Communist Party resolution would have gone to the conference. The vote of the EC was also evidence that it was wrong to treat the debate as a straight conflict between the Communist Party and the Labour Party because several members of the Labour Party on the Executive had agreed with the Communist Party resolution.<sup>20</sup>

At the Special Conference, the Communist Party resolution was put by D. R. Llewellyn and formally seconded from the floor, and the other resolution was put by Will Arthur and seconded by Ted Williams, M.P. for Ogmore, on behalf of the SWMF sponsored M.P's.

This excluded S. O. Davies, M.P. for Merthyr who took an abstentionist point of view, opposing both resolutions. He maintained a consistent attitude throughout the war, evidenced by his unwillingness to give unqualified support to War Weapons week in Merthyr later in the war.<sup>21</sup>

One interesting factor in the motion moved by Will Arthur was that the Labour Party was called upon to end its by-election truce in order to intensify the struggle of workers on the home front. This would seem to indicate that even the 'moderates' of the SWMF were to the left of the official Labour Party policy.

The conference reached no decision on the resolutions as it was generally considered that voting should be deferred to the lodges.<sup>22</sup>

If the campaigning had been intense before the Conference, it was doubly so in the short period afterwards when the lodges made their decisions, and one significant factor was the role played by the press, especially the Western Mail in the agitation.

Nearly every day between the initial conference and that at which the roll-call on the resolutions was to take place, there was a lambast against the Communist Party and in particular, Arthur Horner, although he seems to have played a minimal role in the campaign to commit the SWMF to the Communist Party policy. At the Conference, apart from stating that he stood by the Communist Party motion he took no part in the proceedings.<sup>23</sup>

The conference decision to refer the vote to lodges was criticised by one, Alfred Morris of Trelewis, who claimed that the results would not represent the miners because mandates would be given by pit committees or by snatch votes at pit head meetings at which only a small number of men would be present. 95% of SWMF members he estimated would have no voice in the matter.<sup>24</sup> This was the line pursued by the Western Mail who headed one article 'Reds Snatch Votes Methods'<sup>25</sup> and in another detailed events at Treharris lodge. Here, it was claimed only 450 out of a possible 2,000 men attended a general meeting. Three hours were spent discussing domestic matters, in which time hundreds of men left. At this stage, the Communists insisted on a vote being taken on the two resolutions discussed at the coalfield conference. As a result the "stop-the-war" motion was carried by 22 votes against 20. One miner was quoted as describing the meeting as 'a positive farce' and as expressing the fear that all miners at Treharris would be branded as 'Reds', whereas the meeting had been 'stampeded'.<sup>26</sup>

Just as the Daily Worker on the one side reported the lodges which supported the anti-war resolution, the Western Mail publicised those who supported the motion put by Will Arthur. Typical, was the following report concerning the Rhondda Valley:-

'The Rhondda has long been painted red. This bogey must be dispelled. The miners of Rhondda are as

loyal and patriotic as those of Durham. Responsible trade unionists in the valley are confident that the preponderance of votes cast in the Rhondda will be in favour of the Socialist motion. Perhaps four out of thirty-two lodges will be in favour of the 'Stop-the-war'-cry'.<sup>27</sup>

It was reported that two of the largest lodges in the Aberdare Valley had instructed their delegates to vote in favour of the Socialist policy and that the largest lodge in the coalfield, Penallta, had also voted 'to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion'. In the Blaenavon district the SWMF lodges turned down the 'no support-for-the-war' proposition and the anthracite miners of the Gwendraeth Valley were described as 'loyal' for the war. At the Trimsaran lodge, it was said that the Communist recommendation could not find a seconder. Arthur Horner had once been miners agent in this area and the Western Mail correspondent alleged that 'not all the influence of Mr. Horner has succeeded in any appreciable degree in winning over to Communism, the average miner in the area'.<sup>29</sup>

On the day of the adjourned conference the Western Mail was confident that the Communist resolution would be heavily defeated and that the Welsh miners would refuse to be 'the dupes of the Communists'.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst the Western Mail was most vociferous in the campaign, posing the issue in terms of whether the SWMF was to be used for the convenience of 'Stalin and

his thugs'<sup>31</sup> or not, it is more probable that the most influential propaganda in favour of the 'support-the-war' faction was that of the South Wales Regional Council of Labour, which issued between 80,000 and 100,000 copies of a brochure entitled "We Stand By Our Principles".<sup>32</sup>

When the roll-call was finally taken at the 2 March Special Conference, the Labour Party resolution received a substantial majority, 1,940 delegates voting in its favour and 607 for the Communist Party resolution. Translated into a vote for the total membership of the SWMF, this was roughly 90,000 to 30,000.<sup>33</sup>

The Western Mail provided some analysis of the voting. Monmouthshire, the Rhondda and the Aberdare Valleys had shown themselves decidedly in favour of the 'official socialist attitude'. The voting for the Communist motion came mostly from lodges of unemployed miners and some of the Western Valleys, particularly the Dulais Valley. The anthracite area and the Garw Valley were fairly evenly divided. A point also made by the newspaper was that although the Communist resolution had received the equivalent of 30,000 votes it was preposterous to think that there were that many men supporting it.<sup>24</sup>

The Daily Worker, of course, presented a different interpretation of the events. It argued in its report that the greatest opposition to the war had been expressed at the best attended lodge meetings, whilst it had been the poorly attended meetings that had

voted for the war. Many of the lodges were swayed, it claimed 'by the terrific campaign of the Regional Council of Labour, with the aid of the Tory Western Mail'.<sup>35</sup>

The defeat of the Communist Party resolution was a major one for the 'broad left' on the SWMF EC, whose policies on international affairs had held away throughout the 1930's. The resolution was defeated for four main reasons. Propaganda was one, but not the only one. If the Daily Worker believed that the campaigns of the Regional Council of Labour and the Western Mail were decisive, then that does not reflect greatly in the persuasiveness of their own propaganda which was also extensive. However, it was a rarity for the Labour Party to campaign so hard on an issue and it must be considered an influential factor.

A second reason was that there was a debate throughout the organisation of the SWMF, much to the credit of Communist Party and left wing Labour party activists, but this probably worked against them in the end as it seems to have activated opinion against the left-wing stance.

The main reason, however was that there was, quite simply, a widespread hostility towards the policy of the Communist Party. They were campaigning around a very unpopular policy. Such hostility was aggravated by the fact that a debate had been initiated in the SWMF. It was generally felt that such a prolonged debate was



unnecessary as the result was predictable. The hostility towards the Communist Party had been fired by the events in Finland and the change in the party policy in late September. This had produced scepticism and distrust. This factor leads on to the final point. There can be no doubt that many of the Communist Party members and fellow travellers were unhappy about their own policy and probably lacked conviction in their campaigning.<sup>36</sup> One example may have been Arthur Horner himself. Although attempts were made to bring him into the centre of the controversy, he tended to remain on the sidelines during the debate, as is evidenced by the small role he played in the Special Conference. This may have been tactical on his part, but it could also indicate that he was doubtful about the policy being pursued by the Communist Party. When the South Wales Communist Party district committee approved that change in their party line on 12 October, there were 15 in favour and 1 abstention.<sup>37</sup> One could speculate as to whether Horner was that abstentionist. According to oral evidence received in recent years it is quite likely. Dai Dan Evans, a fellow Communist Party member and miners' agent at that time has said that Horner found it very difficult to accept the change in line<sup>38</sup> and Will Arthur who proposed the Labour Party resolution at the Special Conference has said the Horner was very uneasy about the Communist Party position.<sup>39</sup>

Not only the SWMF were engaged in heated debate on

the issue of support for the prosecution of the war, in the early months, other institutions were engaged in equally intense polemics. Criticism and outright rejection of the war arose for several different but principled reasons. Apart from the Communist Party who mainly operated within the trade union movement in an attempt to win support over to their particular ideological stance, and which, incidentally, opposed the use of the tactic of conscientious objection as a propaganda means, there were the Welsh Nationalist Party, the Independent Labour Party, the Peace Pledge Union and various religious sects such as the Welsh Congregationalists and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. All these organisations used conscientious objection as the main plank of their campaign. Whilst the SWMF condoned none of these organisations or their activities, there were of course many miners who were involved in an individual capacity.

There were more Conscientious Objectors in Wales than in any other part of Great Britain. By July 1940, 2.56% of men called up in Wales were registered as conscientious objectors, compared with 1.3% in England and 1.46% in Scotland.<sup>40</sup> The largest percentage of these were members of the Welsh Nationalist Party, whose main activities were centred in North and West Wales and which had very little influence in the South Wales Coalfield. Such was the reputation, however, of the level of opposition to the war in Wales that it was

alleged that it was used in Nazi propaganda.<sup>41</sup>

The most active campaigning organisation around conscientious objection in South Wales was the Peace Pledge Union, which acted to some extent as an umbrella organisation for other groups. They bought large houses in Cardiff, Penarth and Carmarthen, which were utilised to demonstrate how young conscripts could become objectors and they also organised mock tribunals in towns and villages for the purpose of instructing would-be objectors upon how to act at the actual tribunals and become registered.<sup>42</sup>

At one session of the South Wales Conscientious Objectors Tribunal at Carmarthen, twenty-five applicants for registration came from the small villages of Crwbin and Llangerdeirne in the Gwendraeth Valley, fourteen of whom were all miners employed at the Pentremawr colliery, Pontyberem. The presiding Judge, had no doubt that there had been a 'mass production of conscience'.

'There is no other district in the kingdom where there is such a large proportion of C.O's" he said.

Another member of the tribunal called the occurrence, 'a local epidemic'. The Judge visited the area on the following day and discovered that 'young men who had seldom visited a place of worship had suddenly become regular attendants at prayer and chapel meetings'. He was convinced that mock tribunals had been held in the district.<sup>43</sup>

It was in this far western area of the coalfield

that conscientious objection was most common. If the Welsh Nationalist Party had any influence at all, it was here, but the main opposition came from non-conformist churches. This was at the time of what was known as the 'phoney war', whilst, following the events surrounding the Fall of France and the blitz, when the fiercer realities of war became apparent, many churches made a substantial modification of their attitude. The Presbyterian Church of Wales for instance called off its campaign to call upon the Government to convene a conference of all nations for the settlement of international differences.<sup>44</sup> The Welsh Congregationalists, however, were more persistent. At their annual conference in June 1941 they passed a resolution calling for an immediate armistice and the following year they passed a resolution demanding the settlement of the war "along the path of compromise and arbitration". Another oppositional tendency in West Wales was the Llanelli Council<sup>45</sup> for Evangelical Churches which called upon the Government to declare its peace aims in July 1941.<sup>46</sup>

Those people who appeared before Conscientious Objector's tribunals and were accepted as having 'moral, humanitarian or religious grounds for objection were usually registered as C.O's and often ordered to work on the land. Proposals that they should be sent to work in the pits were never taken up, the Government not wishing to introduce divisive elements who were likely to stir up trouble in the pits.<sup>47</sup>

Objectors whose grounds were more overtly political were usually not allowed registration, as the case of a Merthyr collier, who was later to become a miners agent for the South Wales Area of the NUM will serve to illustrate.

Lance Rogers<sup>48</sup> had served with the British Battalion of the International Brigade in Spain for twenty-one months, and was a member of the Independent Labour Party. He was called up to serve in the British army soon after the declaration of war, but applied for registration as a C.O. The South Wales tribunal surprisingly registered him unconditionally in April 1940,<sup>49</sup> but this decision had to be confirmed by the Central Appellate Tribunal for Conscientious Objectors in London. Here, Lance Rogers told the tribunal that he had killed in the past and would do so again if he were satisfied that the cause was good. He mistrusted the British Government and feared that 'the same machinations that strangled the French people would strangle the British if they were not careful'. He concluded his remarks thus:

'The best blow I can strike against the Nazi regime is here in this country. I don't think any good can come of slaughtering the German people'.

This time Lance Rogers' name was removed from the register of C.O's.<sup>50</sup> This now meant that he was no longer exempt from military service, and he was duly called-up to serve in the South Wales Borderers. On his refusal to serve he was court-martialled and sentenced to 93 days imprisonment. In December 1941

after serving his term of imprisonment he was accepted again as a registered conscientious objector.<sup>51</sup>

The issue of opposition to the war became a declining feature not only in South Wales but throughout Britain, following the Nazi invasion of France in mid-1940 and then the invasion of Russia in June 1941, and although the I.L.P, the W.N.P. and the Welsh Congregationalist church maintained their attitudes it was in an increasingly muted manner. The WNP lost a degree of credibility when it decided that its members should join the Home Guard in August 1940, because of their desire 'to defend Wales from the consequences of English policy'.<sup>52</sup>

At the time of the industrial troubles in the coalfield in early 1944 the issue of anti-war organisations provoking strikes did emerge although this seems to have been rather contrived on the part of Ernest Bevin.<sup>53</sup>

From the middle of 1943 debate in most quarters was turning to the prospects for the post-war world, rather than to the ethics or merits of fighting the war in the first place.

Although defeated in their 'stop the war' resolution the Communist Party and left wing Labour Party ensured that the SWMF maintained a critical stance towards the Government. Persistent calls were made for the end of the electoral truce,<sup>54</sup> and lodges and Area Committees were at the forefront of the campaigning instigated by the Communist Party to get Chamberlain and the other

'Men of Munich' totally removed from office.<sup>55</sup> Soon, the SWMF was plunged into controversy once more when it was decided to affiliate to the People's Vigilance Movement, an organisation designed to play a watchdog role on the issues of food prices, rationing and racketeering, but which many people claimed was a front for the Communist Party.

As soon as the war began, the cost of living started to rise at an increased rate and reports of profiteering and hoarding became quite common.<sup>56</sup> When the SWMF discussed the situation in September 1939 it was decided that lodges should be recommended to set up Vigilance Committees in all localities in co-operation with the Regional Council of Labour whose task would be to watch movements in the cost of living and to blacklist profiteers.<sup>57</sup> Apart from isolated cases, however, the Tower and Treherbert lodges<sup>58</sup> for instance, there seems to have been a surprisingly small response and these committees died a quiet death.

The concept of vigilance committees did not re-emerge until after the military disasters concerning Norway and Denmark and after left wing elements in the Labour Party had failed to convert the Party into breaking the electoral truce. Between May and July 1940, a provisional committee was set up which organised a conference in July 1940 to demand the removal of the 'Men of Munich'. Arising out of this similar conferences were held throughout the country and committees were set up. The committees were linked by the demand to

call for a 'People's Convention' to press for a 'People's Government', truly representative of the people of Britain. In September a Manifesto was issued over the signatures of 500 leading and representative people from all parts of the country, Prominent individuals supported the Manifesto, but the only organisation of any great consequence to do so was the SWMF.<sup>59</sup>

Although originating within the Labour Party, there is no doubt that the real motivating force behind the 'People's Vigilance Committees was the Communist Party, and it was this fact that brought the SWMF and prominent individual Labour Party members into conflict with the official organs of the Labour Party in the following few months.

The first signs of activity from the organisation in South Wales was when a six-point programme 'for the defence of the South Wales people' was widely circulated. Entitled, 'A Call to the People' it was signed by 100 people well known in the Labour and Trade Union movement. Amongst them were the following leading SWMF officials:- Arthur Horner, W. J. Saddler, Mark Harcombe, David Phillips, Jim Evans, Jim Phillips and Emrys Butler. The manifesto urged the need to build a People's Vigilance Committee in South Wales, and called a conference on 5 October for such a purpose. The speakers were D. N. Pritt, a former member of the Labour Party's National Executive, but recently expelled,



and Glamorgan County Councillor, Mabel Lewis.<sup>60</sup>

The conference was attended by 231 delegates of trades union and political organisations, a large percentage of whom, were miners' representatives.<sup>61</sup> The SWMF EC had decided that all its members should attend the meeting, although one lodge, Cwmcarn protested against such support being given.<sup>62</sup> The decision by the E.C. was in direct contradiction to a request from the Regional Council of Labour that its affiliated organisations should refuse to send delegates to the conference.<sup>63</sup> A second letter from the Regional Council of Labour informing the SWMF EC that the People's Vigilance Movement had been proscribed by the N.E.C. of the Labour Party and the T.U.C. was similarly ignored.<sup>64</sup>

On October 15 the SWMF EC re-affirmed the stand it had made by giving a donation to the People's Vigilance Movement,<sup>65</sup> a gesture that was counter-balanced some weeks later by a grant of £3,000 to the Government, towards the cost of the war.<sup>66</sup>

The reaction to their support of the PVM, however, began to become more hostile both from within the union and from outside. Area No. 8 of the SWMF wanted a Special Conference to be called to discuss the matter.<sup>67</sup> and the Regional Council of Labour informed the E.C. that steps would be taken 'to combat the attempts of such bodies as the People's Vigilance Movement to undermine the declared principles and policies of the Labour Movement.<sup>68</sup>

Reprisals, when they came, were against members of the Labour Party who sponsored the movement. On 7 November 1940 the Mountain Ash Constituency Labour Party expelled Mabel Lewis, who had chaired the first conference of the PVM in South Wales, her husband Justin and Councillor E. A. Bennet who was also a member of the SWMF EC.<sup>69</sup> The decision was upheld at a conference of Aberdare and Mountain Ash Labour Parties.<sup>70</sup>

In its role as an affiliated organisation to the Labour Party the SWMF EC decided that a protest be sent to the Aberdare Divisional Labour Party over E. A. Bennett's expulsion and that he be reinstated.<sup>71</sup>

Matters began to polarise further during December 1940 when localised People's Vigilance Committee conferences started to take place,<sup>72</sup> and when the SWMF EC was requested to send delegates to the national People's Convention, whereupon it was decided that four members should go.<sup>73</sup>

This decision led to several protest motions being received from lodges<sup>74</sup> and the intervention of the SWMF sponsored M.P's who requested a special meeting with the E.C. to discuss the decision.<sup>75</sup>

This special meeting between the SWMF EC and the miners M.P's turned out to be a stormy one as the M.P's whose main spokesman seems to have been Aneurin Bevan, urged the E.C. to disassociate itself from the People's Convention. The defence of the E.C. was that participation in the PVM was quite consistent with the

terms of the resolution passed by the SWMF on its attitude to the war.<sup>76</sup>

At their next meeting the SWMF EC discussed a motion that the previous decision, to appoint delegates to the People's Convention be rescinded. This was defeated.<sup>77</sup> According to SWMF EC member, E. J. Evans, the initial vote had been 13 in favour of sending delegates and 3 against. The decision had been reaffirmed by a slightly reduced, yet still decisive majority.<sup>78</sup> The Daily Worker stated that the vote was 10 for and 8 against and stressed that only four of the ten were members of the Communist Party.<sup>79</sup>

The People's Convention met at the Royal Hotel and Holborn Hall in London on 12 January 1941. Of 2,234 delegates present, exactly 100 came from South Wales, many of whom were miners' delegates. The SWMF EC was one of only four trade union executive committees that sent delegates. During the conference two miners' delegates from South Wales took part in the discussions, Will Paynter, miners' agent in the Rhymney Valley and Frank Davies, the chairman of Saron lodge.<sup>80</sup>

The support that the People's Convention received was quite remarkable, not only because the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, where it had originally been planned to meet, had been destroyed three weeks before the Convention, but also because it took place at a time when the security of Britain was being seriously threatened. It represented a widespread discontent

throughout Britain and there was nowhere that this was more apparent than in South Wales, following the collapse of the coal export market after the Fall of France.<sup>81</sup> Although the Government claimed that the Convention 'was not representative of any large body of working class opinion and need not be regarded as giving cause for alarm,<sup>82</sup> a truer indication of their feelings was probably demonstrated by the suppression of the Daily Worker on 21 January 1941. It was a direct result of the Convention and it was an act which provided the SWMF with yet another campaigning issue.

The response of the Labour Party to the success of the Convention was to clamp down much harder on its membership. The expulsion of the Lewis's and E. A. Bennett were to prove to be only the first of many. Expulsions came thick and fast and amongst them were several men who held prominent positions within the SWMF:-

Alderman Sidney Jones, miners agent for SWMF Area No. 7 and a member of Monmouthshire County Council and Bedwellty Divisional Labour Party,<sup>83</sup> Emrys Butler, Jim Phillips, Dan Griffiths, Lloyd Humphries and Haydn Lewis, five members out of eight who were expelled from Ammanford Labour Party,<sup>84</sup> J. E. Morgan and Goronwy Jones, chairman and secretary of Lady Windsor Lodge, Ynysybwl and Sol Wright, the chairman of Penrikyber lodge.<sup>85</sup>

The relationship of the SWMF to the People's Vigilance Movement remained a contentious issue. Soon

pressure was being applied on the E.C. not only from the Regional Council of Labour, but also from the MRGB.<sup>86</sup> More lodges too, protested against the actions of the E.C.<sup>87</sup>

When the MFGB insisted that the SWMF EC define its views and relationship with the PVM, the SWMF EC replied that they had no association with it.<sup>88</sup> It was an ambiguous reply and was interpreted in some quarters as implying that the SWMF had severed its relationship and was therefore to be considered a victory for the 'moderate elements'.<sup>89</sup> An alternative viewpoint was expressed by E. J. Evans. The MFGB he claimed, had posed the question not as to whether the SWMF was associated with the PVM, but whether it was affiliated. The President had ruled that the question of affiliation did not arise as the PVM was not a party. The future relationship of the SWMF to the PVM would be determined at the annual conference in March.<sup>90</sup>

Arthur Horner replied similarly to the Western Mail. Delegates were sent to the People's Convention to hear what was said and to report back. The fact that he was a member of the executive of the PVM, he said, had nothing to do with the SWMF.<sup>91</sup>

Members of People's Vigilance Committees in South Wales believed that the press and particularly the Western Mail were trying to make it look as if the South Wales miners had withdrawn their support for the movement. Goronwy Jones, secretary of Lady Windsor

lodge told a meeting in Mountain Ash.

'Whenever there is an opportunity to attack our movement you will find the Western Mail leading the attack and the Welsh miners are falling too easily for it'.<sup>92</sup>

The question was finally referred to the SWMF Annual Conference in late March 1941, but a decision was avoided, a factor that again incurred scathing criticism from the Western Mail.<sup>93</sup> By this time however, the PVM was losing momentum and was becoming a dying issue, although in May it was able to organise a lobby of the South Wales Regional Food Officer by 300 women complaining at the high cost of living and alleged food shortages.<sup>94</sup> The eventual death of the issue came in June 1941 with the invasion of Russia by Hitler, when the Convention followed the Communist Party in switching its line to one of full-blooded support for the war.<sup>95</sup>

The episode concerning the growth of People's Vigilance Committees in South Wales is somewhat overshadowed by the confrontation between the majority of the SWMF EC and the Regional Council of Labour. It was popular in the press to interpret the debate as being one between the Labour Party and the Communist Party, but that was a crude characterisation. There were only 4 Communist Party members on the SWMF EC at the time, and yet support mustered for the People's Vigilance Committee was at one time 13 votes. Wide

support from within the Labour Party was clearly apparent and this of course led many members into confrontation with their own party. The involvement of so many Labour Party activists was due to a frustration with their own party which many considered should break the electoral truce, and with the Regional Council of Labour which seemed incapable of producing any initiatives itself, only negative responses to Communist Party initiatives.

There is no doubt that the concept of Vigilance Committees was considered admirable by a wide-spectrum of people. The type of work they did looking for breaches in rationing and visiting shops, checking upon prices, was thought necessary and had widespread support in the communities. Mass Observers at the People's Convention analysing the support concluded that, 'people were looking for a way out of the present mess'. Many disagreed with parts of the Conventions programme and some remarked that it was a pity that it was so left wing.<sup>96</sup> One can expect that these types of attitudes also prevailed on the committees in the localities and especially in South Wales where unemployment and transference of labour was disrupting community life.

The role of the SWMF can be interpreted in several ways. First of all its eagerness to intervene in the defence of its members and their families was a testament to the traditionally all-pervasive role that the union had in the community, summed up by a paragraph in Will Paynter's autobiography.

'The SWMF - the "Fed" - as it was called - was unique among unions, it was a social institution providing through its local leaders an allround service of advice and assistance to the mining community on most of the problems that could arise between the cradle and the grave. Its function became a combination of economic, social and political leadership in these single industry communities .... Without doubt the strength and ties of the Federation with the communities were based on its intimate involvement in social and domestic affairs'.<sup>97</sup>

The belief that the establishment of the People's Vigilance Committees were genuine is evidenced by the fact that several members of the Labour Party were prepared to break with the organisation on the issue. On the other hand there were undoubtedly a degree of 'politicking' going on. No doubt the Communist Party expected the Labour Party to respond in the manner which they did and found it advantageous to point out that they were lining up with the 'Tory' Western Mail. Scoring political points, one from the other, ultimately seemed to become more important than any examination of the issues for which the Committees were set up to take action upon.

The Nazi Invasion of the Soviet Union and its Effects on SWMF Policy.

The schism that existed on the SWMF EC due to the



ideological disagreements over the nature of the war was healed rapidly in June 1941 when a dramatic development took place in the war with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The invasion took place on 23 June and next day the SWMF EC passed a resolution pledging its full support "to the just <sup>ca</sup>use of the Soviet people in resisting aggression" and calling upon the Government "to establish full solidarity with the Russian Government in all diplomatic, economic and military activities".<sup>98</sup>

Immediately the union became involved in the setting up of Anglo-Russian solidarity committees to raise funds for the Russian Government.<sup>99</sup> An E.C. committee in July called upon the MFGB to establish an 'Aid to Russia' scheme on a national basis as part of repaying the debt to Russia for her generous gift to the British miners in 1926<sup>100</sup> and it was later decided that there was to be a 2/6 levy on every SWMF member for 'Aid to Russia'.<sup>101</sup>

The whole policy direction of the SWMF EC was transformed from June 1941. There was a definite shift of emphasis from concern with domestic issues to the direct needs of the war effort. Encouragement of production was seen as a major task for the union as the war was approached with a new verve and policy directed with a new found unity.

The transformation clearly took place as a result of the dominating influence of the 'broad-left', Communist Party members and left-wing Labourites, but it would be incorrect to suggest that the respon<sup>s</sup>e

was totally Russophile in nature. Although production weeks in support of Russia, "Stalingrad" weeks and such like were to be a common feature throughout the coalfield, there was a more positive attitude prevalent in relation to the British war effort. The SWMF EC sent telegrams to British generals, such as Montgomery, congratulating the "heroic efforts of the Allied armies fighting valiantly on behalf of the British people."<sup>102</sup> These types of telegrams were never sent before June 1941.

The public attitudes expressed by the SWMF after June 1941 leaves little doubt as to where their origins lay. They reflected the stances being taken by Communist Party members and their supporters. For example, criticism of the continued suppression of the Daily Worker was maintained,<sup>103</sup> the campaign for the opening of the Second Front was heavily backed by the union,<sup>104</sup> the release of Fascists, including Mosley, from British gaols was attacked,<sup>105</sup> and at Labour Party Conferences the union delegates were committed to supporting the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party.<sup>106</sup>

Whilst supporting the prosecution of the war in general, the policies of the SWMF more often than not contained an element of criticism of the Government's conduct of the war and usually demanded a more aggressive approach.

1. For a detailed description of MFGB policy in industrial affairs in this period see R. Page Arnot 'The Miners in Crisis and War' Chapter VI 'The Struggle Against Facism and War'. On the policy of the SWMF in this period the only article so far written is by Hywel Francis, 'South Wales Miners in the Spanish Civil War'. Journal of Contemporary History (Vol. 5 No. 3, 1970).
2. Western Mail, 17 April 1939.
3. Ibid., 27 April 1939.
4. SWMF EC Minutes 2 May 1939.
5. Western Mail, 8 May 1939.
6. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 12 June 1939. An undertaking was given quite readily by the Coalowners that young men who had been on military training should be re-employed on completion of that training provided they applied for reinstatement within reasonable time (SWMF EC Minutes 27 June). The supply of housecoal issue was not resolved as easily. At the same SWMF EC meeting it was reported that the Coalowners Association would not give instructions to companies that families in which youths called up for military service, were the main support, should receive housecoal. It was a matter for each company to decide.

The result of this decision was that in the first few months following the outbreak of the war, when conciliation was largely the order of the day in the coalfield, the housecoal question was one of the most contentious. At the SWMF EC meeting on

3 October 1939, the North Celynen lodge applied for permission to tender notices to enforce a claim that housecoal should be supplied to the dependents of workmen in the forces, which had been turned down by the Company. The E.C. turned down the application but they pressed the coalowners again on the question, but received the same reply as before. (SWMF EC Minutes, 10 October 1939). At an E.C. Meeting on 12 December 1939, it was reported that several complaints along the lines of that received in October from North Celynen lodge had been registered. It was resolved that the president would take up each specific complaint with the owners. (SWMF EC Minutes 12 December 1939).

7. SWMF EC Minutes, 22 August 1939.
8. Western Mail, 13 October 1939.
9. Daily Worker, 21 October 1939.
10. SWMF EC Minutes, 24 October 1939.
11. News Chronicle, 2 December 1939.
12. Western Mail, 4 December 1939.
13. SWMF EC Minutes, 16 December 1939.
14. Aberdare Leader, 9 December 1939, Daily Worker 29 December 1939, New Leader, 5 January and 19 January 1940.
15. News Chronicle, 17 February 1940.
16. SWMF EC Minutes, 30 January 1940.
17. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 17 February 1940.

18. SWMF EC Minutes, 10 February 1940.
19. Western Mail, 21 February 1940.
20. Ibid., 24 February 1940.
21. Merthyr Express, 22 March 1941.
22. SWMF Special Conference Minutes, 17 February 1940.
23. Western Mail, 19 February 1940.
24. Ibid., 23 February 1940.
25. Ibid., 29 February 1940.
26. Ibid., 27 February 1940.
27. Ibid., 24 February 1940.
28. Ibid., 27 February 1940.
29. Ibid., 28 February 1940.
30. Ibid., 2 March 1940.
31. Ibid., 28 February 1940.
32. Ibid., 22 February 1940.
33. SWMF Adjourned Conference Minutes 2 March 1940.
34. Western Mail, 4 March 1940.
35. Daily Worker, 4 March 1940.
36. See below Section III Chapter II p. 612
37. Western Mail, 13 October 1939.
38. Dai Dan Evans interview by H. Francis 7.8.73.  
Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
39. Will Arthur interviewed by Dave Egan and Stuart  
Broomfield 31.5.73. Tape at South Wales Miners  
Library.
40. Western Mail, 23 July 1940.
41. Ibid., 20 November 1939.

42. Ibid., 12 March 1940 and 13 May 1940.
43. Ibid., 24 January 1940, LAB 10/367 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 1 February 1940.
44. Western Mail, 20 June 1940.
45. Ibid., 19 June 1942.
46. Ibid., 7 July 1941.
47. Denis Hayes. 'The Challenge of Conscience' (London 1949)p. 24
48. Further details of the Lance Rogers case can be obtained from the Claude Stanfield Collection at the South Wales Miners Library, Swansea and from a tape-recording of Lance Rogers made by Hywel Francis also at the SWML.
49. The New Leader, 18 April 1940.
50. Merthyr Express, 7 September 1940.
51. Ibid., 13 December 1941.
52. Western Mail, 1 August and 5 August 1940.
53. See Section II Chapter III p. 349
54. SWMF EC Minutes, 7 May 1940.
55. Daily Worker 18, 22, 25, 26, 27 June, 1 and 4 July 1940, News Chronicle, 13 July.
56. Perhaps the most vehement man opposed to profiteering and hoarding in South Wales was the Mayor of Newport, Alderman J. Waddell who threatened to pin a list of sugar-hoarders on the Town Hall. He revealed cases of landlords exploiting the situation, trying to evict the families of men who had joined

up, but had received no pay.

One of his more publicised threats was to commandeered cars after a lukewarm response to his appeal for the formation of a volunteer motor corps. (Western Mail, 13 September 1939).

57. SWMF EC Minutes 16 September 1939.
58. Aberdare Leader, 30 December 1939.
59. Harry Adam's Chairman's Address to the People's Convention. 'The People Speak: The Official Report of the People's Convention 12 January 1941'. p. 9-11, Angus Calder op. cit., p.281-3.
60. Daily Worker, 13 September 1940.
61. Ibid., 7 October 1940.
62. SWMF EC Minutes 17 September 1940.
63. Daily Worker, 21 September 1940.
64. SWMF EC Minutes, 24 September 1940.
65. Ibid., 15 October 1940.
66. Ibid., 19 November 1940.
67. Ibid., 15 October 1940.
68. Ibid., 22 October 1940.
69. Western Mail, 8 November 1940.
70. Ibid., 7 January 1941.
71. SWMF EC Minutes, 3 December 1941.
72. e.g. Ammanford (Ammanford Lodge Minutes, 19 December 1940) and in the Aberdare Valley (Western Mail, 30 December 1940.)
73. SWMF EC Minutes, 10 December 1940.

74. e.g. Abercynon Lodge (SWMF EC Minutes 3 December 1940) Fforchaman Lodge (SWMF EC Minutes 24 December 1940), Nantymelyn Lodge (SWMF EC Minutes 31 December 1940).
75. SWMF EC Minutes 31 December 1940.
76. Ibid., 4 January 1941, Western Mail 8 January 1941.
77. Ibid., 7 January 1941.
78. Amman Valley Chronicle, 28 February 1941.
79. Daily Worker, 10 January 1941.
80. 'The People Speak', The Official Report of the People's Convention.
81. See above, Section I Chapter II.
82. CAB 98/18 Minutes of the War Cabinet on "Communist Activities". The People's Convention 20 January 1941.
83. Western Mail, 23 January 1941.
84. LAB 10/367. Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales 15 February 1941. Ammanford Lodge Minutes 31 January 1941.
85. Aberdare Leader 15 March 1941.
86. SWMF EC Minutes 21 January 1941.
87. Britannia Lodge (SWMF EC Minutes 21 January 1941, Cwm Lodge (SWMF EC Minutes 4 February 1941), International (Garw) Lodge sent in a motion of support.
88. SWMF EC Minutes 11 February 1941.
89. Amman Valley Chronicle 20 February 1941.
90. Ibid., 27 February 1941.
91. Western Mail 3 March 1941.
92. Ibid., 12 March 1941.



93. Ibid., 30 March 1941.
94. Ibid., 23 April, 2 May 1941.
95. Angus Calder op. cit., p. 301-2.
96. Ibid., p. 383.
97. Will Paynter op. cit., p. 110.
98. SWMF EC Minutes 24 June 1941.
99. Western Mail, 26 August 1941.
100. SWMF EC Minutes, 26 July 1941.
101. Ibid., 18 August 1941.
102. Ibid., 13 July 1943.
103. Western Mail, 22 August 1943.
104. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes April 1942 and April 1943.
105. SWMF EC Minutes, 22 November 1943, The Markham Lodge actually proposed that there be a one-day strike over the release of Mosley (SWMF EC Minutes, 14 December 1943).
106. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes April 1942 and April 1943.

CHAPTER IITHE STRUGGLE FOR UNITY

The SWMF entered the war a much stronger organisation than it had been for many years, following a decline in membership after the General Strike and Lockout and the threat of company unionism. By 1939 the campaign for 100% bona fide trade unionism in the coalfield was almost completed. Although the prewar years were characterised by conflicts with employers, with non-unionists, with the scourge of unemployment, and against Fascism at home and abroad, these conflicts had been important in binding a unity. This unity seemed permanently under threat in the war years, however. In the first years the politics of the Communist Party were seen by many to be divisive and in the last few years of the war there seemed an ever-present threat to the authority of the SWMF leadership. In these last years in particular the cry for unity was at its loudest from the SWMF leaders, who not only wanted to maintain the strength of their own organisation but sought to strengthen it further by leading the campaign for one national mineworkers union.

a) A Political Rift:- October 1939 - June 1941.

The nature of the political rift that existed in the SWMF not only on the executive but throughout the organisation has already been described in the

previous chapter. It centred around the Communist Party's attitude towards the war, an attitude very important to the SWMF as many of those in leading positions in the union were members of the Communist Party - these included the President, Arthur Horner, other executive members, and many delegates to conferences, representatives on Area Committees, lodge chairman, lodge secretaries and ordinary lodge committee men. The Communist Party had a tremendous influence within the SWMF but at no other time in its history had the organisation been so unpopular nationwide.

Although it might be argued that the Communist Party members in the SWMF acted divisively by provoking the debate on the 'Stop-the-War' motion and by pressing for the union to associate with the People's Vigilance Movement, they did so under considerable pressure of unpopularity that threatened their union positions.

On the SWMF EC itself the atmosphere was reputedly, very bitter,<sup>1</sup> but although there were many calls for the resignation of those members of the executive associated with the Communist Party, and particularly of Arthur Horner, himself, no member of the Executive lost his position because of his ideological stance. In the lodges, however, there were several instances of Communist Party members being removed from office, for example at Clydach Vale,<sup>2</sup> Treharris<sup>3</sup> and at Britannic and Trane<sup>4</sup>. At an election for office at Taff Merthyr lodge in April 1940, Communist Party members actually

defeated sitting members of the lodge committee,<sup>5</sup> but this was a peculiar case because those defeated had once been the representatives of the SWMIU which had controlled the colliery from 1926 to 1938.<sup>6</sup>

If one man bore the brunt of the attack, it was Arthur Horner. Many individuals called for his resignation but never any official body of the union. Miners agent Will Betty stated at an SWMF rules Conference that if Horner was opposed to the war he should no longer remain as President,<sup>7</sup> and there were further similar instances at the height of the controversy surrounding the People's Vigilance Movement. At this time the Western Mail ran two editorials demanding that Communists should be removed from office in the union.

'It has been obvious for some time that Communists on the SWMF EC are exercising an influence in certain decisions out of all proportion to their actual strength..... the union can have no security until they are replaced by loyal members'.<sup>8</sup>

The newspaper demanded that the SWMF should purge themselves of Communists and that no Communist should be allowed to remain a member of the executive or occupy a position of responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

The newspaper provided a platform for those members of the SWMF who were of a similar opinion. The most vociferous of these was one, George Thomas, contributions

secretary at Treharris lodge, who criticised Horner's prominent role in the PVM. He called upon Horner to pay more attention to the affairs of the union and that if he could not carry out the Federation's policy because of his Communist principles he should resign.<sup>10</sup>

George Thomas was censured at the Ocean Combine Committee for 'ignoring proper procedure regarding criticism of federation officials'.<sup>11</sup> This was no deterrent to Mr. Thomas<sup>12</sup> and he found himself backed up by the Chairman of Park and Dare Lodge, Cwmparc, J. Rhys Thomas who demanded that "the Communist president and several members of the executive must be challenged to declare their loyalty either to South Wales miners who pay them or the Communist secretariat".<sup>13</sup>

There seems, however, to have been no formal opposition to Horner, and the other Communist Party members. Horner was in fact re-elected as President of the SWMF at both the 1940 and 1941 Annual Conferences without opposition.<sup>14</sup> In his public attitudes there is every indication that he was a spokesman for the SWMF rather than the Communist Party. At the Annual Conference of 1940 he announced, "So long as I am President of this Federation I will operate majority decisions. When I cannot carry out the wishes of the majority of the members I will do the only honourable thing, that is, offer my resignation". Just over a month later at the time of the Fall of France he declared:

'Whatever opinion I may have of the present Government, past or present, all are agreed that the maximum must be done to assist in production of coal and to raise the production to meet the needs of the country in its present dangerous situation'.<sup>16</sup>

The attention that the Communist Party received both from the media and the Government, possibly exaggerated their influence, although in the circumstances it is understandable that a witch-hunting attitude would be prevalent against those who were critical of participation in the war.

It is of course, true, that the Communist Party was relatively strong in South Wales and particularly in the coalfield and within the SWMF. What strength they lacked in numbers they made up for in organisation. Within the SWMF their activity was chiefly based around lodge committees and mass meetings, trying to drum up support for their motions. Although it was reported that the Young Communist League had issued leaflets in Cardiff calling upon workmen to act subversively,<sup>17</sup> there is no real evidence of this having taken place in the pits, and whilst it is true that there was some restriction of output and sabotage there is no way that this could be traced back to the Communist Party.

This was a reflection of the national situation. The War Cabinet Committee on Communist Activities

reported in January 1941 that there was no definite evidence that Communist activity had had a serious effect on the output of war industries, although Communists had probably in some cases had a bad influence by discouraging working after the alert or on overtime.<sup>18</sup>

At a meeting of the same committee, Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour said that it was difficult to distinguish between subversive propaganda and the exposure of genuine grievances and that there were many branches of industry where the conditions of work and general lack of amenities lent themselves to exploitation by agitators.<sup>19</sup> This too, was a situation reflected in South Wales. Rather than campaign outright against the war, the Communist Party led campaigns on issues of widespread grievance, such as cost of living increases, shortage of air-raid shelters, poor work conditions, etc. They were perhaps more active in South Wales than elsewhere, but reports are conflicting. A Mr. W. Faulkener of Surbiton, Surrey, who seems to have made a detailed study of Communist Party activities throughout Britain claimed that it was stagnant in South Wales. He based his claim on the number of Party publications which were sold in the area, which was less he said than the number sold in small counties such as Hampshire, Sussex and Kent.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand a report by the South Wales Area of the Communist Party in March 1941, claimed that there

had been increased recruitment since September 1939, although it admitted that this represented large steps forward by a small number of branches. One area of growth was in West Wales which could possibly be explained in the context of the events surrounding the Fall of France. Another note of interest was that membership figures of those outside the mines, exceeded for the first time those within the SWMF.<sup>21</sup>

The claim that membership increased is a surprising one. Oral testimony indicates that the change in the party line in late September 1939 was accepted reluctantly by many members,<sup>22</sup> and many left the party because of it.<sup>23</sup> Recruitment, however, could have come as a result of the People's Vigilance Committees and because of defections from the Labour Party. It was a very difficult time for Communist Party members.<sup>24</sup> In some areas they were subjected to harassment, especially from the police. In Maesteg police stood outside the National Council of Labour College classes observing those who attended,<sup>25</sup> and at Caerau, in an attempt to stop the Communist Party holding an open-air meeting the police are alleged to have stood on members' fingers as they chalked advertisements in the road.<sup>26</sup>

When in June 1940, the Government called upon the police to seize copies of a leaflet "The People Must Act" issued by the Communist Party, two Dulais Valley miners were arrested at a meeting in Neath.<sup>27</sup>



The most prominent members of the Communist Party from South Wales to be arrested and, in fact, gaoled, were T. E. Nicholas, an ex-minister from Glais in the Swansea Valley, dentist and bard, and his son Islwyn. They were accused of being concerned in "acts prejudicial to the public safety or the defence of the realm". They were said to have been engaged in endeavouring to impede recruitment into the Forces. They were held for four months, July to October 1940. Islwyn Nicholas believes that 'but for the strong movement throughout Wales in favour of their release' they would have remained in prison longer.<sup>28</sup> At the forefront of that campaign was the SWMF which immediately they were arrested, swung into action. They lodged a protest to the Home Secretary and instructed the SWMF sponsored M.P's to press for their release.<sup>29</sup> Islwyn has written that at no time did the SWMF relax in its efforts to secure their release and he paid tribute to the 'untiring work' of Evan J. Evans of Ammanford and Arthur Horner.<sup>30</sup> A few days after the release of Nicholas a conference held under the auspices of the National Council for the Defence of Civil liberties at which 39 SWMF lodges were represented, called for a full inquiry into the case.<sup>31</sup>

Even after the Nazi invasion of Russia and despite the campaigning zeal demonstrated by Communist Party members in the interests of the war, they were still

viewed with much suspicion in some quarters. At Rose Heyworth colliery, efforts to boost production were deprecated as 'nothing more nor less than a flimsy effort to "show-up" the coalowners as being always at fault'.<sup>32</sup> In Neath two members of the Labour Party were expelled from the party for belonging to the Neath British-Russian Unity Committee because it was a front organisation for the Communist Party,<sup>33</sup> and in Swansea a microphone and amplifier were found in a room where the Communist Party held a meeting. They were allegedly planted by the police.<sup>34</sup>

The policy of the Communist Party had changed, but attitudes towards them did not necessarily do so. However, on the SWMF EC there was an unprecedented degree of harmony. This was not to be true throughout the organisation, though, for as the war progressed so did the irritability of the rank and file and the executive found themselves faced with an unprecedentedly high level of unofficial strikes.

b) The Relationship Between the SWMF Leadership and the Rank and File

Many of the strikes that took place in the war years, because of their unofficial nature, tended to involve a degree of recrimination on the part of those involved, against their union leaders. Several people considered that there was a widespread discontentment amongst the rank and file with the leadership of the union. Aneurin Bevan was one. Because the miners leaders often came

came back to their members empty-handed and spent so much of their time 'exhorting, rebuking and even abusing' the rank and file, he felt that the miners came 'perilously close to a morbid distrust of their leaders'.<sup>35</sup>

It was frustrating on the one hand to be told that the miners had a new found strength in bargaining power because of the war situation and then to be urged not to use it.<sup>36</sup> According to one South Wales miner, quoted in the Daily Mail the miners were 'troubled by what they regarded as the political acrobatics of their former extreme leaders, who were always fighting and agitating for more money and better conditions. These are now the very people who are using their fervour to urge the miners to go all out for victory. They accost their leaders with the words, "you used to tell us that we were downtrodden, and now you are playing the bosses' game".<sup>37</sup>

One miners view is not representative, of course, although this was probably a fairly common attitude. The use of the quotations in a newspaper of the political right had the purpose, of discrediting the leadership of the SWMF despite their more 'responsible' attitude in face of the unofficial strikes. This approach can also be detected in the Western Mail which also pointed to pre-war agitation as the source for the wartime unrest.

'It is the past propaganda of the Socialist Leaders that has let loose the lawlessness on our

country. They have themselves to blame, they have created the psychological conditions out of which the irresponsibilities result'.<sup>38</sup>

Criticism of the leadership continued, then, from its critics on the right but it also came from political tendencies on the left who were highly critical of the Communist Party. They claimed that the leadership was failing in its job and was out of touch with the rank and file. A correspondent to the South Wales Voice made the following vitriolic attack on the SWMF Communist Party Leaders:-

'Our leadership is inept and impotent. They so much resemble Oliver Twist. They are denying the essence of their teachings. They stand aside and gape and wonder at small issues, lost in the bewilderment of their ignorance of the situation and call for greater discipline from the workers in the situation of chaos and exploitation, ignoring their primary role for the more ambitious and pleasing role of appeasers and reactionaries. What for and for whom?'

'We hear a great deal in abstract manner of Mosley, of Fascism and yet we do not hear of regimentation of the British Worker, regimentation trade union leadership made possible. Who can deny that the most reactionary section of our trade union movement are the Left Wing elements? Their vision is limited and their outlook fogged by the repercussions of this war, their policy is of

pseudo revolutionaries lost in the haze of the far-away horizon of the Soviet Union'.<sup>39</sup>

The Independent Labour Party accused the SWMF leadership of pursuing a policy of quiescence in the face of widespread discontent with wage and compensation rates and working conditions. It criticised them for naively preaching 'the gospel of discipline', openly defending government policy as against the urges and demands of the rank and file', and 'lining up with the forces of the ruling class as against the workers, defending prosecution of workers for contravention of capitalist law'.<sup>40</sup>

Despite their support for the unofficial strikers, organisations such as the ILP and the RCP did not receive much support from ordinary miners, although the ILP did get one member of the SWMF EC to write for its newspaper, the New Leader. This was D. R. Llewellyn who had identified himself with the striking boys in the Garw Valley in 1942. Up until mid-1942 he had been a member of the Communist Party, having fought with the International Brigade in Spain and risen quickly to prominence in the union upon his return to the mines. It was he who had proposed the Communist Party, 'Stop-the-War' motion at the SWMF Special Conference in February 1940. In early 1941 he was victimised at the pit where he worked, International (Garw) Colliery, but he was eventually reinstated at another pit in the Tredegar

Colliery Company, Ffaldau.<sup>41</sup>

In 1942 he was expelled from the Communist Party for his role in the boy's strikes and began to write articles for the ILP in early 1944. One such, was entitled, "Miners' Leaders Without a Plan".<sup>42</sup>

The union leadership was well aware of the tone of the criticism that was being hurled at them, and Arthur Horner was always keen to point out to the coalowners at Conciliation Board meetings the kind of pressure that he and his fellow leaders were under from their members.

'The men are dissatisfied, they accused us of being the Executive Council for the Government and not an E.C. acting for the workmen; some are even kind enough to suggest that we were more representative of your (the owners) needs than theirs'.<sup>43</sup>

'The men have a feeling that the E.C. are letting them down. They said to me "You are talking about the war on the International Front, you look after the war on the home front. That is what you are paid to do. You are allowing us to be exploited and taken advantage of because of your concern for the war".<sup>44</sup>

Although these allegations were being used by Horner to make an effect upon the Owners, there is no doubt that the union leaders were perturbed by the situation. The leaders of the SWMF believed that having passed a motion giving the full support of the union to

the war effort, it was their duty to urge strikers to return to work, as striking amounted to a direct contravention of that resolution. On several occasions the SWMF EC found it necessary to circulate statements to lodges on the matter of industrial unrest, criticising those who resorted to unofficial strike action.<sup>45</sup>

These statements were not wholly condemnatory. Indeed, they accepted that many of the grievances behind the strikes were justified, but that the war situation created an environment in which strike action was not justified. For example:-

'Whilst these stoppages may be justified in days of peace, the Council believes that they must be avoided in days that were fraught with so much danger to all concerned, particularly the working class movement in which the miners have and are playing a conspicuous role'.

Another justification used by the E.C. was that it was necessary for the membership of the union to do everything in its power to demonstrate that the state intervention in the industry after June 1942 was a vast improvement on the situation that obtained prior to then, especially as it was in the Owners interests to disprove such a fact as they desired a return to complete private control.<sup>46</sup>

The union was always at pains to stress that the real responsibility for the dissatisfaction in the coalfield lay with the Owners and the Government. In

his Presidential Address to the Annual SWMF Conference of 1943, Horner stated,

'I have spoken frankly and objectively to my own men, but it is necessary to speak equally frankly to the Government and the Owners. The miner is still underestimated and treated as a person, who either does not desire, or does not deserve conditions freely conceded to other workers'.

He asserted that this applied to feeding arrangements, transport and compensation. The percentage of miners killed was enormously greater than that in any other industry. He warned the Government that they were playing with a fire that might scorch up the whole industry and hoped that they would display the necessary good sense and comply with the reasonable demands that would be put forward in the near future. This was presumably a reference to future wage demands.<sup>47</sup>

Horner attacked those men who believed that they had been 'sold' by their leaders and called upon the rank and file to have more faith in them.<sup>48</sup> Commenting upon the turbulent situation in the coalfield he once complained:

'Who is to blame for it? It is not the politicians and it is not the Government. It is the miners federation that gets the blame. Is it not funny that if an M.P. makes a speech in the House, backs a motion, demands the moon, and gets nothing, he is a fine chap, but if officials of the



Federation make demands on the Owners and come away with fifty per cent of what they ask for, they are swindlers and have sold the pass'.<sup>49</sup>

He stressed in his speeches that the Federation existed to see that the patriotism of the miners was not exploited by those who were out to further their own profits and private interest, and assured members that whilst the Federation was pledged to support the war it was also acting as a watchdog to ensure that the miners were not exploited.<sup>50</sup>

Yet, despite all Horner's assertions the evidence points to the fact that the symptom of unofficial strikes can be construed to indicate that there was a large body of feeling in the coalfield to the effect that the SWMF was not defending the interests of its members adequately. In many cases the strikes may have been attempts to pressurise the leadership of the union to take more positive action on the miners behalf.

One direct grievance resulting from the E.C. attitude on strikes arose after they had decided to cease all legal aid to breach of contract cases, following the apprentice boys strikes of May and June 1942.<sup>51</sup> This produced many protests, especially from the anthracite area. At an Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee meeting Edgar Lewis pointed out how <sup>wrong</sup> it was to allow a man to go into court alone, when the Company was always represented by a lawyer, and it was decided that each lodge in the Combine send a motion into the SWMF EC

calling upon them to rescind the resolution curtailing legal aid.<sup>52</sup> Twelve months later several lodges sent in motions to the Annual Conference calling for the same.<sup>53</sup>

Widespread dissatisfaction existed, therefore, with the SWMF leadership, but the total condemnation made by left-wing groups such as the I.L.P. and the R.C.P. never met with any mass support from the rank and file. The vast majority of men were in no doubt of their support for the war effort.<sup>54</sup> As Idris Cox wrote in the Daily Worker, the majority of strikes that took place were to resist attempts to worsen conditions and not from any desire to take advantage of the war for its own ends.<sup>55</sup> In a discussion on the industrial unrest that took place on the SWMF EC, one member stated that he believed that 'theory and practice were in great contradiction within the coalfield'. "Ideologically", he said, "our members support the war, but their feet did otherwise".<sup>56</sup>

Trevor James a miners agent during this time has said he considered there to be a distinction between men's attitudes above and below ground. Above, it was concern for the war, below it was 'bread and butter' issues.<sup>57</sup>

At least one member of the E.C. felt that the union had not taken a militant enough line on issues affecting pit life, and this was where the main divergence between the rank and file and the E.C. lay.

In early 1944 the E.C. decided to institute several measures in the hope of remedying the problems. All lodges were called upon to strengthen the political consciousness of the movement.<sup>59</sup> Previously, in an earlier circular they had called for all lodge members to attend area conferences on 'The Role of the Workers in the Present International Situation'.<sup>60</sup>

There was some acceptance by the E.C. that there was a need for closer contact between themselves and the rank and file.

"The E.C. is conscious that insufficient had been done to inform the membership of the many efforts which are being put forward by the organisation to protect workmen and to improve wages, conditions of labour, compensation, etc."

"In the light of this it was decided to produce a monthly bulletin to explain to members what the SWMF and the MFGB were doing on their behalf".<sup>61</sup>

The charge of remoteness from the rank and file was true of some officials. One area, in particular, of South Wales where this was clear, was Monmouthshire, Area No. 8 of the SWMF. At one SWMF EC meeting the problem was raised of the general attitude of the men to the authority of the organisation in the area.<sup>62</sup> This was shortly after the Porter Award stoppage which had originated in the Western Valley of Monmouthshire. It was decided to set up a special committee to investigate the situation after many lodges had complained to the E.C.

about the services rendered by the full-time officials in the area.

The hearing found that the complaints were, in the main, justified and that considerable delays took place at the Area office in dealing with disputed claims. It was decided that the administration of the area was overburdened and this had been aggravated by "a very bad feature that had developed in the work of the area office, i.e. that it was crowded out very often with unauthorised deputations and with individuals calling personally with their disputes, especially in regard to compensation matters". A series of administrative proposals were suggested as a solution.<sup>63</sup>

Although there was an element of conscious protest against the union, representing a fraction of the frustration engendered amongst miners in the war years, there was nothing approaching the yearning for alternative leadership amongst the rank and file that the I.L.P. might pretend, and calls for such fell on deaf ears. The unofficial strikes were far more a comment on the demise of the coal industry than on the state of the union. They represented a series of unco-ordinated protests against intolerable conditions that had been aggravated by wartime pressures. Largely, they were based upon local grievances and could arise, totally unforeseen, and were of a specific nature. It was here that there was a loss of contact between the leadership and the men.

c) Striving For Unity Through Action

'The South Wales Miners Federation like all trade union organisations has, as its fundamental duty, the obligation to safeguard the working and living conditions of its members in all circumstances. The change from peace to war cannot lessen this obligation. On the contrary, the responsibility of our organisation is greater than ever before'.

'War is not only terrible in the sense that blood is shed in dramatic battles on land, sea and in the air, it is as well a horribly expensive thing. Thousands of millions of pounds have to be raised to finance the carry on of the war, and it is reasonable to expect that those responsible for the conduct of the war, who do not belong to our class, will make every endeavour to ensure that the burden of the expense of war is placed upon the shoulders of the working people by means of lower wages and worsened social conditions. This Federation must demonstrate its vigilance and its determination to defeat such efforts'.

(Arthur Horner, President's Address, SWMF Annual Conference, April 1940).

The essence of the policy outlined by Horner, above, was carried out by the SWMF in the first eighteen months of the war as the union became involved in the campaigns against the rising cost of living due to the war and in related demands for increased benefits

to pensioners,<sup>64</sup> forces' dependants<sup>65</sup> and the abolition of the means test.<sup>66</sup> The support given by the union to the People's Vigilance Movement was part and parcel of this policy.

In this early period of the war the union was also involved in a campaign for improvements in civil defence arrangements, which also brought further conflict with the official Labour Party. Almost as soon as the war broke out a joint committee of management representatives and union officials<sup>was</sup> formed to discuss all matters pertaining to air-raid protection at collieries,<sup>67</sup> but in the 'phoney war' period September 1939 to March 1940, there was little subject matter to discuss. The collapse of France transformed the situation. South Wales could no longer be regarded as not vulnerable.

On 25 June 1940, the SWMF EC received a deputation from the Ogmore and Garw district council asking for SWMF support in their pressing for provision of Air Raid shelters in the valley. This was agreed and all SWMF members were urged by the union to actively participate in local defence organisations.<sup>68</sup>

The involvement of miners organisations in the Local Defence Volunteer Corps, produced immediate demands that they be controlled democratically.<sup>69</sup>

In a pamphlet produced by the Communist Party it was alleged that there was no protection in South Wales against high explosive bombs and only limited protection

from blast and splinters. Only in the coastal towns of Newport, Cardiff and Swansea were there any Anderson shelters and even then for only a minority of the people. In the South Wales mining valleys there was no Anderson shelter.<sup>70</sup>

Within the mining industry itself there was alleged to be a lack of protection for surface workers and the SWMF raised this matter with the MFGB.<sup>71</sup> There was the complaint that air raid warning systems at the pits were inadequate and indeed one pit did threaten strike action on the issue.<sup>72</sup> There were also disputes at many pits because deductions were made from pay for time spent in a shelter during an air-raid alarm.<sup>73</sup> Eventually the union and the management made an agreement on these matters.<sup>74</sup>

Whilst this agreement provided a degree of satisfaction within the industry, the SWMF took the view that air-raid shelters for the general public and schools, were inadequate<sup>75</sup> and the union resolved to call a conference of representatives of local authorities on the matter.<sup>76</sup> This was held and an organisation entitled the South Wales and Monmouthshire Civil Defence Advisory Committee was established.<sup>77</sup> This Committee ran into the same type of problems as the People's Vigilance Committee and in particular its legitimacy was challenged by Glamorgan County Council which maintained that the new body was an attempt to take their powers as the Civil Defence Authority out of

their hands.<sup>78</sup>

The union in the early period of the war appeared to be more concerned with the protection of its members in the wartime situation than with the direction of the war itself. Its policies centred around the maintenance of the living standards and the safety of its members and their families. The direction behind such policy must be seen as being the grouping of the Communist Party and left wing Labour Party members on the executive. After June 1941, their belief in the changed nature of the war signified a new emphasis in Federation policy. From this stage forward the best way that improvements in conditions on the Home Front could be achieved was by ensuring a final victory over the forces of Fascism, and hence it became essential to maintain production at all costs to ensure that those at the battle fronts were adequately equipped.

The change in emphasis was also a product of circumstances. It was not solely the result of a changed policy on behalf of leading members of the SWMF. The early months of the war, the 'phoney' war had seen a rapid rise in the cost of living and it was only natural that an effective union should strive to cushion its members from such, and when the war finally did explode on the Western Front, the Fall of France had such effects in the South Wales Coalfield that the union primarily had to seek aid and protection for those men thrown out of work. In May



1941 when the South Wales coalfield had not yet completely returned to full working capacity, the Minister responsible for the Mines announced a serious coal shortage. It is from this point on that production became the prime consideration in the coal industry, and the union, management and Government became totally obsessed with the problem.

It is not being suggested that the union, from this stage on, neglected the interests of their members on the Home Front, as was sometimes suggested by unofficial strikers in the latter years of the war, but that its resources were concentrated on trying to resolve the production problem and in related discussions the SWMF maintained a keen awareness of their members needs. The union did not become passive in the face of Government legislation that it did not approve of, or thought detrimental to trade unionism, such as the introduction of the anti-strike order IAA brought in shortly after the Porter Award strike<sup>79</sup> but generally domestic policies were framed in terms for introduction in the post-war period when reorganisation of industry and the protection of SWMF members from any post-war slump was seen as essential. For radical policies to be introduced in the post-war period, first of all the war had to be won, and when faced by criticism that the union was neglecting its members interests this was the standard answer from the SWMF leadership.

d) The Formation of the NUM - The End of the 'Fed'.

At the time of the unofficial strike waves of

1943 and 1944 the tenor of the argument made against the strikers by the SWMF leadership did not concern the grievances propounded but the effects that the actions of the strikers would have upon the unity of the miners in both South Wales and nationally. Perhaps more than any other section of the MFGB, the SWMF was committed to the welding together of a strong national union. The actions of unofficial strikers jeopardised this goal as it undermined the credibility of the SWMF. Nevertheless, before the war was ended, a new trade union entered the annals of history, as the NUM, and the autonomous district organisations in the coalfields that constituted the MFGB ended their existence. In South Wales, the SWMF became the South Wales Area of the NUM.

The formation of one mineworkers union had long been one of the cherished ambitions of Arthur Horner, particularly after the experiences of the miners in the General Strike. In his autobiography Horner has explained that the defeat in 1926 made him realise that the conditions in the least profitable pits would be used against the miners as a whole. Only if the total resources of the industry were pooled could they hope for real improvements.<sup>80</sup> In 1928 he wrote a pamphlet for the National Minority Movement which explained the deficiencies of the system whereby the miners in their different regions were organised in separate autonomous units:-

"The MFGB as present constituted cannot prevent any single district from taking isolated action despite

a majority to the contrary, or enforce participation in common action in the event of a district not being prepared to do so. The District Associations are completely autonomous units, entitled to withdraw from the MFGB at any time whether before, during or after a fight.<sup>81</sup>

After the General Strike the coalowners had imposed their own district settlements and as a result conditions and wages varied between one coalfield and another. Events during the war gradually began to change things. At the beginning the Government had desired to avoid too close an involvement with the coal industry, but, as had been the case in the First World War the relationship between the Government and the industry had been characterised by a gradual extension of state power which was accompanied by an enhancement of the bargaining position of labour.<sup>82</sup> There had been a growth of national negotiations, first over the cost-of-living based wage increases and secondly over the Greene Award which had established a national weekly minimum wage. The Greene Committee had also been given the brief to submit recommendations for a permanent machinery to be set up to deal with questions of wages and conditions. This had eventually led to the setting up of a National Conciliation Scheme with the setting up of the National Reference Tribunal in March 1943.

As J. E. Williams has written these developments revealed an immediate practical need for structural reform on the part of the miners.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore as Robin Page Arnot has pointed out there was a growing determination amongst miners leaders to strengthen their organisation in order to safeguard the improvements reached during the war and to maintain them when the war was won. The events following the First World War were never far from their minds and they were aware of the need for a closer unity and preparation for the post-war mining industry.<sup>84</sup>

A scheme that the various district associations of miners throughout the country should merge into one big union with central control on a national basis was prepared and discussed in 1938. It had been supported by a delegate conference of the SWMF but it was not until July 1942 that an MFGB conference accepted a resolution that there should be a change in the form of the miners organisation.<sup>85</sup> An MFGB re-organisation Sub-Committee was set-up which produced a set of draft proposals by May 1943,<sup>86</sup> and at the July annual MFGB conference of that year it was decided that the scheme should go to the districts for amendment and then to a Special Conference for approval.<sup>87</sup> This Special Conference took place in August 1944.

The ~~SWMF~~ had played a prominent role in attempting

to hasten the development towards one national union, and indeed, Arthur Horner claimed that the proposals for reorganisation had arisen out of a resolution passed at the SWMF Annual Conference in 1942 proposed by the Clydach Merthyr lodge.<sup>88</sup> When it came to the MFGB Conference to reorganise the Federation, the SWMF delegates continued to play a prominent role.

Although Will Lawther, President of the MFGB stated after the conference that he had never been to a conference at which the delegates had shown such zeal and determination to adopt what they conceived to be one of the most vital changes in the history of the miners,<sup>89</sup> it was not done without a deal of heated debate and angry exchange. Several of these were as a result of SWMF amendments. The MFGB executive had proposed seventeen objects, to which many amendments were put. Only three of these amendments were accepted and two of these were proposed by the SWMF.

One was proposed by Arthur Horner, and was a clause that had been in the SWMF rules since 1917.

It ran:-

'It is the object of the organisation to promote and secure the passing of legislation for improving the conditions of the members and ensuring them a guaranteed week's wage with protective clauses for the miners even when they cease work, when cessation is due to causes

beyond the immediate control of the members and to join in with other organisations for the purpose of and with the view to the complete abolition of Capitalism'.

This was initially opposed by the Executive on the grounds that it was covered by the object which read,

'To seek the establishment of Public Ownership and Control of the mining industry'.

Horner argued that nationalisation of certain industries was not the abolition of capitalism, and his object was carried.

The other proposal put forward on behalf of the SWMF was introduced by Will Arthur. This was,

'To negotiate a National Wages Agreement with the national ascertainment covering the whole of the British coalfield'.

Will Arthur argued that if there was a national union set up without a single national wages agreement it would be tantamount to a step backwards.<sup>90</sup>

The decisions of the conference were referred to the districts and a special SWMF Conference was held on 4 October 1944 to discuss them. Arthur Horner spoke fervently in favour of acceptance. His speech illustrates the effect that the war had upon ensuring that the concept of one national union progressed from being an abstract ideal to a reality:-

'The Scheme of One Miners' Union emanates from our hard experiences and not from the pet ideas of any

individual groups or individuals in this country. During the war the Government has been compelled to recognise that the coal industry is a basic industry upon which the whole of our war efforts depend. To this end the Government has already taken steps and have Nationalised the Royalties, thereby becoming the owners of the coal that obtains in the country. They have also been able to introduce some measures of control of the Mining Industry and to establish a Coal Charges Fund which provides for uniform rates of increase during the war.....

'This fund is a National Fund out of which South Wales takes more money than possibly any other district in the British coalfield. We have established state possession and administration of this fund which is a great step forward.

'The measure of national unity established in this war has at last brought about a degree of uniformity that would otherwise have been impossible in regard to War Wage increases to miners.....

'As a result of our wartime experiences we as miners have realised that it is much to our interest to meet the Government or the Employers of the Mining Industry as one single body, rather than as 22 separate district fragments.

'There is no answer to the case for the consolidation of all districts in the British Coalfield into one Miners' Union. If in the evolution of the Trade Union movement it is confronted with circumstances

that call for radical changes in its constitution in the interests of the mass of the workers, then the interests of any group of individuals or individual must be submerged in favour of the general interest of the mass of workers. The trade union branch or district must adapt itself to the needs of the time, or perish.....

'....With the establishment of a One Miners' Union the day upon which we will have one agreement for the British Coalfield will have been brought much nearer'.<sup>91</sup>

Opposition to the formation of the NUM came from an unusual quarter in the coalfield, one not usually active or vocal within the mining industry - The Welsh Nationalist Party. They circulated a four page pamphlet throughout the coalfield urging members of the SWMF to vote against the merger as their "free and democratic trade union organisation" would become part of a "Bureaucratic big-boss union controlled from and centralised in London".<sup>92</sup>

The impact of the Welsh Nationalist Party was not great and when it came to the roll-call on the motion to accept the new organisation there was a massive majority in favour of the one national union, 74,303 'FOR' and 9,446 'AGAINST'.<sup>93</sup> This was a reflection of the national picture, the final overall result being 430,630 in favour and 39,464 against.<sup>94</sup>

On Tuesday 28 December 1944, the executive of the SWMF met for the last time, and union Vice-President,



Alf Davies, told the press,

'During the past twenty years and particularly following the "defeat" of the miners in 1921 and 1926 it became imperative that the call for one miners' union should become intensified. The SWMF has always played a leading part in movements for the "all-in" union and now the dream has come true'.<sup>95</sup>

Whether the formation of the NUM was a dream come true or not, it is very likely than in its valediction to the SWMF, the editorial of the Western Mail hit a common sentimental chord when it concluded,

'The letters SWMF have conveyed different emotions to different people. Though the new development is, in the opinion of the miners' leaders an advance of great strategic importance, a local pride and sense of history engender some regret that the letters are no longer significant and that the coalfield organisation becomes an "Area" functioning under an "Area President".<sup>96</sup>

The end of the SWMF could be seen as the end of an era, although a clearer demarcation of a new phase came two years later in January 1947 with the introduction of nationalisation. Perhaps, over the years a romanticised view had emerged about the "Fed.," but in 1971 in a collection of essays, 'Men Of No Property', two former SWMF activists, James Griffiths and Will Paynter, wrote nostalgically about the organisation.

James Griffiths:- 'We began with the high hopes and for

some years our hopes were justified. Hopes were increased, conditions improved and many cherished reforms, such as holiday with pay, were at long last achieved. But, as time went on, and in spite of the substantial improvements in the material conditions of life something seemed to be lost. The old skills were replaced by the new with the advent of the machines to the coal face; the intimate relationship between work and neighbourhood was broken, as with the closure of so many mines the men had to travel further to work and the Coal Board became too remote. Life is like this; somehow or other, the reality never seems to match up to the dream'.<sup>97</sup>

Will Paynter:- 'A single union operating in single industry communities, this was the unique environment which moulded the "Fed" into an exceptional kind of trade union.....

'Obviously as these communities have grown and new industries have eroded their original single industry basis this social influence of the union has also declined.....

'The "Fed" was a social institution and acted as such without question. Indeed its strength lay in its intimate social and domestic involvement. It is a regrettable fact that these intimate ties are withering away and this singular character of the 'Fed', is disappearing and being replaced by the more formal

and remote union patterns'.<sup>98</sup>

The war years were the watershed. On the one hand the union was at the peak of its strength but the signs were that its special relationship with the community was beginning to be eroded. This special relationship was partly bred upon the insularity prevalent in the mining valleys, but as W.H.B. Court has written, the war had begun the process of breaking down the isolation of the mining villages.<sup>99</sup>

The quotation from James Griffiths reflects a disillusionment with nationalisation and post-war conditions and only indirectly reflects creditably upon the 'Fed'., but this in part explains the feelings about the 'Fed' which have been articulated by Will Paynter in his autobiography. The post-war world was one vastly different from the pre-war era. Within the industry mechanisation was accelerated, nationalisation was introduced and, associated with it, the rationalisation, which led to the closure of many pits. Due to successful agitation by many of the local councils in South Wales other industries began to be developed so that the dominance of mining in the valleys began to decline.

e) The War and Nationalisation

In contemplating the aftermath of the General Strike, Arthur Horner had realised the need for two major objectives to be achieved by miners if such a debacle was not to recur. The formation of the NUM was

one, nationalisation was the other. Throughout his early years as President of the SWMF these were his long term objectives for the organisation. 1 January 1945 had seen the first come into fruition. Not only was it important in itself but it was a necessary prerequisite for achieving nationalisation. In demanding national unified control of the industry the miners themselves had to be organised on a national basis too.

Throughout the war years nationalisation as a slogan had been a unifying cry from the SWMF leadership. It had been amongst the union's major objectives for thirty years. They had been cheated of it in 1919 and now the opportunity for achieving it had arisen again.

The wartime experience of the industry had brought the issue of nationalisation back to the forefront of its affairs. Since the experiences of the 1920's nationalisation had never realistically been on the agenda for implementation. The SWMF had largely been on the defensive but the onset of war had presented new possibilities especially as the bargaining position of the miners was considerably strengthened.

What gave the demand a new relevance, however, was the dismal performance in terms of productivity achieved during the war. As this was critical to the war effort, the structure and organisation of the industry were under permanent discussion. In 1944,

when the need of coal for war production was at its greatest and the newly liberated countries desperately needed supplies for reconstruction, coal output in South Wales was the lowest it had been for any year since the late eighteen hundred<sup>s</sup> with the exception of the year of the General Strike, and it appeared to be set on a continuing downward spiral.

In 1922 South Wales had provided one-fifth of the national coal output, but by 1944 this figure had become less than one eighth. Of the 322 collieries in production, 79 employed less than twenty workmen, and many others had begun a contraction in their scale of operations. The majority of those collieries which employed more than 250 workmen (155) had been in production for over forty years or more, and some for as long as a hundred years. Only eleven had been newly opened in the previous twenty five years. Such was the age of these collieries that the more productive seams had been exploited in the past and the physical conditions prevailing held little prospect that productivity would be likely to increase. Unless many of the older collieries received urgent technical attention they were likely to be rendered economically unworkable very soon after the war was over.<sup>100</sup> These facts were exposed largely because of the strain placed on the coal industry by wartime demands. The industry was shown to be deficient in many aspects. It was in a state of serious debilitation, slowly decaying and

playing a diminishing role in the British economy. Thus it was, as Michael Foot has written, that 'the exigencies and vagaries of war added a fresh argument for the nationalisation of the coal industry'.<sup>101</sup> The problem of declining manpower and output, plus the increasing degree of unrest and dissatisfaction amongst the workforce brought back on the agenda as a prime agitational demand of the SWMF and the MFGB, the slogan of nationalisation.

When the war ended and the Labour Party achieved power so convincingly, the whole Labour movement accepted that the nationalisation of the mines would be their first priority.<sup>102</sup> Few people disagreed that the industry, having failed to reach the expectations required of it by the needs of war, was in serious need of re-organisation. Even the coalowners had their plans and schemes, although very much at odds with the proposal of nationalisation.

To many, reorganisation was necessary in order to try and establish a better standard of industrial relations in the industry but as Professor Court has outlined, there were other problems, perhaps of greater consequence that had to be sorted out. Firstly, the industry was nearing a time when it would have to take special measures to attract the labour it needed to counteract the effects of the retirement of older men and the disinclination of younger men to join it. Secondly, the efficiency of coal mining labour was

poor, and to raise it would require heavy capital investment and a thorough overhaul of organisation and technique. Money for this could only come to a limited extent from the colliery companies, while the outside investor was chary of touching enterprises which had a name for unprofitability and embittered industrial relations. Without the money, the industry must remain unmodernised. In that state it could only continue to deteriorate. Hence, if it were to survive as a major industry, government aid of one sort or another was urgently required.<sup>103</sup>

That the mines had reached such a state of depression was largely due to the coalowners lack of an effective capital re-investment programme. A prominent South Wales industrialist, W. C. Devereux, the chairman of High Duty Alloys, was most critical of the coalowners on this point. He maintained that they had failed to return a sufficiently high proportion of their earnings to the improvement of the mines, to the development of mining methods and to research on mining and utilisation of the product.<sup>104</sup> In defence of the coalowners it should be said that their reluctance to invest in long-term technical developments was influenced by the uncertainty as regards the future of the coal industry.<sup>105</sup>

This lack of capital re-investment on the part of the owners, which in practical terms tended to mean that the industry was being run on out-of-date machinery in need of replacement, was never thoroughly exposed

to the Government and the public until the Reid Committee, largely made up of mining engineers, made a thorough analysis of the technical weaknesses of the industry in 1944. It reported that much of the industry was out of date, the methods of coal-hauling and coal-getting had to be modernised and that there was an acute shortage of technical ability and of finance.<sup>106</sup>

Up until the publication of this report the problem of the mines during the war was dealt with largely in terms of labour supply and the shortcomings of the labour force. This report provided the backbone of the Labour Government arguments for nationalisation,<sup>107</sup> although the Reid Committee itself had not actually proposed such an outcome, having recommended a centralised management, but having left open the question of ownership.<sup>108</sup>

Throughout the war years a widespread recognition began to emerge amongst leading politicians, not only those in the Labour Party, that reorganisation of the coal industry was vitally necessary. Alan Bullock believes that by 1942, the Home Secretary, Sir John Anderson had reached the conclusion that nothing less than the reorganisation of an industry notoriously in need of modernisation would enable it to make efficient use of its manpower.<sup>109</sup> In the War Cabinet in October, 1943 Gwilym Lloyd-George, the Minister of Fuel and Power proposed the complete ~~sa~~ take-over of the industry, but received little support.<sup>110</sup>



Throughout the war there was a lack of courage on the Government's part to make any sweeping changes in the running of the industry and instead it lurched from one expedient to another, usually with the effect of increasingly alienating the workforce. Partly the reasons were practical for to attempt the task of a radical overhauling of the industry at a period of extreme political and military crisis was perhaps too much to contemplate, but the major factor was the desire to avoid the controversy that any revolutionary step in wartime might create, especially given the torrid past history of the issue. Certainly the re-emergence of the issue added a keener edge to the conflict between coalowners and mineworkers, and throughout the war years continuous fencing on the matter was to take place largely a mock battle prior to what was felt would be a more determining post-war confrontation. The debates became more furious in the last twelve months before V. E. Day, when the certainty of victory was more or less assured, but the prospects of changes taking place whilst hostilities continued <sup>were</sup> ruled out by Churchill's intervention in the Parliamentary debate of October 1943.<sup>111</sup> In the last twelve months of the war both sides presented various blueprints for the post-war organisation of the industry.

As soon as the war had begun the coalowners had assumed a defensive position, against the prospect of nationalisation. Aware that the government in the

previous World War had adopted a central control over the industry they wished to avoid a recurrence.<sup>112</sup> The miners on the other hand were presented with an opportunity to press their demands more aggressively, although partially hampered by the agreement made by the Labour Party and the T.U.C. with the Government not to press for any changes in pre-war arrangements.<sup>113</sup>

At the first annual conference of the SWMF to take place during war-time, in April 1940, a motion was put urging the Government to take control of the mines.<sup>114</sup> The background to the demand was the developing coal production crisis in the early months of the war, but it was the events surrounding the invasion and eventual Fall of France that made more realistic the call for drastic measures. Indeed, in May 1940, the Government had presented itself with some remarkable emergency powers, 'making provision for requiring persons to place themselves, their services and their property at the disposal of His Majesty'. In supporting the Government Order, the Leader of the Labour Party made the following statement,

'It is necessary that the Government should be given complete control over persons and property, not just some persons of some particular class of the community, but of all persons, rich and powerful, employer and workmen, men and women, and all property'.

It was the signal for many in the miners' unions to raise the demand for the Conscription of Wealth, which

implicitly suggested Government control.<sup>115</sup>

There was no chance of this, however, according to Michael Foot, whilst Oliver Lyttleton was at the Board of Trade, as nationalisation only had to be mentioned to him, 'to paralyse his brain'.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, as the impact of the Fall of France began to resound with its disastrous consequences in the coalfields of South Wales and Durham, the necessity of firm government action towards the industry seemed more apparent to working miners. In South Wales during the autumn and winter of 1940-1, a steady flow of resolutions arrived at the SWMF headquarters in Cardiff from individual lodges and areas, calling for the nationalisation of the mines.<sup>117</sup>

These months also saw discussions taking place on the application of the Essential Works Order to the industry, to which the MFGB had initially pledged its opposition unless satisfactory wage standards could be negotiated and, some effective measures of control of the industry be extended to the workmen's representatives.<sup>118</sup>

The E.W.O. was eventually accepted by the MFGB without any real steps being taken to meet their conditions. The SWMF dissented, but finally agreed to follow the majority view, although insisting that pressure be maintained to force the Government to appoint a National Board to control the industry.<sup>119</sup>

The application of the E.W.O. to the industry meant closer Government involvement in its affairs and from this stage the unions sought to extend that involvement by agitating for 'national unified control'.<sup>120</sup> This concept was attacked in the Western Mail as an attempt to bring in nationalisation in a new guise,<sup>121</sup> and as the production crisis deepened in the first months of 1942, Sir Evan Williams accused the miners' leaders of trying to use the emergency to gain an installment of nationalisation and of being responsible for the fall in output by creating restlessness amongst their members through their propaganda in favour of schemes of Government control.<sup>122</sup>

Throughout this period the Government were in the process of preparing plans to re-organise the industry and some form of Government control was being considered a possibility. The coalowners, fearing that such steps would inevitably lead to nationalisation in the future were opposed to any Government intervention, but feeling was mounting that they would intervene. Some of arguments put forward in favour of Government intervention were of a negative nature, ensuing from a degree of despair with the industry's wartime performance. For instance, a columnist in the Amman Valley Chronicle backed Government control on the grounds that 'if the worst comes to the worst they cannot make a bigger hash of things'.<sup>123</sup>

The positive arguments came from the miners'

union, of course, and their supporters. Arthur Horner argued that the miners would not respond to appeals for increased productivity if the industry was in private hands as they would if the mines were owned by the state.<sup>124</sup>

In June 1942, the Greene Committee investigating the mining industry proposed the system of organisation to be known as Dual Control, which was accepted by the Government. The industry was to be run as a national service with a Ministry of Fuel and Power to be set up backed by Regional Fuel Boards. The finances of the industry, however, were still to be in the hands of the owners. The scheme was attractive to the Government because they still did not want too close an involvement with the industry or to become party to every mining dispute in the country.<sup>125</sup> This caution led to the establishment of a system that won no friends at all amongst those involved in the day to day running of the industry.

The Western Mail's analysis of the scheme was that although it fell short of the socialists plans it was the 'thin end of the wedge' as far as the coalowners were concerned.<sup>126</sup> In a nutshell, this statement summed up the problem of Dual Control, it fell between two stools, neither pleasing the miners sufficiently, nor the coalowners. Consequently the history of Dual Control becomes a catalogue of its faults enumerated by both sides of the industry from different angles.

The owners made the following criticisms. They pointed to the continuing decline in productivity as one indicator of the schemes failure, and indeed, attributed it to the establishment of control. Secondly, they claimed that the Regional Boards were ineffective as they had no power, and that suggestions made to them were subject to delays, and thirdly they accused the Government of pandering to workers demands. The scheme was not one of Government Control, they asserted, but of joint control with the Government always in favour of the workmen's demands.<sup>127</sup>

Miners and their representatives chose similar factors to criticise, but used them to back different arguments. For instance, a survey of lodges made by the SWMF produced complaints that Government control was too remote and of delays in the decision making process.<sup>128</sup> As to the decline in productivity, this was attributed to the fact that the owners still had financial control of the industry. The particular weakness of this was the effect that it had upon the managers, who had divided loyalties but were more likely to attend to the interests of the owners, who paid them. The miners leaders felt that often the owners and managers were more interested in sabotaging Dual Control rather than making it work.<sup>129</sup>

Arthur Horner's criticisms were usually made in as constructive a way as possible as he pressed the arguments for complete Government control, but Aneurin

Bevan, not as closely involved in the negotiations concerning the industry had the freedom to express his views far more vehemently and aggressively. At the time Dual Control was introduced he accused the stated of stepping in, 'not in substitution of private interests, but as their guardian'. If the Controllers made a mess of the job, state interference would be blamed, whilst if they succeeded the owners would still be drawing their dividends whilst the miners would still be subject to the Controllers with imprisonment the penalty for resistance. If a scheme was to be successful in the mining industry, he said, it had to secure the goodwill of the miners, and this, Dual Control failed to do.<sup>130</sup> He was thus, most pessimistic about success from the very start, and twelve months later was calling for the urgent implementation of nationalisation.

'The Government has tried everything to solve the problem of the mining industry. Semi-starvation, imprisonment, exhortations, threats, the supplications of the miners leaders and what is also the omnipotence of Churchill's oratory - all have failed. No, we are wrong. There is one thing they have not tried. They haven't tried getting rid of the coalowners. For there is one truth the Government have not learned. You can get coal without coalowners, but you cannot get coal without miners'.<sup>131</sup>

The scheme was open to attack from all sides, and

another, perhaps surprising, critic was the Government department whose responsibility it was to run it. In October 1943, the Minister of Fuel and Power presented a series of criticisms to the War Cabinet, and it is interesting to note that although a liberal - conservative politically Lloyd-George's criticisms bore some resemblance to those of the miners' leaders. Although the Government was theoretically in full operational control, in practice that control had proved difficult to achieve. The source of the problem, he believed, was that the colliery managements who had responsibility for day to day operations at pits were not under his jurisdiction, but remained employees of the colliery owners. He considered it necessary to bring the management and technical staffs under his direct control regardless of their existing ties to individual colliery owners. To this end he proposed that the mines be rented by the Government or ~~some~~ other step be taken which would relieve the coalowners from their functions in regard to the pits for the duration of the war.<sup>132</sup>

Lloyd-George received little support and shortly afterwards Churchill made his speech ruling out nationalisation of the mines during the wartime emergency. The scheme limped on until the last days of the war.

Although widely despised it must not be forgotten that Dual Control was an important stepping stone on the road towards nationalisation. The Regional Control Boards were the first national organisation for the



coal industry since the owners had imposed district settlements after the General Strike, and furthermore the Greene Committee which had proposed the scheme were also responsible for recommending that the National Reference Tribunal be set up under the chairmanship of Lord Porter thus implementing a national conciliation machinery. In April 1944 came a further advance from the miners point of view with a National Wages Agreement.

In the last months of 1943 and the first months of 1944 the immediate industrial relations problems dominated in the industry and discussion on reorganisation receded into the background, to come to the fore once more in the months following the Normandy invasions when the end of the war seemed to be in sight and talk of reconstruction became extremely relevant. The debate concerning the future of the coalmining industry centred around the reports of two committees, the Foot Committee and the Reid Committee. The first chaired by the Chairman of the Mining Association of Great Britain was commissioned by the coalowners, the second by the Government. The Foot Plan proposed a system of control devised on the basis of the continuance of private enterprise. It suggested that a national board be set up composed of fifteen persons representing the coalowners. The board was to have complete authority in the running of the industry, the right to close down uneconomic pits and to organise around the

most profitable concerns.<sup>133</sup> It was the coalowners response to plans for nationalisation and aimed at receiving the support of the Conservative Party in the hope of their possible victory in the first post-war general election. The Reid Committee Report was mainly a technical study of the industry which although furnishing few proposals concerning the organisation of the industry, provided a great deal of technical information which was used to support the case of those who aimed for nationalisation.<sup>134</sup>

In the first six months of 1945 debate on the ways and means of organising the industry continued unabated and especially as the General Election approached in the July. In South Wales the plans for the coal industry were central to the election campaign and the South Wales Area of the NUM were at the forefront urging the return of a Labour Government which would introduce nationalisation.<sup>135</sup>

The result of the General Election, a surprisingly large victory for the Labour Party was, of course, the determining factor as to when nationalisation of the coal industry would be put on the statute book, but it had been the experience of the industry in wartime that had provided the major arguments for the case in favour.

Once the election results were known it was full steam ahead towards nationalisation as the new Labour Government in its first King's speech made it one of

their priorities. Arthur Horner, however, warned his members not to let themselves get out of hand in the belief that they could do what they like because the Government was of their own choosing. Hard work, greater production and more self-discipline were the means by which nationalisation could be facilitated.<sup>136</sup>

It comes as some surprise to read the revelations of Emanuel Shinwell, the new Minister of Fuel and Power on his accession to office. Despite the intense debates that had been aroused by the subject of nationalisation over the last thirty years there was no blueprint in existence as to how it should be brought into practice. There were proposals, memoranda and even draft bills, but they were all theoretical and lacking in substance, nothing practical and tangible existed.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless a Coal Nationalisation Bill was prepared and published in the next five months, and eventually 1 January, 1947 was set as the day for national take-over of the mines.

The debate concerning the forms that nationalisation should take was lacking in ideological intensity. There was none of the depth of theoretical discussion that had preceded the MFGB submissions on the subject to the Sankey Commission in 1919.<sup>138</sup> Talk of workers control was minimal and according to Horner it was hardly considered. He had been amongst the most ardent advocates in 1919 being closely connected with the

Unofficial Reform Committee, but his view in 1945 was that because nationalisation was taking place in a capitalist society the organisation of the industry had to fit the pattern, provided there was consultation from top to bottom of the industry.<sup>139</sup>

With the exception of views on worker participation the submissions of the NUM in 1945 were broadly similar to what those of the MFCB had been in 1919.<sup>140</sup> They presented the attitude that nationalisation was good for the country as a whole, that it was the only way of securing coal output by winning the confidence of the miners and their families, and that only in a nationalised industry would the miners achieve satisfactory and safe working conditions and better wages. At the centre of the unions proposals was the 'Miners Charter' which was in fact drawn up by Horner.<sup>141</sup> The 'Miners Charter' called for adequate training for new entrants into mining, safe working conditions, good wages, a guaranteed weekly wage, adequate compensation for loss of wages due to injury and death, improvement of health and safety measures, decent housing and social amenities for miners and their families, pit-head baths and canteens at all collieries, supplementary pensions and a five day working week.

These demands were, according to Will Paynter, practical politics, realisable in the post-war world.<sup>142</sup> The union did not, however, make any demands as to what form State Ownership should take and because of this

Robin Page Arnot believes that they did not take sufficient advantage of their own strength at this time, being too concerned lest they should upset public confidence in nationalisation.<sup>143</sup>

In the event, nationalisation was introduced at a most unpropitious time. Throughout 1946 the coal production crisis had deepened and coal supplies to both industry and domestic consumers were proving to be inadequate and on the very eve of vesting day the prospects of thousands of men being made unemployed due to the shortage was being mooted.<sup>144</sup> The winter of 1946-7 also turned out to be the most appalling of the century in which coal production was cut drastically by the inability of collieries to function in the conditions, and consequently more than half the country's power stations had to shut down due to shortage of coal.<sup>145</sup>

According to some sources vesting day was one of tremendous celebration,<sup>146</sup> but others have reported that although the trappings of celebration were there it appears that no great enthusiasm was engendered for the event. At each of the 225 collieries taken over in South Wales, blue flags, eighteen feet long, bearing the initials NCB, three feet deep in white, were hoisted, and posters, five feet by four feet were exhibited to tell the miners of the formal takeover.<sup>147</sup> The two major ceremonies in South Wales were at 6.45 a.m. at the largest colliery in the coalfield, Penallta, where the new chairman of the South Western Divisional

Coal Board, General Sir Alfred Reade Godwin-Austen hoisted the flag, and at Duffryn Rhondda colliery where General Sir Alfred and the President of the South Wales Area of the NUM, Alf Davies, attended jointly.<sup>148</sup>

The Western Mail reported that there was no euphoria amongst the miners and very little evidence of enthusiasm<sup>149</sup> which indeed reflected its own attitude. On the eve of vesting day it had presented a lengthy attack upon the attitude of the miners. Their absenteeism rate was too high and they had not co-operated over the previous twelve months with the desperate pleas for increased productivity - this ignored the fact that output in the coalfield had increased steadily since the previous August. It concluded that nationalisation would seem 'a bitter and tragic mockery of the cherished hopes of the people.'<sup>150</sup>

On vesting day itself it wrote that "whilst the miners may justifiably celebrate their New Years Day as the crowning achievement of decades of agitation, it is a matter of profound regret that their jubilation cannot be shared by the nation at large". It also printed a long article extolling the virtues of free enterprise, trumpeting its success in the industry and its 'legacy of achievement'<sup>151</sup> which has been of incalculable service to the national well-being.'

Although clearly biased against nationalisation,

there was clearly some truth in the Western Mail's assessment of the miner's response to vesting day. Already there was a foreboding amongst some men that nationalisation would not bring about the radical changes which they hoped for. The new Chairman had already said that changes would come in an evolutionary, not revolutionary, manner,<sup>152</sup> and it had been decided that all staffs at the collieries should remain in their places for the time being.<sup>153</sup> So, to all intents and purposes the workers were working for exactly the same people as before. What was most disconcerting to many, however, was the composition of the new Regional Fuel Board. Only one man, Gomer Evans, who had connections with miners interests was on the board, and he was in the transparently 'poacher turned gamekeeper' role of Director of Labour.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, it was to be a matter of policy throughout the NCB to appoint former trade union officials to be in charge of industrial relations, and this tended to engender suspicion and views that they were no longer 'one of us'.<sup>155</sup>

A further grievance in South Wales was the high percentage of former officials from the hated Powell-Duffryn Company who were appointed to positions of responsibility under the new regime.<sup>156</sup> When the Production Board was announced, five of its seven members were ex-Powell Duffryn men.<sup>157</sup>

The choice of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Regional Coal Board also came under attack, and three

weeks before vesting day the South Wales Area Executive of the NUM passed a motion of no confidence in them,<sup>158</sup> which was only withdrawn after a visit to South Wales by the President of the NUM Will Lawther, and in his new role as General Secretary of the NUM Arthur Horner.<sup>159</sup> The appointment of chairman to the various regional boards had obviously been considered a prickly problem, and it had been decided to select people who were independent and free of colliery interests. However well meaning this policy might have been and however capable the man chosen as chairman might have been, it did not inspire much confidence amongst the miners when he arrived hotfoot from India, less than three weeks before vesting day announcing that he had little knowledge of South Wales or of the coal industry.<sup>160</sup> The appointment had been made against the advice of Arthur Horner.<sup>161</sup>

In addition to these specific complaints about South Wales which did prejudices no good at all was the general complaint concerning the amount of compensation that had been awarded to the old coalowners which had amounted to £164,600,000.<sup>162</sup>

Thus, right at the very start there were many who viewed nationalisation cynically and many of those who had responded enthusiastically to nationalisation were quickly disillusioned.<sup>163</sup> The appalling winter of 1947 played its part in the process but from many miners point of view it was the realisation that the



management at the collieries were the same old faces Emlyn Williams, now President of the South Wales Area had returned to his old job in the pit after seven years in the army. Asked what difference he saw between 1939 and 1947 he made the following reply.

'Well, there was basically little difference, except that the mines were nationalised. As far as management were concerned, as far as the system was concerned, there was no change at all. The only thing we felt when we came back from the forces was that some of the old trade union leaders at that time were more inclined to eulogise nationalisation.

'At Bwlfa werwere working on the same price list, they expected us to do the same quantum of work, it was the same systems and it was the same managements, with the same aptitudes for carrying out Powell Duffryn policy, not a socialist policy'.<sup>164</sup>

Other oral testimonies indicate that he was not alone in his criticisms,<sup>165</sup> and very soon it began to come clear that many of the problems apparent in the coal industry during wartime were to reassert themselves in the first years of nationalisation, namely low productivity, absenteeism and unofficial strikes.

The quote from Emlyn Williams highlights three of the major causes of the disillusionment explaining why the response to nationalisation became disappointing—the composition of the boards, the lack of a theoretical

framework for nationalisation and the conflict between the union leaders and the rank and file. The first two are interlinked. The managers of the collieries who had learned their trade under private industry could not be expected to change attitudes overnight. R. Kelf-Cohen has written that there was a vague optimism among the theorists of socialism that once an industry was transferred from private to public ownership a complete change would come over the outlook of those engaged in the industry. Their attitude would become one of devotion to public good.<sup>166</sup> Quite clearly this was a fantasy. The managers were stuck in their old groove. Of course, there had not been time to train a new breed of managers but the deficiency of keeping on the old brigade was that it prevented the mineworkers from perceiving any tangible change in the industry once nationalisation had been declared. If nationalisation was to win the confidence of the miners this was one area where that confidence could have been influenced. Many of the miners leaders had refused appointments on the Regional Boards because they realised that with nationalisation operating under capitalism managers still had different interests to workers,<sup>167</sup> but many of the rank and file miners felt that nationalisation was a dose of socialism. Ben Davies, a miner in the Dulais Valley has described how many people were under the impression that the pits were

to be run for them and that they would have a great deal of power in their hands, only to learn too quickly that the NCB consisted of 'old-timers, the old brigade of coalowners and representatives of the coal-owners'.<sup>168</sup>

The new management system was also complex, as R. Kelf-Cohen has described,

'..... the "boss" had not gone on 1 January 1947. He was still there, but behind him there were other bosses reaching all the way back to London. It was all something bewildering - well, put by a miner who described working for the NCB as working for a ghost'.<sup>169</sup>

The problem was that it was impossible for nationalisation to make overnight changes, to present the benefits a miner would derive from an NCB instead of a colliery owner, quickly. The Reid Committee had stated that it would take many years for technical change and modernisation to bear fruit, but the miners fatigued by the wartime efforts, production drives and food scarcities were more than eager for effective change. Instead they faced more of the same under nationalisation. Rationing and shortages continued and an even more serious production problem than in wartime required of them even greater efforts, under largely the same colliery conditions as during the war.

The union leaders were once more playing the same

type of role as they had done during the war, urging greater production and criticising absentees and unofficial strikers. For many of the trade union leaders nationalisation was the panacea to end all evils in the industry and it had to be made to work. This is the view expressed by Dai Dan Evans, and because for so many it amounted to the achievement of long sought after aims the shortcomings were disregarded. There was a critical generation gap between many of the leaders of the union and the rank and file. The miners leaders had seen great hardship throughout the the nineteen-twenties and thirties and had been involved in great confrontations just to achieve union recognition, for them nationalisation was the end of the tunnel.<sup>170</sup> Younger men such as Emlyn Williams had no illusions about nationalisation the pits were the same in 1947 as they were in 1939 and they were not prepared to back the same horse under another name.<sup>171</sup>

It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the performance of the mining industry under nationalisation in its early years but it is of significance to point out that the claims made by miners leaders for the effects that it would have on the miners performance were not proven and secondly that it did not provide a working environment of greater satisfaction for many miners. Many of the tensions evident between the union leadership and the rank and file <sup>in the war years</sup> continued into the period of nationalisation and indeed in the early 1950's were to increase as the expectations of nationalisation began to recede.

f) Arthur Horner

In studying the South Wales coalfield during the Second World War, one personality stands out, head and shoulders above all others - Arthur Horner. On the union side he is the dominating influence and in terms of his own personal career the years 1945-1947 might be said to represent the pinnacle, his two major aims for the coal industry having been achieved - the formation of one miners union and nationalisation.

Apart from his influence in South Wales he was a figure of both national and international prominence. No student of this period could avoid the impact which he had upon events during this period. He is the voice of the South Wales miners in the national press, he dominates at the SWMF conferences and he is the main miners representative at the South Wales Conciliation Board meetings. It is above all from the minutes of these meetings that his ability as a negotiator is apparent and his performances during the meetings concerning the 1942 Coalfield Agreement and the Penrikyber stoppage are quite outstanding. Dai Francis retired General Secretary of the South Wales Area of the NUM still remembers well, over thirty years later, the 'trimming' that Horner gave the coalowners on the latter occasion.<sup>172</sup>

Oddly enough, despite his being such a powerful influence in these years Horner paid little attention

to them in his autobiography. He chose to play down the spate of unofficial strikes, mentioning that there was 'a few' and contemptuously refers to criticism of his leadership and comparisons with J. H. Thomas as having been made by so-called 'lefts'.<sup>173</sup> In minimising the importance of both the unofficial strikes and the criticism of himself he has done himself an injustice. The fact is that during a period of great dissatisfaction amongst miners in South Wales during which he was the object of criticism and vilification from large numbers on occasions, he was not unafraid of confronting his critics head-on and he had the strength of argument to win them round to his point of view. At the same time he was continually and effectively putting the miners' case to the owners and working hard to achieve a national wages agreement, a unified national union and nationalisation, all of which he genuinely believed would advance the standard of living of his members and their personal security.

Horner acted as a moderating influence on the rank and file during the Second World War yet this did not stop his enemies continually attacking him for his associations with the Communist Party. This was especially the case in the early years of the war when the Communist Party were officially opposed to participation in the war effort. James Griffiths who preceded Horner as President of the SWMF has said of him that despite his revolutionary reputation he

became one of the most moderate leaders of the miners.<sup>174</sup> In saying this he has placed his finger on the apparent paradox of Horner's career, chastised as a revolutionary, most of his agreements and achievements as President of the SWMF are characterised by significant compromises. This can be explained by his evident belief that what many might consider to be small gains must be grasped as they could lead to significant improvements in the future. This policy was apparent in the making of the Bedwas and Taff-Merthyr agreements towards the end of the thirties when he recognised that the rival SWMIU had to be eliminated before the SWMF could consolidate its own strength and push for real improvements in miners conditions.<sup>175</sup> The policy was at work again when the schemes to establish the NUM and nationalisation were established. If these are examined, neither match up to Horner's earlier ideals as to how they should be carried out effectively. In both cases he was involved in working a compromise.

Horner's attitude to the formation of the NUM as it was established has been explained by Dai Francis. The scheme did not amount to complete unification, for although the union's industrial work was centralised the districts were still allowed a degree of autonomy in other matters. A second shortcoming as far as Horner was concerned was that separate sections, such as

the craftsmen and winding enginemen, and the smaller areas such as North Wales and Cumberland, had an influence in the decision making process above their weight in numbers. Dai Francis explains that Horner was concerned in laying down the foundations of a unified body and in ensuring that changes could be made in the future, hopefully along directions which he desired.

'Horner had to compromise, particularly when you take into consideration that you had Spencer still in Nottingham. The important thing was the necessity for laying down foundations. Horner had it laid down in the constitution - Clause 7 of the rules - that it should be the responsibility of the NUM executive to review the constitution from time to time...This never operated because of the dominance of the right wing, but the intention of Horner was that it would operate'.<sup>176</sup>

Similarly with the introduction of nationalisation, the importance was the laying down of foundations. As he has written in his autobiography, nationalisation as he envisaged it working could not operate under capitalism.<sup>177</sup> However there is a degree of contradiction apparent when his response to nationalisation is analysed, because it is his desperately keen desire to make sure that it is seen to be effective which leads him into conflict with the rank and file of the union once more. He



behaved as if it were the panacea,<sup>178</sup> as if it were the real thing.

The key to understanding Horner's attitude to making these compromises and especially that concerning nationalisation perhaps lies in the events surrounding the earlier struggle for nationalisation between 1919 and 1921. In 1919 the MFGB had talked rather than acted, thus allowing Lloyd-George to out manoeuvre them<sup>179</sup> and even the possibility of limited gains slipped by. Events in this period were also significant, in moulding another pillar of Horner's attitudes during his Presidency, that is the importance of acting through the official trade union movement. In the struggle over decontrol of the mines he had been involved in unofficial action at Wattstown and this had been easily isolated and defeated by the use of state power.<sup>180</sup> From this stage on he seems to have been converted to the importance of involving mass support through official trade union machinery as a principle. This attitude, indeed, brought him into conflict with the Communist Party in 1931 when he was accused of pursuing a deviation, designated 'Hornerism'. He opposed the Communist Party leading unofficial action to prolong the three weeks coalfield - wide strike undertaken by the demoralised S.W.M.F. in January 1931.<sup>181</sup> It was not inconsistent of him therefore in the Second World War, to oppose the unofficial strikers, despite agreement with their complaints.

His attitude to the relationship between trade unionism and his political beliefs was undoubtedly similar to that which Will Paynter expounded for himself in his autobiography, and also attributed to Horner,

'It has often been said to me that I was a miner and a trade unionist first and a communist second. Judging this in retrospect I have to admit that it has a great deal of truth in it which became more apparent as my duties and responsibilities in the union increased. It was true, too, of Arthur Horner, and of most leaders who have lived and worked in the mining valleys of South Wales. Politics take second place to the trade union job and if and when they conflict, as they did on occasions for Horner and myself, loyalty to the trade union and its decisions come first'.<sup>182</sup>

This attitude is most clearly seen from Horner in the first eighteen months of the war, when although the Communist Party was opposed to the participation of Britain in the war effort and had initiated debate on the matter within the S.W.M.F., Horner adhered to the majority view of the union and backed the war effort. He was obviously more comfortable when his political policies were at one with those of the union and after June 1941 he was happy to urge efforts for greater productivity from the miners in terms of support for

the heroic struggle waged by the Russian people'.'

Soon after the war ended Horner took up national office in the N.U.M. His elevation to such a position of national prominence was clearly based on the reputation he had built for himself as President of the SWMF since 1936. In the war years, especially, he emerged as a figure of national import, having earned both the respect of the miners in his own area and those throughout Great Britain. The country's critical need for coal and his crucial position within the coal industry had brought him into contact with many Government officials at national level and he had earned respect at this level too, as a skilful negotiator and propagandist. The war years provide an interesting study of Horner's ideals and policies in action. For him they were crucial years for they presented the conditions out of which he could perceive the emergence of both a national union in the coalmining industry and nationalisation in a relatively short time. He grasped the opportunity to lay the foundations of both, and if they were not in the shape or form that he had envisaged years before, at least he believed that he had achieved a springboard from which his ideals could be more easily achieved in the future. He had worked towards these goals throughout the war, often confronting opposition from his own members who accused him of neglecting immediate issues relating

to daily life in the pit. Although vocal hostility to him was often harsh and vindictive it was not longlasting and his popularity amongst union members, evidenced by the lack of support for other contenders for his office, was the firm basis from which he could operate to try and achieve the national objectives he believed were necessary if the standard of life of miners was to be raised substantially and permanently.

1. Idwal Penhallurick SWMF EC Member 1941-44.  
Interviewed by Stuart Broomfield 19.3.73.
2. Western Mail, 29 February 1940.
3. Ibid., 28 January 1941, LAB 10/367 Weekly Report  
of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales  
1 February 1941.
4. Western Mail, 24 March 1941. Daily Herald, 26 March  
1941.
5. News Chronicle, 26 April 1940.
6. D. Smith, 'The Struggle Against Company Unionism  
in the South Wales Coalfield, 1926-39' Welsh History  
Review Vol. 6 No. 3 p.377.
7. Daily Worker, 31 May 1940.
8. Western Mail, 13 February 1941.
9. Ibid., 7 March 1941.
10. Ibid., 24 January 1941.
11. Ibid., 28 January 1941.
12. Ibid., 30 January 1941.
13. Ibid., 3 February 1941.
14. Horner was in fact challenged only once during the  
war years. This was at the 1944 Annual Conference  
when he defeated Edgar Lewis by 225 to 8.
15. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes, 25 April 1940.
16. Western Mail, 30 May 1940.
17. Ibid., 10 July 1940.
18. CAB 98/18 Minutes of the War Cabinet Committee on  
Communist Activities 29 January 1941.

19. Ibid., 28 January 1941.
20. Western Mail, 14 December 1939.
21. Communists in South Wales, Policy and Aims. (C.P.G.B Cardiff, 1941).
22. Ned Gittins interviewed by Alun Morgan, August 1973. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
23. Phil Abraham interviewed by Hywel Francis. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
24. Mavis Llewellyn interviewed by Hywel Francis. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
25. Mel Thomas personal collection. Private correspondence received by Mel Thomas. University College of Swansea SWMF Archive.
26. Ibid., Communist Party Information Bulletin, 25 June 1941 p. 4.
27. Amalgamated Anthracite Combine Committee. Minutes 13 July 1940, SWMF EC Minutes 23 July 1940.
28. 'The Case of the Nicholases' unpublished work by Nicholas p. 73. (In the personal possession of Islwyn Nicholas).
29. SWMF EC Minutes, 6 August 1940.
30. Islwyn Nicholas op. cit. p. 43.
31. Ibid., p. 76-77.
32. Western Mail, 29 October 1941.
33. Ibid., 25 March 1942.
34. Ibid., 27 June 1942.
35. Michael Foot op. cit. p. 446.

36. Aberdare Leader, 7 March 1942. This happened when Arthur Horner addressed a meeting at Mountain Ash.
37. Daily Mail, 15 September 1942.
38. Western Mail, 9 July 1943.
39. South Wales Voice, 22 January 1944.
40. New Leader, 17 July 1943.
41. SWMF EC Minutes 6 May 1941 and 29 July 1941.
42. New Leader, 5 March 1944.
43. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards, 19 January 1942.
44. Ibid., 30 August 1943.
45. e.g. SWMF Circulars to Lodges 19 April 1943 and 4 January 1944.
46. SWMF Circular to Lodges 19 April 1943.
47. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes, 29 April 1943.
48. Aberdare Leader, 3 June 1944.
49. Minutes of Proceedings Concerning Conciliation Boards, 2 March 1942.
50. Aberdare Leader, 6 December 1941.
51. SWMF EC Minutes 7 July 1942.
52. AACC Minutes 17 February 1943.
53. Ibid., 19 February 1944.
54. Penrikyber workmen involved in a ca'canny case in March 1944, interviewed by Stuart Broomfield and Alun Morgan. Tape at South Wales Miners Library.
55. Daily Worker, 17 September 1943.
56. SWMF EC Minutes 3 January 1944.
57. Trevor James interviewed by Stuart Broomfield, February 1973.

58. SWMF EC Minutes, 3 January 1944.
59. SWMF Statement of Policy in Relation to the War, 4 January 1944.
60. SWMF Circular to Lodges 19 April 1943.
61. SWMF Statement of Policy in Relation to the War. 4 January 1944.
62. SWMF EC Minutes 3 April 1944.
63. Ibid., 2 September 1944.
64. SWMF Annual Conference Minutes, 25 April 1940.
65. SWMF EC Minutes, 23 April 1940.
66. Ibid., 9 April 1940, 24 August 1940.
67. Ibid., 5 September 1939.
68. Ibid., 25 June 1940, 9 July 1940.
69. Daily Worker, 11 July 1940, 15 July 1940.
70. 'South Wales and the Bombers' by Idris Cox. (CPGB Pamphlet September 1940).
71. LAB 10/366 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales 10 August 1940.
72. Daily Worker, 1 August 1940.
73. LAB 10/366 Weekly Report of the Industrial Relations Officer for South Wales, 10 August 1940.
74. LAB 10/366 Ibid., 17 August 1940.
75. SWMF Adjourned Conference Minutes, 31 August 1940.
76. SWMF EC Minutes 3 September 1940.
77. Ibid., 1 October 1940.
78. Western Mail, 17 October 1940.
79. SWMF EC Minutes 25 April 1944.
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81. Arthur Horner One Mineworkers Union - Why? (National Minority Movement, London, 1928) p. 10.
82. M. W. Kirby, The British Coal Industry 1870-1946. (London 1977) P. 195.
83. J. E. Williams, The Derbyshire Miners (London, 1962) p. 874.
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85. Western Mail, 21 July 1942.
86. Ibid., 25 May 1943.
87. R. Page Arnot, 'The Miners in Crisis and War' p.412.
88. Ibid., p.413-416.
89. Western Mail, 17 August 1944.
90. R. Page Arnot The Miners in Crisis and War pp.417-419.
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92. 'To the Members of the South Wales Miners Federation' (WNP leaflet' 1944). In the Dai Francis Personal Collection University College of Swansea SWMF Archive.
93. SWMF EC Minutes, 31 October 1944.
94. Western Mail, 6 November 1944.
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CONCLUSION.

## CONCLUSION

'In the 25 years following 1945 industrial South Wales underwent a radical transformation of its industrial life and patterns. Old industries metamorphosed into new shapes and new industries grew into prominence. The effects overspilled into the social life and organisation of the region'. (1)  
(J W England in the Introduction to Industrial Britain: South Wales. by Graham Humphreys).

'Since the Second World War the Welsh economy has been characterised by the continued run-down of the once supremely important coal industry'. (2)  
(Graham I Lees in his contribution to Anatomy of Wales edited by R Brinley Jones).

To students of the economy and society of South Wales the years 1945 up to the present day are a clearly defined, distinctive period characterised by the diversification of industry throughout the region on the one hand and the decline in the importance of the coal industry on the other. The extent of the restructuring of the economy can most lucidly be described by giving an account of the employment figures in various industries and of those relating to population distribution.

Prior to the Second World War the Welsh economy was dependent upon the coal industry, the iron and steel industries, and farming. Since 1945 there has been a dramatic shift towards manufacturing and service industries. In 1946, for instance the coal and steel industries employed one third of all workers in South Wales and coalmining alone employed more than the manufacturing industries. By the 1960's however, the manufacturing industries employed more than the coal industry and the metal industries combined. (3)

Employment in the coal industry in 1975 was 40% of what it was in the late 1940's and it continues to decline. Production in 1975 was 60% of what it was in 1945. (4) In 1947 when the coal industry was nationalised the newly formed N.C.B. took over approximately 300 collieries in Wales, of which over half employed less than 300 men. 36% of coal output in 1947 was cut by machines. In 1970 only 52 collieries remained, although the average number of wage earners for each had increased to 750 and nearly 80% of the coal was coming from mechanised faces. (5)

This dramatic decline in the number of pits and miners employed has had profound consequences upon the towns and villages in the area of the South Wales coalfield. Work patterns have been affected and



population figures. During the Second World War the trend of depopulation in South Wales set in the Depression years had been arrested and since the end of the war throughout the whole region there has been an increase of 16,000 people. This statistic disguises the fact that there have been major shifts in population strengths. Before 1945 the concentration of industrial growth on the coalfield meant that it was there that most of the population lived, but the new manufacturing industries have been centred on the coastal plain between Newport and Llanelli. Consequently, whereas the coalfield population in 1931 was 935,000 and that of the coastal plain 860,000, by 1966 the coalfield had been reduced to only 800,000 while that of the plains had risen to 1,010,000. (6) Thus, there has been a drift in population from the mining valleys to the coast. So, whilst Cardiff increased its population by 20% between 1931 and 1971 and Newport by 14%, the population of Merthyr in the coalfield has fallen by 20%. (7) A useful measure of the decline is to compare the lists of the ten largest local authority areas in the region in terms of population for the years 1931 and 1966. In 1931 seven of the ten were in the coalfield, by 1966 there were only two coalfield towns on the list. (8)

This decline in the fortunes of the coal industry and the resultant effects on population numbers has obviously had consequences upon the social life of the coalfield.

The effect of the phased run-down of the coal industry in South Wales has been dramatic in the life of the mining valleys. Not only has the typical occupation of the inhabitants changed; so have the links between them, their expectations, and their way of life. The young Rhondda school-leaver no longer works in the pit. The old miner remains part of an ageing community,

increasingly unable to sustain its traditional culture. The male voice choirs, the working-men's institutes, and the chapels are all in decline.' (9)

Central to this decline has been the diminishing role of the local mining lodge in the community and the miners' welfare hall. True these still exist but mainly as drinking clubs and bingo and snooker halls, they do not fulfill the all pervasive role they once did. An implicit comment upon the extent of their decline is the recent rescue attempt of miners' libraries made by the Social Science Research Project on the coalfield between 1971 and 1974. (10)

As has already been seen two prominent ex-miners leaders have bemoaned this declining influence, James Griffiths seeing the breakdown of the 'intimate relationship between work and the neighbourhood' and Will Paynter the 'withering away of the singular character of the Fed'. (11)

With the decline in social influence of the miners union has come also a decline in its political influence in the region as a whole. In 1939 when Ness Edwards was elected as MP for Caerphilly, <sup>(12)</sup> the number of miners' sponsored MP's rose to 13, by 1970 there were 3. (13) It is also interesting to note that the complexion of political debate has changed from discussing the fortunes of South Wales against the background of the relative merits of capitalism and socialism to a background involving nationalism and devolution. Nevertheless, whilst recognising the decline of the miners' union in both the political and social life of the coalfield it has to be realised that it still has tremendous influence and power acting very much as the pacemaker in trade union affairs, especially on the issue of wages, and also recently having played a very prominent role in the formation of the Welsh TUC.

The important question to be put at this juncture is whether the coalfield experience during the Second World War played a significant part in these long term developments. Alan Butt Philips has written that it was 'economic' changes in the war years 1939-45 that appear now to have been crucial in setting the Welsh economy on the path to modernisation and rationalisation. (14)

As part of his argument he cites the statistic for the growth in the engineering, vehicle building, oil and chemical industries during the war. Numbers of workers involved in these industries leaped from 22,000 to 147,000. (15)

It is certainly true that one can look back at the war years and note similar trends taking place to those in the post-war world—diversification of industry, the increase in women labour, and the decline of the old staple industries for example, but the real turning point when these trends began was before the war in the years of the depression. Events during the war provided the accelerator towards change. Agreed about this are D Morgan Rees and Graham Humphries.

'Between 1930-32 the staple industries, coal, iron and steel had reached the nadir. It was the time of appalling depression which can be now looked upon as a watershed in the history of Welsh industry.' (16)

'In 1945 the traditional economic inheritance still dominated the region. South Wales was still basically a nineteenth century place in a twentieth century world ...

"..... But the seeds of change had already been sown, and in the succeeding twenty-five years the region was economically transformed .....

"..... Although it was not obvious in 1945 the foundations of subsequent change had been laid down during the previous decade." (17)

The experience of the 1930's had led many to the assessment that there was a need for a diversification of the economic structure of the region. For too long it had been dependent upon the fortunes, good or ill of the coal industry and of the metal industries, iron, steel and tinsplate. If an industry suffered recession as coal did in the late 1920's and the 1930's there were not only economic consequences to be faced but the potential collapse of a whole social structure built around the industry.

Studies in the early 1930's had resulted in the passing of the Special Areas Act in 1934 to help depressed areas and in 1936 the first government trading estate was started at Treforest, a few miles south of Pontypridd and the Special Areas Reconstruction Association was set up to help build individual factories elsewhere.<sup>(18)</sup> Down to the end of 1938, 72 different firms were assisted to settle in different parts of South Wales, including 51 at Treforest. Before the start of war the trading estate provided employment for 2,500<sup>(19)</sup> a small number in proportion to the working population, but a start.

In 1937 there was a very thorough economic survey of South Wales which concluded that there was little prospect of revival for the basic industries and that there was need for diversification of the economic structure.<sup>(20)</sup> Coincidentally in that same year the rearmament programme began to dominate the economic situation and this provided a stimulus to diversification. More factories, including the Royal Ordnance Factories with their heavy demand for labour came into the region. When the war itself started, strategic reasons influenced the government to disperse production of many essential goods and materials away from the south east of England to the safer west. Within several months of the beginning of the war there was 'a virtual elimination of the persistent problem of unemployment among the employable.'<sup>(21)</sup>

Industrialists were pleased with the situation but recognised that the new factories were based on war production and did not have a potential longevity of existence, there was a need for industries that would also be needed in peace-time to be brought in, and it is notable that many local authorities persistently agitated for this in the last couple of years of the war, especially in the coalfield, for it was already significant that most of the new developments were on the coastal plain. (22) (23)

In 1942 a Welsh Reconstruction Advisory Council was appointed and came to more or less the same conclusions as the 1937 survey. The long-term prospects of the coal industry were not good-uneconomic pits would be closed in the post-war period and many others were in dire need of modernisation - so a more varied economic structure was necessary after the war. (24)

The war contributed to the making of that more varied economic structure not only by being the source of a major injection of new industries, but also, because those industries existed to work in, a pool of skilled labour was built up familiar with machine handling and manipulation, well suited for employment in engineering and light manufacturing. (25)

War, then, was the accelerator towards change, entrenching a trend that had begun in the Depression years. This can be most clearly demonstrated in a statistical sense by examining the figures for women workers in Wales. In 1923 there were 8 insured women workers to every 100 men, By 1936 this figure had doubled to 16 but the proportion was still far below the national figure of 39 to 100. Between 1939 and 1941, the first two years of the war, the ratio approached the national average. (26)

Whereas the obvious needs for the diversification had been perceived at least ten years before the start of the war, progress in that direction had been very slow, although the trend had been set. Furthermore it had only been achieved by the constant prompting and cajoling of MP's, local authorities and other political pressure groups. The war had created the conditions in which the Government actively co-operated in hastening the process.

In terms of the Welsh economy such changes that have taken place have had their benefits, but it is less easy to point to the benefits in the coalfield region, where the decline of the industry has left many villages almost derelict. Replacement industry has not provided sufficient jobs in the coalfield itself, which has meant the uprooting of many families from their familiar environment, or has meant that many men have had excessive work journeys added to their day. The trend away from the coalfield communities had begun, of course, in the Depression years and then between the end of the 1930's and the immediate post-war period the labour force was reduced by around 100,000. The war had provided for many a welcome opportunity to leave the region for good; many had joined the army and were either killed or returned to civilian life elsewhere whilst others had found jobs in England during the war and decided to stay there.<sup>(27)</sup>

Viewing these long-term developments tends to create a false picture of South Wales immediately as the war ended. They have taken many years to work themselves out and it is only in retrospect that the combination of the experiences of the Depression and the War have been seen as the crucible of change. As Graham Humphrys has written, 'these developments had little visible effect in the region in 1945, and superficially it appeared that

South Wales was ready to revert to its former depressed self.<sup>(28)</sup> Indeed, the first years after the war had ended were to be ones of continuing hardship; shortages of materials for industry and food; the coal crisis deepening; the winter of 1947 introducing siege like conditions; rationing remaining, and a small but discernible increase in unemployment, reaching a rate of over 8% of the insured population of Wales in 1948.<sup>(29)</sup>

The mood in 1945 was apprehensive with more than a half expectancy of return to pre-war unemployment and desolation. The pessimism was a result of the experiences of the previous post-war debacle being ingrained upon people's consciousness.<sup>(30)</sup> On the other hand, the prevailing mood of the nation as a whole did not by-pass South Wales. The expectancy of a more humane post-war world was also prevalent and there was a swirl of excitement surrounding the General Election results.

Throughout the country the readiness for a change of political leadership had been apparent since 1942 with defeats of Government candidates at by-elections by various Independents and members of the Commonwealth Party. In South Wales there had been one significant result as a part of this trend in a by-election at Newport in May 1945. Here, the Conservative, National Government backed candidate scraped home by just over two and a half thousand votes from an I.L.P. candidate who polled 13,722 votes.<sup>(31)</sup>

The demand for a new deal after the war had also been stimulated by the recommendations of the Beveridge Committee for much improved social services and social security. Discussions on such matters had been initiated throughout their organisation by the SWMP and many meetings had been arranged on its

proposals in coalfield communities. The SWMF had set up a sub-committee to investigate the recommendations and this came down very much in support. (32)

The massive vote in favour of a Labour Government was, of course, no surprise in the coalfield, where Labour won all the seats, for the region had been a stronghold even at the time of the lowest ebb for Labour in 1931. The national result, however, was beyond the wildest dreams of expectation. In Wales for instance Labour's strength had lain essentially in the mining valleys but after 1945 it spread to the country as a whole. (33)

There was one shock for Labour in the coalfield. This was in the Rhondda East constituency where Harry Pollitt, the Communist Party candidate narrowly failed to defeat W. H. Mainwaring, by just 972 votes. The Communists had fought an intensive campaign and on being elected a relieved Mainwaring commented, 'we have just survived another blitzkrieg'. (34) Not too much should be read into this result, for the Communist Party had a strong tradition in the seat and Mainwaring was far from being popular. Nevertheless the vote represents a significant pool of doubt as regards Labour's commitment and ability to introduce the promised new deal.

As an act of faith, however, with an area that had maintained its support for Labour throughout its bleakest years, the two major reforming ministries, Social Insurance and Health, were given to two South Wales mining MP's, James Griffiths and Aneurin Bevan, respectively. Nevertheless support for Labour remained neither blind nor uncritical and in 1946 two by-elections results indicated that dissatisfaction was creeping in. In the June the Labour majority at Ogmore tumbled from 25,003 to 7,947 and the Welsh Nationalist Party claimed nearly 30% of the vote, and in December Labour's majority



fell by nearly 7,000 with the W.N.P. gaining 20% of the vote. (35)

These results in mining constituencies on the very eve of the introduction of nationalisation seem to suggest that disillusionment had already set in with another dose of post-war anti-climax.

The mining industry had come out of the war with all its deficiencies revealed - its poor industrial relations, its out of date machinery, its uneconomic pits and above all, perhaps, that the job itself was harsh and degrading. Public exposure of mining conditions was very similar to that of the exposure of poverty in the East End of London following the evacuation operation. The middle classes were aware that poverty existed in the cities of Britain but never came face to face with it, until confronted with children who slept under the bed, relieved themselves in the corner of the room and were generally destructive, foul-mouthed and defiant.

"The effect of evacuation was to flood the dark places with light and bring home to the national consciousness that the 'submerged tenth' described by the sociologist Charles Booth in his late nineteenth century work still existed in our towns like a hidden sore, poor, dirty, and crude in its habits an intolerable and degrading burden to decent people ....." (36)

The miners had been the 'submerged tenth' of the industrial world. Every one had known they were there before the war, because they had not hidden themselves away. They had marched with their problems to London, they had been on strike, they had rioted and they had had outspoken representatives to shout their case, usually men of the so-called extreme left. Nevertheless they had largely been ignored, until there was a national shortage of coal.

Public attitudes to the miners during the war are difficult to assess. E. R. Chamberlain believes that the general public nursed an uneasy conscience about the whole business of the miner but as absenteeism alternated with strikes sympathy gave way, not so much to anger, as to a puzzled exasperation. (37) W.H.B. Court believed that the miners had public sympathy at the time of the Greene Award but had lost it by the time of the Porter Award. (38)

Two things more than any other affected public opinion as to the appalling conditions of the miners. The first was the eagerness with which many young miners joined the forces, doing so in such numbers as to precipitate the manpower crisis. Emlyn Williams' reasoning was typical of many. He joined up with seven friends.

"It was mainly because of the treatment that we had within the mining industry that we decided that the armed forces was a better outlet for us ....."

A similar situation occurred at the end of the war. Miners could opt for early release from the forces because of the demand for coal but many decided to stay on. Emlyn Williams could have returned to the mines in 1944, but did not do so until 1947.

"I was in a regiment that had quite a number of miners, but not one of them opted for release. It was better than going back to work under P.D's as far as many of us were concerned." (39)

The second fact that helped convince public opinion as to the unpleasantness of mining was the experience of the Bevin Boys. In terms of boosting production, their conscription into the mines had been a farce but some of them became great advocates for the miners' cause. They were able to bring home to the public what the job was

like and why it was unpopular, like the following conscript from Barnes in Surrey.

"It was an eye-opener to my family ..... They came to understand a lot more about the miners' way of life, especially after my lifelong friend was killed in a shaft only six months after joining .....

We could all understand the attitude of the miners against the mine owners. They didn't strike me as militant. They weren't an aggressive, rabid people"(40)

It was not the conscious aim of miners to convince public opinion about their past injustices and the legitimacy of their demands for higher wages and nationalisation. It was, however, necessary to influence the Government, and the wartime experience of the coal industry effectively did this. The output performance convinced men of all political parties of the need, if not for nationalisation, at least for some form of reorganisation. The wartime output and manpower problems had much more influence over attitudes than the arguments of the miners leaders, especially as coal was so vital to the national interest and war effort.

On the other hand the opportunism of the Government's interest aroused the suspicion of the miners. Unemployment in the years before the war and poverty in the mining communities were not of sufficient import to arouse Government to sympathetic action, especially as adequate coal supplies were forthcoming, but as soon as the national economy required more coal than the miners could produce, then it was the appropriate time to deal with the 'coal' problem. Events in the first eighteen months had a long term effect on miners attitudes throughout the rest of the war, with the stop-go policy surrounding miners call-up to the armed forces and the urgings for great

productive efforts being followed by unemployment and transference, and then recall and more urging for effort.

This national demand for coal became an extraneous factor, too in the industrial relations of the industry. It was no longer just a question of union and owners. In a peacetime situation with comparable conditions of full employment and excess demand over output the miners would have had almost the ideal bargaining position, but the strength of their position was undermined by the awareness of national crisis. It was this that was at the root of the stress in the relationship between union leaders and the rank and file. To the miners it appeared that their leaders only presented the face of national interest to them whilst in reality the miners leaders were arguing the miners' case to owners and Government officials.

It was the conflicting emotions felt by the miners that produced contrasting performances on their part throughout the war. Their efforts to meet production targets in the first nine months of the war were outstanding but the achievement faded from memory as absenteeism and unofficial strikes dominated the press about the mining industry. Such were their efforts that the energy sapping effects were never overcome, but at other times of critical developments in the progress of the war, such as at the time of the Normandy landings, the miners were able to rally and increase production. In between times their disgruntlement with the deteriorating conditions in their industry emerged to the fore and dominated their consciousness.

The war could not eradicate the feelings most miners felt about their industry, especially as there was a decline in the standards of materials being used and safety. Having to tolerate these conditions in the 'national interest' did nothing to help. Thus at the time nationalisation was introduced labour leaders aware of what miners felt about their industry called upon them 'to emancipate yourselves from the understandable inhibitions created by the past. Emancipate yourselves from the mentality thrust upon you by crude capitalism.'<sup>(41)</sup>

It was asking a lot, especially as one of the greatest agents of change - war - had failed to do so. War had transformed the employment situation in the industry; it had transformed a situation of under production into one where demand outreached output; it had exposed the technical weaknesses of the coal industry; it had brought the Government into closer contact with the running of the industry despite the desire to avoid too close a relationship; it had prepared the ground for nationalisation of the industry which had been resisted for over twenty years; it had brought the co-operation of coal owners and miners leaders in production drives; it had facilitated the growth of conciliation machinery within the industry; it had brought higher wages for the miners and it had hastened the formation of the NUM. War had evoked patriotism and the national interest to unify the workforce; but nothing which happened between 1939 and 1945 was great enough to alter the ingrained hostility which a miner felt towards his work environment. Indeed, this hostility had been strengthened and the miners group consciousness had intensified as their performance throughout the war had been scrutinised publicly and they as a body of men had been persistently criticised.

## FOOTNOTES

## CONCLUSION

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APPENDICES



| SERVICE OR EMPLOYMENT ENTERED INTO     | 1 JULY 1940 - 14 SEPT 1940 | 15 SEPT 1940 - 30 NOV 1940 | DEC 1940 | JAN 1941 | TOTAL  |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|--------|
| Service with HM Forces                 | -                          | 72                         | 55       | 36       | 1,394  |
|  | -                          | 454                        | 218      | 162      |        |
|  | -                          | 218                        | 75       | 104      |        |
| Factories and other trades             | -                          | 754                        | 198      | 200      | 3,747  |
|  | -                          | 1,204                      | 291      | 378      |        |
|  | -                          | 434                        | 139      | 149      |        |
| Other                                  | -                          | 22                         | 10       | -        | 104    |
| Colliers Outside Mon. & S. Wales       | -                          | 39                         | 10       | -        |        |
|  | -                          | 18                         | 5        | -        |        |
| Ill Health and Other Causes            | -                          | 709                        | 174      | 160      | 3,370  |
|  | -                          | 1,234                      | 266      | 339      |        |
|  | -                          | 334                        | 73       | 81       |        |
| Trade Depression                       | -                          | 1,400                      | -        | -        | 4,931  |
|  | -                          | 2,559                      | -        | -        |        |
|  | -                          | 972                        | -        | -        |        |
| Unknown Destinations                   | -                          | 1,585                      | 156      | 153      | 5,876  |
|  | -                          | 2,255                      | 287      | 272      |        |
|  | -                          | 873                        | 156      | 134      |        |
| Details as to Destination not obtained | 2,584                      | -                          | -        | -        | 4,715  |
|  | 2,131                      | -                          | -        | -        |        |
| TOTAL MIGRATION                        | 2,584                      | 4,542                      | 593      | 539      | 8,258  |
|  | 2,131                      | 7,745                      | 1072     | 1151     | 12,099 |
|  | -                          | 2,854                      | 448      | 468      | 3,770  |
| GRAND TOTAL                            | 4,715                      | 15,141                     | 2113     | 2158     | 24,127 |

(1) Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum for Joint Meeting with the Secretary of State for the Mines on 24 February 1941, on 'Migration of Labour from South Wales Mines'.

APPENDIX II

WARTIME COAL OUTPUT STATISTICS

TABLE 1 OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL, PERSONS EMPLOYED AND OUTPUT PER PERSON  
IN THE SOUTH WALES COALFIELD, 1938-1944 (1)

| YEAR | OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL |            | OUTPUT S. WALES AS % OF G.B. | NO. PERSONS EMPLOYED IN S. WALES | OUTPUT OF COAL PER PERSON PER ANNUM S. WALES (tons) |
|------|-------------------------|------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
|      | G.B.                    | S. WALES   |                              |                                  |   |
| 1938 | 227,015,308             | 35,292,748 | 15.55                        | 136,116                          | 259.28  |
| 1939 | 231,350,242             | 35,269,149 | 15.24                        | 130,954                          | 269.32  |
| 1940 | 224,308,699             | 32,351,990 | 14.42                        | 130,394                          | 248.11  |
| 1941 | 206,354,199             | 27,426,377 | 13.29                        | 113,990                          | 240.60  |
| 1942 | 203,641,904             | 26,723,431 | 13.12                        | 115,808                          | 230.76  |
| 1943 | 194,500,359             | 25,115,673 | 12.91                        | 116,167                          | 216.20  |
| 1944 | 184,114,525             | 22,395,200 | 12.16                        | 112,337                          | 199.34  |

TABLE 2 ANNUAL OUTPUT OF ANTHRACITE COAL IN SOUTH WALES COALFIELD 1939-1945 (2)

| YEAR | TOTAL (TONS) |
|------|--------------|
| 1939 | 5,299,677    |
| 1940 | 4,958,387    |
| 1941 | 3,725,430    |
| 1942 | 3,666,941    |
| 1943 | 3,446,460    |
| 1944 | 3,082,693    |
| 1945 | 2,683,000    |

TABLE 3 NATIONAL OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL, PERSONS EMPLOYED AND OUTPUT PER PERSON PER QUARTER, JANUARY 1939 - DECEMBER 1944 (3)

| QUARTER        | Av. no. of wage-earners | Output of saleable coal - tons | Output per man employed - tons |
|----------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| JAN-MAR 1939   | 773,083                 | 61,038,300                     | 78.95                          |
| APR-JUN 1939   | 772,969                 | 56,713,200                     | 73.37                          |
| JULY-SEPT 1939 | 761,126                 | 54,265,700                     | 71.30                          |
| OCT-DEC 1939   | 758,110                 | 59,320,700                     | 78.25                          |
| JAN-MAR 1940   | 760,437                 | 55,977,600                     | 73.61                          |
| APR-JUN 1940   | 764,307                 | 61,974,100                     | 81.09                          |
| JULY-SEPT 1940 | 755,257                 | 55,168,100                     | 73.05                          |
| OCT-DEC 1940   | 716,659                 | 51,179,100                     | 71.41                          |
| JAN-MAR 1941   | 695,433                 | 50,249,600                     | 72.26                          |
| APR-JUN 1941   | 690,404                 | 50,064,600                     | 73.96                          |
| JULY-SEPT 1941 | 697,382                 | 51,616,300                     | 74.01                          |
| OCT-DEC 1941   | 707,313                 | 53,413,800                     | 75.52                          |
| JAN-MAR 1942   | 706,722                 | 50,929,300                     | 72.06                          |
| APR-JUN 1942   | 707,510                 | 49,870,900                     | 70.49                          |
| JULY-SEPT 1942 | 710,538                 | 49,939,700                     | 70.28                          |
| OCT-DEC 1942   | 711,353                 | 52,893,500                     | 74.36                          |
| JAN-MAR 1943   | 711,736                 | 50,500,400                     | 70.95                          |
| APR-JUN 1943   | 708,576                 | 48,650,900                     | 68.98                          |
| JULY-SEPT 1943 | 704,118                 | 47,210,800                     | 67.05                          |
| OCT-DEC 1943   | 701,099                 | 49,126,500                     | 70.07                          |

TABLE 4. OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL IN SOUTH WALES PER QUARTER IN 1943 (4)

| QUARTER          | OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL - TONS |
|------------------|--------------------------------|
| JAN - MARCH 1943 | 6,563,800                      |
| APR - JUNE 1943  | 6,275,800                      |
| JULY - SEPT 1943 | 5,994,400                      |
| OCT - DEC 1943   | 6,281,700                      |

TABLE 5. WEEKLY NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED AND OUTPUT OF SALEABLE COAL IN THE SOUTH WALES COALFIELD, AUGUST 1944 - OCTOBER 1944 (5)

| WEEK/ENDING       | WAGE EARNED | OUTPUT  |
|-------------------|-------------|---------|
| AUGUST 5, 1944    | 112,611     | 457,900 |
| " 12, "           | HOLIDAY     | WEEK    |
| " 19, "           | 112,559     | 425,900 |
| " 26, "           | 112,533     | 481,560 |
| SEPTEMBER 2, 1944 | 112,490     | 480,200 |
| " 9, "            | 112,446     | 480,400 |
| " 16, "           | 112,439     | 485,300 |
| " 23, "           | 112,477     | 491,800 |
| " 30, "           | 112,383     | 493,800 |
| OCTOBER 7, "      | 112,332     | 499,600 |
| " 14, "           | 112,250     | 507,200 |
| " 21, "           | 112,148     | 506,400 |
| " 28, "           | 112,142     | 510,400 |

1. South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of Ministry of Fuel and Power, Table XXVIII, p. 53.
2. Report from the Regional Controller to the Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association on the total output of anthracite coal in South Wales 1890-1948.
3. Court op. cit. p. 109
4. Ministry of Fuel and Power, Statistical Digest from 1938, Published 1944. Table 15, p. 22.
5. S.W.L.F. Circular to the M.F.G.B. 7 December, 1944.

APPENDIX III

NO. OF PERSONS EMPLOYED IN SOUTH WALES COALFIELD  
JULY 1939 - DECEMBER 1944 (1)

| MONTH ENDED | PERSONS EMPLOYED |                     | MONTH ENDED | PERSONS EMPLOYED |                       |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| July 1939   | 120,860          |                     | June 1942   | 104,779          |                       |
| Oct. 1939   | 119,306          |                     | Sept 1942   | 105,507          |                       |
| Dec. 1939   | 121,735          |                     | Dec. 1942   | 106,836          |                       |
| Feb. 1940   | 121,395          |                     | March 1943  | 106,611          |                       |
| May 1940    | 123,984          |                     | June 1943   | 105,737          |                       |
| Aug. 1940   | 122,353          | Fall of France      | Sept. 1943  | 103,417          |                       |
| Nov. 1940   | 113,751          |                     | Dec. 1943   | 103,170          | Bovin Boys begin work |
| Feb. 1941   | 102,017          |                     | March 1944  | 103,643          |                       |
| May 1941    | 100,577          | Introduction of EWO | June 1944   | 103,817          |                       |
| Aug. 1941   | 103,440          |                     | Sept. 1944  | 102,631          |                       |
| Nov. 1941   | 104,659          |                     | Dec. 1944   | 102,856          |                       |
| March 1942  | 104,516          |                     |             |                  |                       |

- (1) Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association Memorandum  
 Re - Declining Standards of Production, June 1945.  
 (These figures relate only to workers in collieries in the Mon and South Wales Coalowners Association, approx 90% of the coalfield, hence the slight variance with the figures in Table I, Appendix II).

| Number of New Cases Certified Annually by the Silicosis Medical Board 1938 - 1946 |                       |                  |              |                           |                  |              |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|---------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| YEAR  | South Wales Coalfield |                  |              | All other Coalfields of G |                  |              |
|   | Partially Disabled    | Totally Disabled | Annual Total | Partially Disabled        | Totally Disabled | Annual Total |
| 1938  | 155                   | 228              | 383          | 29                        | 15               | 44           |
| 1939  | 228                   | 177              | 405          | 21                        | 23               | 44           |
| 1940  | 272                   | 160              | 432          | 12                        | 21               | 33           |
| 1941  | 327                   | 158              | 485          | 15                        | 19               | 34           |
| 1942  | 485                   | 260              | 745          | 26                        | 28               | 54           |
| 1943  | 823                   | 302              | 1,125        | 91                        | 50               | 141          |
| 1944  | 1,303                 | 255              | 1,558        | 315                       | 128              | 443          |
| 1945  | 4,651                 | 529              | 5,180        | 422                       | 152              | 574          |
| 1946  | 3,405                 | 348              | 3,753        | 455                       | 145              | 600          |
| TOTAL   | 11,649                | 2,417            | 14,066       | 1,386                     | 581              | 1,967        |

Table II

DEATHS IN THE SOUTH WALES COALFIELD CERTIFIED AS DUE TO SILICOSIS 1939 - 1943 (2)

| YEAR  | DEATHS |
|-------|--------|
| 1939  | 91     |
| 1940  | 102    |
| 1941  | 85     |
| 1942  | 72     |
| 1943  | 82     |
| TOTAL | 432    |

(1) P Hugh-Jones and C M Fletcher op.cit. p.14

(2) These figures are taken from a letter from T W Bowden, Secretary of Mountain Ash Trades Council & Deep Duffryn Lodge to the Aberdare Leader 11 November 1944.

## APPENDIX V

DISTRIBUTION OF LABOUR IN SOUTH WALES COLLIERIES  
IN WARTIME (1)

TABLE I

| Internal Distribution of Labour in South Wales Collieries<br>1938 and 1944 |                            |                    |   |                             |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| PERIOD   | Number of Manshifts Worked |                    |   | Pithead<br>Output *<br>Tons |
|  | Total                      | At the<br>Coalface | Elsewhere below<br>ground and on<br>surface |                             |
| 3 mths ended<br>Jan 1938   | 8,784,048                  | 3,964,586          | 4,819,462                                   | 9,637,220                   |
| 3 mths ended<br>Dec 1944   | 6,766,479                  | 2,502,352          | 4,264,127                                   | 5,837,556                   |
| Decrease   | 2,107,569                  | 1,462,234          | 555,335                                     | 3,763,664                   |
| % Decrease   | 22.97                      | 36.88              | 11.52                                       | 39.05                       |

TABLE II (2)

| Manpower Distribution in South Wales Collieries 1943 and 1944 |                 |                           |                 |         |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Year  | At the Coalface | Elsewhere below<br>Ground | Surface         | Total   |
| 1943  | 49,467 - 43.29% | 43,736 - 38.28%           | 21,071 - 18.43% | 114,274 |
| 1944  | 47,871 - 42.61% | 43,617 - 38.83%           | 20,855 - 18.56% | 112,343 |

- (1) Monmouthshire and South Wales Coalowners Association  
Memorandum re. Declining Production, June 1945.
- (2) South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey of the Ministry  
of Fuel and Power, Table XLV p.83.

APPENDIX VI WARTIME ABSENCES STATISTICS

I - MANSHIFTS LOST ANNUALLY WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN WORKED  
EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MANSHIFTS WHICH  
COULD HAVE BEEN WORKED (1)

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1939        | 6.48           |
| 1940        | 7.16           |
| 1941        | 7.96           |
| 1942        | 9.13           |
| 1943        | 11.18          |
| 1944        | 12.67          |

II - MANSHIFTS LOST QUARTERLY WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN WORKED  
EXPRESSED AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL MANSHIFTS WHICH  
COULD HAVE BEEN WORKED

(2)

| <u>PERIOD</u>           | <u>%</u> | <u>PERIOD</u>            | <u>%</u> | <u>PERIOD</u>            | <u>%</u> |
|-------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|----------|
| 3 months ended Jan 1939 | 5.38     | 3 months ended Feb. 1941 | 8.13     | 3 months ended June 1943 | 10.84    |
| 3 mths ended April 1939 | 6.67     | 3 mths ended May 1941    | 8.00     | 3 mths ended Sept 1943   | 11.27    |
| 3 mths ended July 1939  | 5.61     | 3 mths ended Aug 1941    | 6.35     | 3 mths ended Dec 1943    | 12.17    |
| 3 mths ended Oct 1939   | 6.76     | 3 mths ended Nov 1941    | 7.93     | 3 mths. ended March 1944 | 13.64    |
| 2 mths ended Dec 1939   | 6.36     | 4 mths ended March 1942  | 10.04    | 3 mths ended June 1944   | 10.88    |
| 2 mths ended Feb 1940   | 8.56     | 3 mths ended June 1942   | 8.86     | 3 mths ended Sept 1944   | 13.12    |
| 3 mths ended May 1940   | 7.36     | 3 mths ended Sept 1942   | 8.77     | 3 mths ended Dec 1944    | 13.01    |
| 3 mths ended Aug 1940   | 6.50     | 3 mths ended Dec 1942    | 9.32     |                          |          |
| 3 mths ended Nov 1940   | 6.63     | 3 mths ended Nov 1943    | 10.45    |                          |          |



III - AVERAGE NUMBER OF SHIFTS WORKED PER PERSON, PER WEEK  
IN THE SOUTH WALES COALFIELD DURING SEPTEMBER 1944 (3)

| WEEK - ENDING   | 9th Sept | 16th Sept | 23rd Sept | 30th Sept. |
|---|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Shifts worked at coalface                             | 5.17     | 5.18      | 5.23      | 5.25       |
| " " elsewhere<br>below ground .....                   | 5.59     | 5.60      | 5.62      | 5.65       |
| Total shifts worked under<br>ground .....             | 5.38     | 5.39      | 5.42      | 5.44       |
| Shifts worked at the<br>surface .....                 | 6.19     | 6.21      | 6.27      | 6.23       |
| Total shifts worked under<br>ground and surface ..... | 5.53     | 5.54      | 5.58      | 5.59       |

IV - THE PERCENTAGE OF ABSENTEEISM BY CLASSES OF WAGE-EARNERS DURING 1943/1944 (4)

| PERIOD       | FACEWORKERS |             |       | OTHERS UNDERGROUND |             |       | SURFACE WORKERS |             |       | ALL WORKERS |             |       |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------|--------------------|-------------|-------|-----------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------------|-------|
|              | Avoidable   | Unavoidable | Total | Avoidable          | Unavoidable | Total | Avoidable       | Unavoidable | Total | Avoidable   | Unavoidable | Total |
| Year 1943    | 5.6         | 9.0         | 14.6  | 4.0                | 7.8         | 11.8  | 2.5             | 5.5         | 8.0   | 4.4         | 7.8         | 12.2  |
| 1st Qtr 1944 | 5.1         | 8.8         | 13.9  | 3.6                | 7.8         | 11.4  | 2.3             | 6.0         | 8.3   | 4.0         | 7.8         | 11.8  |
| 2nd Qtr 1944 | 6.1         | 8.4         | 14.5  | 4.2                | 7.5         | 11.7  | 2.5             | 4.9         | 7.4   | 4.6         | 7.3         | 11.9  |
| 3rd Qtr 1944 | 7.8         | 9.3         | 17.1  | 5.4                | 8.4         | 13.8  | 3.3             | 5.9         | 9.2   | 6.0         | 8.2         | 14.2  |
| 4th Qtr 1944 | 7.7         | 9.4         | 17.1  | 5.3                | 8.6         | 13.9  | 3.4             | 5.8         | 9.2   | 5.0         | 8.3         | 13.3  |
| YEAR 1944    | 6.7         | 8.9         | 15.6  | 4.6                | 8.1         | 12.7  | 2.9             | 5.6         | 8.5   | 5.1         | 8.0         | 13.1  |

- (1) South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of the Ministry of Fuel and Power 1946, p 86.
- (2) Monmouthshire & South Wales Coalowners Memorandum on Declining Standards of Production, June 1945.
- (3) SMP Circular to the MFCB, 7 December 1944.
- (4) South Wales Coalfield Regional Survey Report of the Ministry of Fuel and Power Table XLVI, p. 86.

## APPENDIX VII

COAL OUTPUT LOST DUE TO STRIKES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR  
A COMPARISON OF PIT DAYS IDLE AND APPROXIMATE OUTPUT LOST  
BETWEEN THE SIX WAR YEARS AND THE SIX YEARS 1914-1920 (1)

TABLE I

| YEAR  | PIT DAYS IDLE<br>OWING TO<br>DISPUTES | APPROX<br>OUTPUT<br>LOST | YEAR | PIT DAYS IDLE<br>OWING TO<br>DISPUTES | APPROX<br>OUTPUT<br>LOST |
|-------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1914  | 964                                   | 485,964                  | 1939 | 154                                   | 77,962                   |
| 1915* | 716                                   | 849,749                  | 1940 | 141                                   | 57,038                   |
| 1916  | 183                                   | 160,092                  | 1941 | 105                                   | 48,190                   |
| 1917* | 944                                   | 529,413                  | 1942 | 189                                   | 56,441                   |
| 1918  | 557                                   | 482,801                  | 1943 | 360                                   | 100,220                  |
| 1919  | 995                                   | 861,402                  | 1944 | 2,657                                 | 681,164                  |
| 1920* | 5,903                                 | 2,987,580                | 1945 | 171                                   | 41,833                   |

\* A coalfield strike or stoppage took place in these years.

TABLE II

ESTIMATED LOSSES (TONS) OF SALEABLE COAL FROM CAUSES OTHER THAN  
ABSENTISM IN GREAT BRITAIN (2)

| YEAR          | RECOGNISED HOLIDAYS | DISTURBANCES | RANK OF GRADE | ACCIDENTS BREAKDOWNS AND REPAIRS TO MACHINERY | RAIL TRANSPORT AND WASTE OF TRANSPORT | OTHER CAUSES | TOTAL      |
|---------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1939          | 10,929,100          | 676,500      | 16,420,000    | 1,089,400                                     | -                                     | 3,180,300    | 32,295,300 |
| 1940          | 5,498,500           | 500,600      | 6,910,000     | 1,419,800                                     | 4,768,100                             | 1,895,800    | 20,992,900 |
| 1941          | 7,353,600           | 341,900      | 618,300       | 1,229,200                                     | 1,229,200                             | 1,265,600    | 12,037,800 |
| 1942          | 7,511,200           | 833,200      | -             | 701,100                                       | 12,500                                | 656,600      | 9,714,600  |
| 1943          | 7,617,100           | 1,090,700    | -             | 1,322,300                                     | 500,800                               | 190,300      | 10,721,200 |
| 1st Qtr. 1944 | 480,000             | 2,032,900    | -             | 389,100                                       | 420,400                               | 180,100      | 3,502,500  |

ESTIMATED LOSSES (TONS) OF SALEABLE COAL FROM CAUSES OTHER THAN  
ABSENTISM IN SOUTH WALES (3)

|               |         |         |   |         |       |        |           |
|---------------|---------|---------|---|---------|-------|--------|-----------|
| 1943          | 975,270 | 99,130  | - | 185,770 | 1,240 | 16,690 | 1,278,100 |
| 1st Qtr. 1944 | -       | 578,990 | - | 37,710  | 80    | 10,480 | 627,260   |

- (1) Joint Memorandum on the Operation of the Conciliation Scheme for the Settlement of Disputes arising at Collieries in South Wales and Monmouthshire to the National Coal Board (designate), 3rd. June 1946.
- (2) Ministry of Fuel and Power Statistical Digest From 1938 (pub. 1944) Table 6, p.8.
- (3) Ibid. Table 16, p. 23.

APPENDIX VIII

COLLIERIES WHICH EXPERIENCED MORE THAN FIVE STRIKES, SEPT 1939-JUNE 1945 (1)

(A) Signifies an Anthracite Colliery.  
 (Figures exclude the Coalfield Stoppage over the Porter Award, March 1944).

| COLLIERY                      | LOCATION             | COMPLETED STOPPAGES | PARTIAL STOPPAGES | TOTAL |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------|
| 1 Steer                       | Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen (A) | 28                  | 22                | 50    |
| 2 Nine Mile Point             | Ynysddu              | 11                  | 19                | 30    |
| 3 Keerdy                      | Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen (A) | 17                  | 9                 | 26    |
| 4 Post                        | Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen (A) | 17                  | 8                 | 25    |
| 5 Cwmgorse                    | Cwmgorse (A)         | 18                  | 6                 | 24    |
| 6 Gelliceidrim                | Glanaman (A)         | 17                  | 7                 | 24    |
| 7 Bynkenillys                 | Cwmllynfell (A)      | 14                  | 4                 | 18    |
| 8 Tarent                      | Pontardawe (A)       | 13                  | 5                 | 18    |
| 9 Onllwyn No. 3               | Onllwyn (A)          | 12                  | 4                 | 16    |
| 10 Larine No. 2               | Ibbw Vale            | 10                  | 3                 | 13    |
| 11 Glengerw                   | Blaengeryw           | 7                   | 6                 | 13    |
| 12 Seven Sisters              | Seven Sisters (A)    | 6                   | 7                 | 13    |
| 13 Imllbach                   | Ystalyfera (A)       | 7                   | 4                 | 11    |
| 14 Ystalyfera                 | Ystalyfera (A)       | 7                   | 3                 | 10    |
| 15 Dillwyn                    | Seven Sisters (A)    | 7                   | 2                 | 9     |
| 16 Mwaldu                     | Pontycymer           | 4                   | 5                 | 9     |
| 17 Onllwyn No. 1              | Onllwyn (A)          | 5                   | 3                 | 8     |
| 18 Yniscedwyn                 | Guznos-(A)           | 5                   | 3                 | 8     |
| 19 Risca                      | Risca                | 4                   | 4                 | 8     |
| 20 Brynteg                    | Seven Sisters (A)    | 4                   | 1                 | 7     |
| 21 Garn Drift and Kay's Slupe | Blaenavon            | 3                   | 4                 | 7     |
| 22 Cross Hands                | Cross Hands (A)      | 3                   | 4                 | 7     |
| 23 Penrhwyber                 | Penrhwyber           | 3                   | 4                 | 7     |
| 24 Pochin                     | Hollybush            | 3                   | 4                 | 7     |
| 25 Blaenmant                  | Crynant (A)          | 5                   | 1                 | 6     |
| 26 Cwmllynfell                | Cwmllynfell (A)      | 5                   | 1                 | 6     |
| 27 Glanaman                   | Glanaman (A)         | 5                   | 1                 | 6     |
| 28 Delyclun                   | Llangennech (A)      | 4                   | 2                 | 6     |
| 29 Cambrian                   | Uydsach Vale         | 3                   | 3                 | 6     |
| 30 Kerthyr Vale               | Kerthyr Vale         | 3                   | 3                 | 6     |

APPENDIX IX

WAR-TIME CARTOONS REFERRING TO THE MINING INDUSTRY

Shortage of space in newspapers necessarily meant that there was a limitation on the amount of visual material which could be used in them. Nevertheless the daily cartoon comments on topical issues were retained and below is a small selection of cartoons relating to the mining industry during the war. I am not aware of there being many more.

The first five cartoons all refer to strikes, and if this is a fair representative sample of cartoons relating to the mining industry it does indicate very clearly the received impression that the general public had of miners i.e. miner = striker or someone not pulling their weight.

Nos. I, II and III all appeared at the time of the Porter Award strike of March 1944. No. I by J.C. Walker of the Western Mail is the most direct comment, implying that

CARTOON . . . . . By J. C. WALKER  
**THE INTERESTED SPECTATORS**



the coal strike could directly lead to the longevity of

the war being extended further. Victory by the end of the year would be put in jeopardy. Its purpose, no doubt, was to put the argument directly to the miner but also to influence public opinion against him. Nos. II and III are far more ironic and are especially anti-miner in tone. The Illingworth cartoon, No. II invokes the slogan 'Salute the Soldier' which had been popularly used

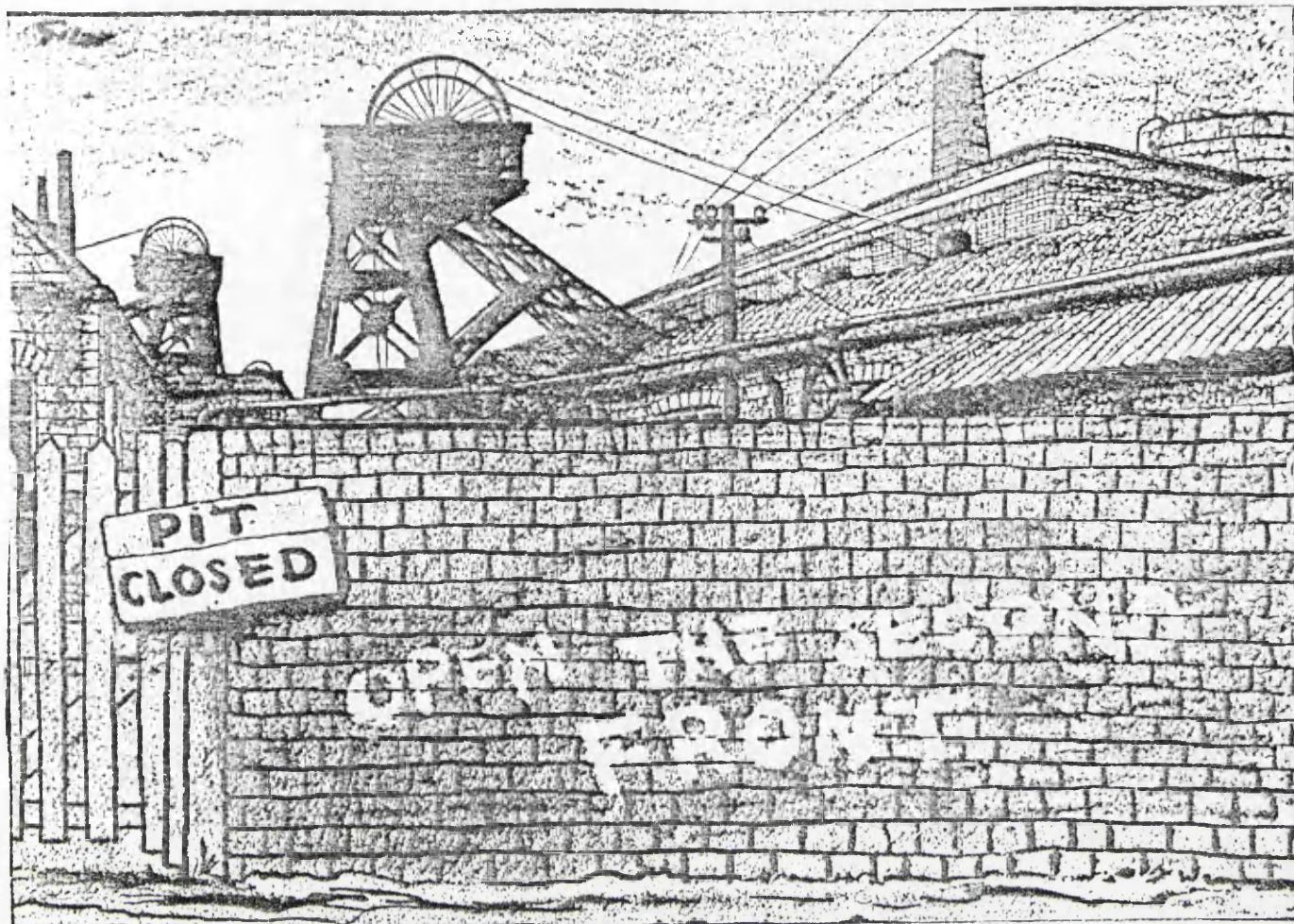


**SALUTE THE SOLDIER!**

—by Illingworth.

for fund raising campaigns for the war effort. The lump of coal thrown at the soldier by the miner is, of course, meant to indicate the miners contributions to the campaign. This was rather unfair as 'Salute The Soldier' weeks had been held in many mining communities and brought forth worthy contributions. The Daily Express cartoon, No. III

is really far more pointed where miners were concerned,



because the miners union had been amongst the most vocal advocates of the opening of the Second Front since the entry of Russia into the war in June 1941. Having criticised the Government for not beginning the campaign much earlier, now on the eve of the operation taking place, miners were on strike. The implication of the cartoon is that closing the pit could also mean closing down plans for the Second Front.



CARTOON = = = = = By J. C. WALKER

# GIVE HIM THE WORKS, DAI!



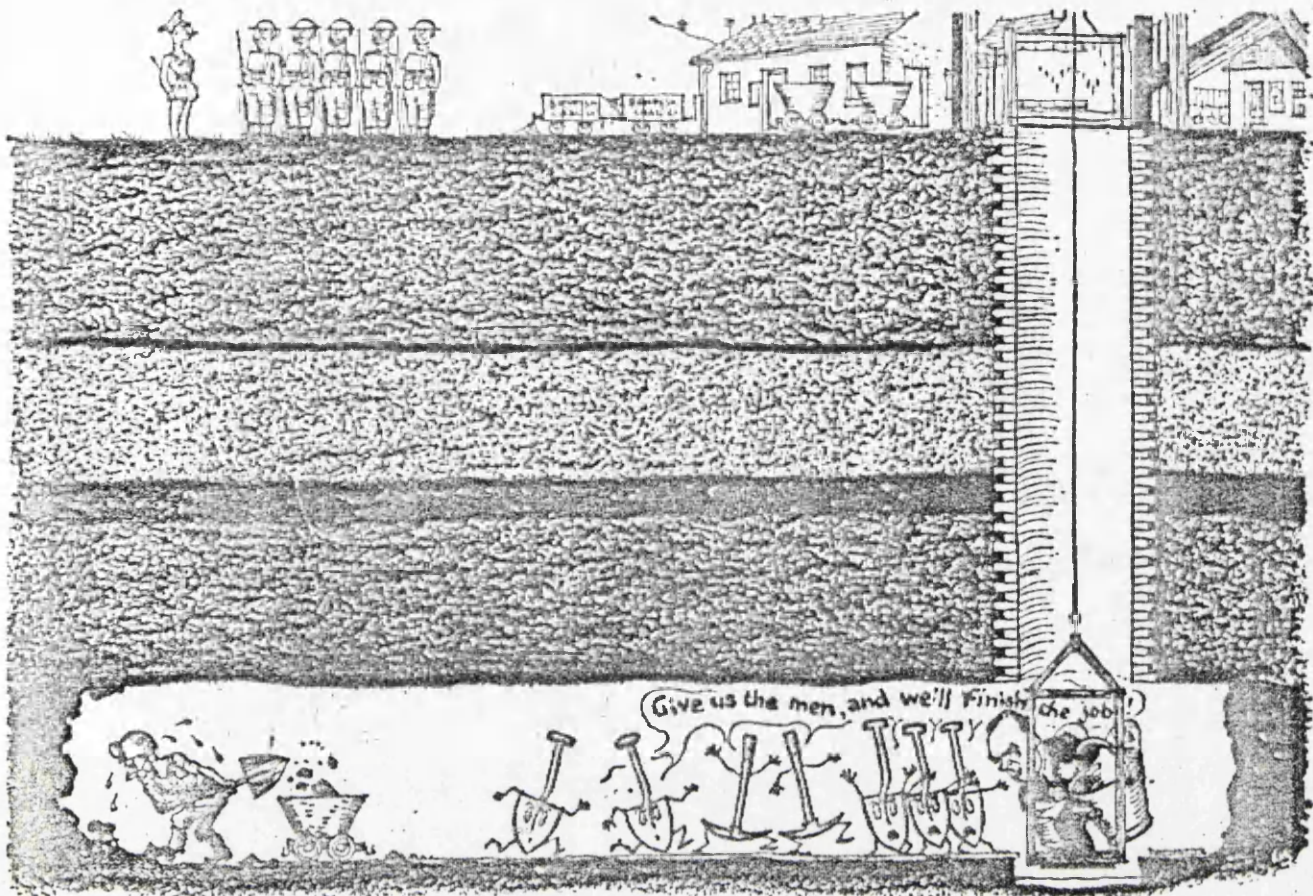
Cartoon IV, again by J.C. Walker of the Western Mail refers specifically to the dispute at Penrikyber colliery in September 1943. It uses the common symbol, Squander Bug, the waster, and by his attitude, the agent of Hitler. Like the previous cartoon by J.C. Walker this one is presenting an argument to miners as to why they shouldn't strike.



The spectre behind the strikes —by Illingworth.

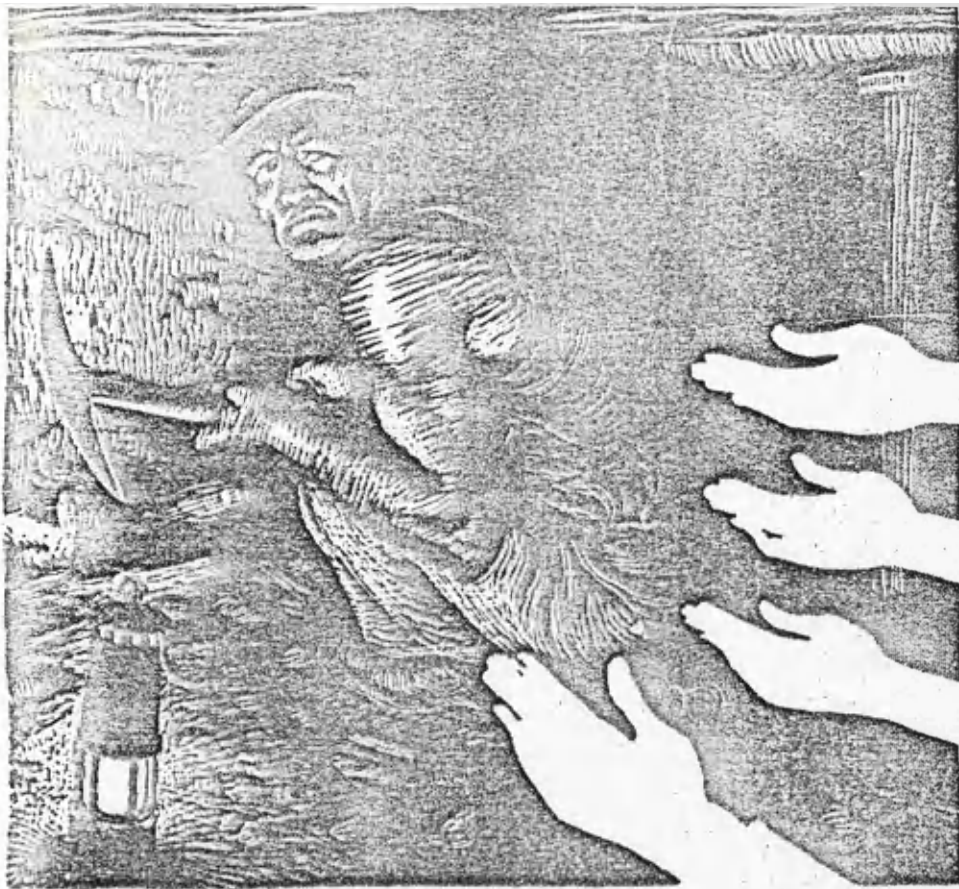
Cartoon V is another from Illingworth. It differs from the previous four in that it is neither designed to propagandize against the miners nor is meant to influence them directly with an argument. It is an analytical comment upon the reason for the high number of strikes during the latter months of 1943, attributing them to the fear that many workers had as to their prospects for employment once the war was over. This feeling was especially strong in South Wales where the memories of depression after the First World War lingered on very strongly.

The last two cartoons are both from Illingworth and are far more sympathetic in tone to the miners. How are comments in the context of the output decline.



—by Illingworth.

Cartoon VI concerns itself with the manpower crisis, showing the working miner sweating away, but surrounded by idle tools in need of men to wield them.



—by Illingworth

# IT'S COAL - OR CATASTROPHE

Cartoon VII is without a caption from its creator although it heads an article entitled 'Coal or Catastrophe'. Of all the cartoons this one most clearly sums up the output problem from the miners point of view. The face of the miner, standing out against the dark background of the pit, shows concern but also a hint of despair. It is all up to him to produce the coal. He is working to his utmost, but still the hands reach out for more.

721.

FOOTNOTES

- I Western Mail, 10 March 1944
- II Daily Mail, 8 March, 1944
- III Daily Express 9 March, 1944
- IV Western Mail, 1 September, 1943
- V Daily Mail, 4 October, 1943
- VI Ibid, 3 October, 1942
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| Cefn Coed Lodge, 1939-45   | Nine Mile Point Lodge, 1939-45 |
| Coegnant Lodge, 1939-45    | Park and Dare Lodge, 1939-45   |
| Cross Hands Lodge, 1939-45 | Penallta Lodge, 1939-45        |
| Elliot's Lodge, 1939-45    | Penllwyngwent Lodge, 1939-45   |

|                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
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D. L. Evans (Abercrave)

David Francis (Former General Secretary of South Wales Area,  
NUM)

Arthur Horner

Goronwy Jones (Ynysybwl)

Professor I. G. Jones (Aberystwyth)

H. Morgan (Abertillery)

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122.  
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