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Printed  
in  
Great Britain  
by  
William Lewis  
(Printers) Ltd  
Cardiff

# *The Welsh History Review*

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## *Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*

## THE SCOTCH CATTLE AND THEIR BLACK DOMAIN

IN December 1816, this paper was found at the Tredegar ironworks:

### Take Notice

The Poor Workmen of Tredega to prepare yourself with Musquets, Pistols, Pikes, Spears and all kinds of Weapons to join the Nattion and put down like torrent all Kings, Regents, Tyrants, of all description and banish out of the Country, every Traitor to this Common Cause and to Bewry famine and distress in the same grave.<sup>1</sup>

This notice is a vivid testimony to the appearance of a new and dangerous force in the history of industrial conflict in south Wales. Since the turn of the century the miners of Merthyr had been noted for their own brand of aggressive trade unionism and Luddism, but in the huge strike of 1816 it was the newer body of workmen to the east which held out longest and with most success against employers and soldiers. Henceforth the men of Monmouthshire and Brecknockshire ceased to rely on the advice and example of their Merthyr colleagues; instead they developed their own peculiar organisation known as the 'Scotch Cattle'. For almost a generation the 'Cattle', which historians have ignored or misunderstood, held the allegiance of the south Wales colliers in a way which was the envy and horror of employers, chapel, union, and friendly society. If the 'Black Domain' belonged to anyone, it belonged to them.<sup>2</sup>

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The 'Black Domain' was a term first used by commissioners who were investigating the social conditions in south Wales in the 1840s. The area covered by this term extended from Rhymney to

<sup>1</sup> Public Record Office, Home Office Letters and Papers (P.R.O., H.O.), 40/4.

<sup>2</sup> The Scotch cattle have been compared to the Molly Maguires of Pennsylvania and to 'rattening' in Yorkshire: E. W. Evans, *The Miners of South Wales* (1964), p. 51. For other comparisons, see C. R. Fay, *Round About Industrial Britain, 1830-60* (1952), pp. 65-66; *Trades Union Commission: Sheffield Outrages Inquiry Committee, 1869*; and D. Forde (ed.), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar* (1956). The last reference was kindly supplied by Dr. J. Latham of Swansea. E. W. Evans, op. cit., has written the best account of the 'Cattle', but he assumes that without trade unionism the workmen were in 'a state of disorganisation': see pp. 57, 69. For another interpretation, see E. J. Jones, 'Scotch Cattle and Early Trade Unionism in Wales', reprinted in W. E. Minchinton (ed.), *Industrial South Wales, 1750-1914* (1969).

Abergavenny and from Llangynidr to Caerphilly, and was divided into two distinct regions. In the north, the heart of the 'Domain', were the deep parallel valleys of the Rhymney, Sirhowy, Ebbw Fawr, Ebbw Fach, Afan Llwyd and Clydach. Each contained several mining villages; crowded, monotonous places lying stark against the bleak landscape. They were separate, almost isolated communities, but they expanded at a rate which few areas in Britain could equal.

The population of the iron-mining region of north-west Monmouthshire more than doubled in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and continued to expand at a decennial rate of about 70 per cent for the next twenty years and 52 per cent and 38 per cent thereafter. The growth of the mining villages themselves was even more striking. For example, the hamlet of Uchlawrcoed, which contained Tredegar, had figures of 513 (year 1801), 2,728 (1811), 3,640 (1821), 5,359 (1831), 13,140 (1841), and 15,424 (1851). In Brecknockshire, around the ironworks at Clydach and Brynmawr, people began to arrive in large numbers a decade later than in Monmouthshire, but there, as in the Glamorgan parish of Gelligaer, the 1830s were the period of greatest expansion.

This iron-mining region, where the three counties converged, differed considerably from the district to the south. There, the countryside was hilly, but it was more green and open. The colliery villages (Llanhilleth, Buttery Hatch, etc.) were small, dispersed communities of a few hundred souls living in the midst of a rural population. Their growth rate was usually slower than that of the mining towns in the north. In the parish of Mynydd-islwyn and the southern part of Bedwellty parish, where the Rock, Argoed, Manmoel, Cwrt-y-Bella, Waterloo, Buttery Hatch and other large collieries were situated, the population rose from 1,846 at the beginning of the century to 8,633 in 1851. During the expansion of the 1820s, new villages were established at places like Blackwood, Ynys-ddu and Tre-lyn (Fleur-de-Lys).

People came to the 'Black Domain' in search of higher wages and what they chose to call 'liberty'. According to the Census of 1851, the largest body of English workmen had come from Herefordshire, Somerset, and Gloucestershire. Irishmen began to arrive in considerable numbers after 1820, travelling eastwards across the coalfield, or sailing direct to Newport. The great majority of workmen were, however, Welsh. An analysis of 1840, which exaggerated the

number of English immigrants, revealed that in Blaenavon district 61 per cent of the men were Welsh, 38 per cent English and 1 per cent Irish. The Welsh migrants in Monmouthshire came mainly from the neighbouring counties of Brecon and Glamorgan. The mobility of these people of the ironworks was often astonishing. 'There are many,' wrote G. S. Kenrick of the Varteg near Pontypool, 'who come from Cardiganshire to the ironworks for five or seven months in the winter season, live economically while here and take home £15 or £20 to their families which pays the rent of their farm, and purchases for them clothing and a few luxuries'. For others, the reason for moving was the fluctuating fortunes of collieries and ironworks. For example, it was reported at the time of the depression of 1841 that 2,000 had left the parish of Trevethin.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly life on the 'Black Domain' was dominated by the trade in iron and coal. If we consider the development of the iron industry first, this was fairly slow, except at Blaenavon, but there was a spectacular expansion in the early years of the nineteenth century:

*Iron Carried on the Monmouthshire Canal (in tons)*

	Blaen- avon	Beau- fort	Clydach	Ebbw Vale	Varteg	Tredeggar	Nantyglo
1803	2,079	1,612	447	1,655	81	—	—
1810	12,254	3,948	1,372	2,758	1,676	7,696	—
1820	9,423	3,132	3,397	3,605	360	8,211	8,826
1830	9,397	5,065	6,771	13,133	8,988	12,303	17,115

In the 1820s large enterprises were established at Bute, Blaina, Pentwyn, Coalbrookvale and Abersychan, and older firms added new furnaces and mills. The iron they produced was conveyed to the coast either by tram-road or on the Monmouthshire Canal. The amount of iron which reached Newport in this way rose from 45,462 tons in 1820 to 155,317 tons in 1835. The years when the

<sup>3</sup> *Census of 1851: Employment of Children in Mines, First Report* (1842), appendix, part II; E. T. Davies, *Religion in the Industrial Revolution in South Wales* (1965); A. H. John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales, 1750-1850* (1950).

quantity fell, that is in 1822, 1826, 1830, and 1833, were difficult times for the iron-masters.<sup>4</sup>

Most proprietors, men like the Hills, Homfrays, Harfords and Scales, came from non-Welsh families. These 'children of Hengist and Horsa' owned or rented a large acreage of land in the vicinity of their works. 'We, who are natives and real owners', said their enemies, 'cannot stretch a foot, without being trod on'.<sup>5</sup> The masters were generally resident; and their mansions, which were frequently built, provisioned, and armed like fortresses, stood conspicuous and challenging. At certain times of the year, unless their competitive spirit had turned sour, the occupants of these houses met one another to discuss details of the trade. Some of them, notably the Harfords of Ebbw Vale, the only Quakers amongst a group of Anglicans, the Homfrays of Tredeggar, and the Hills of Blaenavon, were also concerned with life in the mining towns. They helped to build public halls, markets, chapels, and schools, and entertained their men on special occasions in the manner of country squires.

The 'administering class' of the ironworks had neither the wealth nor the prestige of the proprietors, but their homes were just as distinctive amongst the workmen's barracks. The managers of the works, such as Richard Johnson of Rhymney and William Wood of the British Iron Company at Abersychan, were powerful figures. Under them were a thriving group of agents, clerks and bailiffs, many of whom had travelled from as far as Scotland and northern England because of the demand for their services. They formed part of the small middle class in the mining towns, along with surgeons, drapers, butchers and other 'superior tradesmen' who had moved from established towns like Neath and Swansea, or, as names like Essex, Jackson and Strange suggest, from further afield.

A wide gulf, sometimes strengthened by religious and linguistic differences, separated these 'respectable' inhabitants from the mass of the population. In 1822 it was estimated that there were about 50,000 workmen on the hills between Merthyr and Abergavenny. These employees were by no means one united body. They were divided into those who worked at the furnaces, mills, forges and mines, in each of which the men had a different status and pay according to their skills. Over the whole ironworks the ratio of skilled to unskilled was probably 3:7 or 4:6. The former took

<sup>4</sup> H. Scrivenor, *A Comprehensive History of the Iron Trade, throughout the World, from the Earliest Records to the Present Period* (1854), pp. 127, 134, 258.  
<sup>5</sup> E. Powell, *The History of Tredeggar* (1902), p. 24.



great pride in their craft and its customs, and amongst them could be found the last vestiges of the old apprenticeship system. Most of the other workmen were, of course, employed underground, raising iron or coal. So also were their children. William Wood of Abersychan said that in his area, half the young boys under thirteen years of age worked in the mines. The number of women so employed was smaller, perhaps 1 in 20 of the labour force.

The income of the mining population varied according to age, skill and conditions. Amongst the best paid were the rollermen, puddlers and furnacemen, a fact which reflected the tremendous demand in the iron industry for the skilled technician. Such people could expect favourable contracts, and they were prepared to move across the coalfield in search of them. The ordinary colliers were in a weaker bargaining position, except when, as in 1824, farmers and ironmaster competed for their labour. In the 1820s the common monthly contract was replaced at several of the works by a weekly one, and even this was not strictly adhered to. Hundreds of men were discharged without notice; the result was insecurity and constant recrimination. The men were hired and paid by 'gaffers' or 'doggies' (under-agents and master-miners), but each man, once he had reached his seventeenth year, was his own 'undertaker' in that he could pay children to carry his tools or help him in other ways. For most ironworkers, payment was 'by the piece' or 'by the box', a method which inevitably caused trouble. In one of the few surviving lists of workmen's grievances, the Clydach colliers claimed that they were being underpaid because of irregularities in the weighing of coal and because of losses through accidents and human design. The high earnings of colliers were also partly offset by the dangers of the job and by the price of food which was perhaps 10-15 per cent dearer in the 'Black Domain' than at Merthyr.<sup>6</sup>

To the annoyance of employers and commissioners, most of the men of the ironworks were concerned simply to provide food, clothing and shelter for their families, and to enjoy a drink and a rest when possible.<sup>7</sup> It was the general opinion that these families

<sup>6</sup> On the numbers, status, and wages of the workmen, see, for example, P.R.O., H.O. 40/17, 23, 52/9; N.L.W., The Mayberry Papers, no. 3340; A. H. John, op. cit., p. 56; *Select Committee on the Payment of Wages* (1842), p. 87; *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II; *Minutes of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education* (1840), S. Tremenhere, p. 213; E. W. Evans, op. cit., p. 244. The dangers of working in the mines of this area were highlighted by the 'wholesale slaughter' at Risca and elsewhere in the 1840s and '50s (P.R.O., H.O. 45/2770).

<sup>7</sup> Masters and commissioners were obsessed by the fact that men, who worked twelve hours per day at the mines, could earn more if they did 'overtime' or worked more diligently at the beginning of each month.

were well-fed and clothed, having given up their 'frugal habits' on moving to the coalfield. Although several workmen built houses, most seemed content to live in company houses or in those built by speculators. Some dwellings, such as those erected by Richard Johnson at Newtown, near Rhymney Bridge, were large and well spaced, but the majority were confined and damp, with a depressing view of narrow unlit streets, criss-crossed by tramlines. Overcrowding was exceptional, except amongst the Irish, who at Tredegar lived one or two families to a room. Lodging houses in the mining towns were invariably full, and a large proportion of the resident population partitioned bedrooms so that they could accommodate lodgers.

Those who could afford it spent a little money on education and on their chapels, societies and clubs. The number of schools was small; one was established by ironmaster Crawshay Bailey at Nantyglo, and another at Blaenavon, but there was none at Rhymney, Tredegar and Ebbw Vale until the middle years of the century. Most of the mining population received their only formal education at Sunday Schools. The close relationship between minister and workman, and the latter's interest in, and knowledge of, religious subjects frequently amazed visitors. So also did the lack of secular instruction, for lending libraries and mechanics institutes were few and far between.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, means of self-help were not neglected. By the late 1820s, lodges of Oddfellows were attached to some of the leading ironworks. There were also other offshoots of national benefit societies—Druids, Iforites—as well as local products such as the *Cymdeithas Unol y Blaenau* at Nantyglo. The names of several—the Tredegar Firemen Society, the Garndyrris Forge Society—bore witness to the kind of workmen who were their most enthusiastic members.<sup>9</sup> The function of the benefit societies was to give their members financial help at times of sickness or death, although for many people the chief attraction was their conviviality and ceremonies. The colourful annual procession was an important part of life in the valleys, as were the new works' bands. The peculiar character of mining communities of northern Monmouthshire was thus beginning to be formed.

The communities to the south were somewhat different. Here the population depended on the collieries, some of which supplied the

<sup>8</sup> *Committee on Education* (1840), pp. 214, 217.

<sup>9</sup> There is some evidence that these men turned the clubs into political societies, at least during the Reform Crisis (P.R.O., H.O. 52/19; Powell, op. cit., p. 48).

ironworks, whilst others sold coal in the open market at Newport. The expansion of these collieries began in earnest at the turn of the century and reached full momentum in the 1820s. Little capital was needed to open a colliery for the coal could be cut by level, and soon there were a large number of works. The owners of these collieries, men like Thomas Protheroe of Malpas Court, John Hanson, Joseph Beaumont, Rosser Thomas, Martin Morrison, and Thomas Powell, were less united than the ironmasters and less concerned about the welfare of their employees. They were frequently non-resident, preferring to leave their interests in the hands of managers, agents, and contractors.

The villages which grew up around the collieries were smaller than, and of a different character from, those in the northern valleys. They had neither the amenities nor the social structure which could justify their being classified as towns. 'We have no middle-class of tradespeople here', ran a common refrain.<sup>10</sup> Nor were there many divisions within the working class.<sup>11</sup> The master-colliers formed a small *aristocracy* not far removed in wealth and manners from those beneath them. Most of the villagers were 'a vagrant and migratory population' of no particular skills, content to work for farmer, ironmaster or coalowner. When times were good they sometimes saved to buy a house, or possibly more than one, but the main landlords were undoubtedly contractors, tradesmen and innkeepers. Houses were generally separate, clean and well limed, although there were exceptions. Blackwood enjoyed an unenviable reputation in the 1840s for its sanitation and drainage. Ironically the village had been founded by industrialist-landowner and social reformer, John Hodder Moggridge of Woodfield Lodge. In the 1820s he leased land to 'well conducted and industrious' labourers, offered a prize for the best-kept home and garden, and built a market house for the villagers.<sup>12</sup>

Moggridge was one of those who regarded the 'country colliers' of this area as a special race, inferior, both morally and in a 'temporal condition', to workmen elsewhere. Provision for education was minimal, and only the small number of skilled craftsmen in regular employment could afford to give their children its meagre benefits. In Mynyddislwyn parish, which contained almost 6,000 people in

<sup>10</sup> *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II, p. 550.

<sup>11</sup> There were fewer skilled men in this district than in the iron-mining region, but a higher proportion of women and children employed.

<sup>12</sup> See the interesting article by B. Ll. James, 'John Hodder Moggridge and the Founding of Blackwood', *Presenting Monmouthshire*, II, no. 5 (1968).

1841, there was no schoolroom, few chapels and only one church. Unless the cholera stirred primitive fears, the colliers looked elsewhere for enlightenment and enjoyment. For many, an evening's song and dance, together with a 'harp' (pasty) and a drink of ale, was the high-point of the week. Benefit clubs, or their equivalent, were extremely popular, although few societies were attached to the collieries. In the 1830s these clubs were bracketed with 'kidlewinks' (beer-shops) as the cause of excessive drinking and acts of violence.<sup>13</sup>

The real source of the 'ignorance' and desperation of the colliers was short-time work, and recurring unemployment, both slump and seasonal. Those collieries which were associated with the ironworks were naturally affected by fluctuations in the iron trade. In the depression of 1827, when the ironmasters released large quantities of coal onto the market, thereby undercutting the coalowners, hundreds of workmen had to live on the produce of their gardens or resort to begging. Vagrancy was a serious problem in the Monmouthshire valleys, and on more than one occasion marching bands of colliers struck terror into the hearts of the 'respectable' inhabitants of Newport and Pontypool. Pauperism also alarmed magistrates; in May 1829, when the collieries began to discharge large numbers of men, Moggridge complained that most of his time was occupied with removals under the Poor Law.<sup>14</sup>

The sale-coal industry of the county was particularly sensitive to the seasonal demand for coal. Over winter and early spring the works could be at a standstill for almost four months, and during the remainder of the year it was impossible to make up for this loss of earnings. There were stoppages because of bad weather, the scarcity of materials, and hold-ups at the Newport docks, so that the colliers were never sure of two days' consecutive employment. In a year their average wage was possibly as low as 50 per cent of the figures given by employers and commissioners. It was not uncommon for a collier's family to be in a state of semi-starvation. Hence the anxiety of crippled men to continue at work, and to take their children into the levels at an early age.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II, pp. 487, 538-39, 548. E. T. Davies, op. cit., pp. 62-63, gives details of the first temperance societies formed in the county.

<sup>14</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 40/23 (letter of May 1829); E. W. Evans, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> In 1841 three people intimately concerned with the collieries said that the average wage of the colliers seldom exceeded 10s. or 12s., or 14s. before reductions. *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II, pp. 534, 537, 543. Compare E. W. Evans's figures of 22s.-27s. (1839), 21s.-26s. (1840), and 20s. (1841), op. cit., p. 244. For one study of this difficult problem of unemployment and the average wage, see E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (1964), pp. 72-81.



In both regions of the 'Black Domain' the long pay was the norm. Contractors settled with the men once a month or at even longer intervals.<sup>16</sup> The men were paid on a Friday or Saturday (*Sadwrn pai*) with the help of tickets on which were written their weekly advances, together with charges for rent, coal, soap, equipment, the surgeon and the sick-fund. Once this money had been deducted from the wage, the contractors had to pay the men with the gold or £5 notes which they had received from the company. To obtain the necessary change, payment was often made in a public house, for which service the owner expected a small reward. Many agents and contractors kept public houses, or were related to publicans, and in these circumstances the drinking score of the workmen was also stopped from their pay.

The long pay was unpopular, being responsible for many of the strikes at the sale-coal collieries, but the workmen had no practical redress against the practice, at least until the 1830s. Some men tried to obtain credit between pays at small shops, incurring debts as high as £7 or £8. If they later found it difficult to repay the debt—and pressure from shopkeepers was always strongest during a strike—their property was distrained. Partly for this reason most workmen asked their contractors for advances in the weeks before the final pay settlement. These advances were not in the form of cash because money was scarce, especially amongst the small coalowners; instead the men received paper draws which could be exchanged for goods only at selected local shops, or at the company shop.

The company shop played a central part in the life of the mining communities. Situated within easy reach of the works, it sold everything and acted in some places as a post office. At the large iron concerns there was usually only one such shop, which was managed by a person who transacted all the business in his name. According to one who knew the shops well, the lessees either paid a high rent to the proprietors for the privilege of having the custom of the workmen, or gave the masters a percentage of the sales.<sup>17</sup>

The payment of wages in goods increased rapidly during the 1820s, especially at the sale-coal collieries, despite government legislation and a pledge from ironmasters that they would give advances in cash. Magistrates met at Usk in May 1823 to petition

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Thomas Jones, writing of a later period in the history of the south Wales coalfield, could remember seven, nine and even twenty-four weeks passing between settlements, *Rhymney Memories* (1938), p. 105.

<sup>17</sup> *Select Committee on the Payment of Wages* (1842), pp. 111–12. See also T. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Parliament on the matter, but by the end of the decade money wages were so rare at some works that men must have been paying rent, lodgings, and club subscriptions in kind, or simply running into debt. Proceedings were brought against agents of the British Iron and Varteg Companies, but because of ridiculous technicalities they were unsuccessful. The magistrate who heard the men's complaints, John Moggridge, now wrote angry letters to the government denouncing the payment of wages in shop goods as 'that prolific source of discontent with which that part of the country has been afflicted for the last fifteen years . . .' The leading newspaper of south Wales shared this view, as did most of the tradesmen. They protested strongly, and in 1830 several petitions were sent to Parliament from Monmouthshire. The signatories were rewarded a year later by the passing of Littleton's Anti-truck Bill.<sup>18</sup>

The Act proved ineffective because no provisions were made for its enforcement and evasion was easy. A few convictions were obtained, notably on the Glamorgan–Monmouthshire border, and leading employers meeting in 1832 promised to abide by the terms of the Act. Most of the ironmasters and coalowners, however, did no more than go through the motion of paying their men in cash. A favourite ploy was to make wage settlements in the company shops, the men being expected to change their money immediately for goods. In this way the truck system remained powerful and even expanded in some areas. The Hengoed strike of 1841 and the legislation of the following year only mitigated some of its worst features.

It is difficult to find an unbiased picture of the payment of wages in goods.<sup>19</sup> The opponents of the practice believed that it was a means of profit which hindered natural commercial development. Several of the smaller coalowners and contractors were very dependent on the income from the shops, especially when the coal trade was poor.<sup>20</sup> The independent shopkeepers and craftsmen complained bitterly of their grasping attitude: 'The truck system of dealing is so common in the collieries of this district', said a blacksmith of Pontllanfraith

<sup>18</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 40/17, 40/23, 42/180; *The Cambrian*, 31 May 1823, 20 June and 18 July 1829, 20 March and 17 April 1830.

<sup>19</sup> Some observers stressed the value of the practice as:

(1) a means of providing thousands with the necessities of life which they could not have obtained in any other manner;

(2) a deterrent to immorality, insubordination and drunkenness.

Moreover, the truck shops were said to have been vital relief and hire-purchase agencies, especially in the southern district of the 'Black Domain'.

<sup>20</sup> 'The smaller the concern, the poorer the concern, the greater the oppression . . .' *Select Committee on the Payment of Wages* (1842), p. 113.

in 1841, 'that our markets are closed; in the village of Blackwood the whole supply is monopolised by the company shop. The market-house is closed. There is a terrorism existing over the men, and they dare not speak out'. Families were obliged to queue at these shops and purchase goods which they did not want. They grumbled about the quality, the weight and the price of their purchases—'we pay through the nose for everything'.<sup>21</sup> Hence the popularity of trips to Neath, Merthyr, Bridgend, Pontypridd, Pontypool, and Newport. The truck system also penalised the thrifty, encouraged indebtedness, and widened the psychological and social gulf between classes. It was, admitted magistrates and employers at an important Abergavenny meeting in May 1832, amongst the principal and original reasons for the appearance of the 'Scotch Cattle'.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever the *real* value of the payment of wages in goods, it must be remembered that few workmen were free agents, and all feared victimisation. The unwillingness of miners to seek the protection of the law, their demonstrations in favour of truck, and their reluctance to move to 'free' works, need to be considered carefully. This evidence given by one of the organisers of a 'miners' petition inadvertently provides us with a vivid picture of the men's situation :

3063. Are the wages paid monthly?—Yes, they are.
3064. When the accounts are balanced, are not deductions made for their goods which they have got at the shop?—It is not called goods; it is called money; because they have in hand a cheque in the bank, which is supposed to be money.
3065. Then according to your explanations, as soon as the man gets his cheque, he would be able to set off to the public-house and get drink for it?—No, the publican would not cash it.
3066. They have nothing to do but to go to the bank?—That has been done once or twice.
3067. How far is the bank from the works?—Nine miles.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II, pp. 536, 544; *The Cambrian*, 17 April 1830.

<sup>22</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 40/30: Resolutions of 4 May 1832.

<sup>23</sup> *Select Committee on the Payment of Wages* (1842), p. 145. This evidence was given by R. B. Thomas of Maesteg, Glamorgan. Dr. E. W. Evans (op. cit., p. 73) considers that the Maesteg petition indicates the men's favourable attitude to the truck system, but the evidence of Thomas and others casts grave doubts on this interpretation.

For such workmen, the glamour of Merthyr and Pontypool on the fringes of the 'Domain' was closely associated with the attraction of money.

Given these conditions of pay and employment it was not surprising that the people of the 'Black Domain' formed a society of debtors. Miners were sometimes unable to work sufficient hours to pay off the advances in goods which they had received, and so began the *hen gownt* (old account). In 1814 the men of Ebbw Vale ironworks owed the company shop amounts varying from 6d. to £24 5s. The masters and shopkeepers of the north dealt severely with debtors; those with arrears over £1 were refused a discharge-note. The colliers to the south found contractors and storekeepers more 'accommodating'. During the difficult winter months the men were allowed to run up large debts only to be pressed hard for them in the summer or whenever trade was good. At such times the shop ledger became an object of intense hatred.<sup>24</sup>

Most workmen had neither the opportunities nor the inclination to build up reserves of cash. The money that was saved was usually spent on acquiring furnishings for the home, especially mahogany chests of drawers, popular ornate clocks and window sashes. These brought prestige and distinguished one section of the community from another. Rees Jones, an unpopular contractor of Clydach, said that he did not know all his men's wages, but he knew that, unlike him, none of them had window sashes.<sup>25</sup> 'Luxuries' could also be pawned or sold when miners were unable to work, and when they were faced by the heavy expenses of a birth, marriage, or death. The newly-married couple expected gifts, the dead a 'decent funeral'. In an emergency even a wife might be bartered! The rent and the club subscription just went unpaid, and ultimately this meant expulsion. The population of the 'Black Domain' lived in fear of losing job, home, and security; it was as inescapable as pneumoconiosis.

The 'Scotch Cattle' were born of this fear. Their leader, the *Tarw Scotch* (Scotch Bull) proclaimed himself the *gelyn pob dychryndod*

<sup>24</sup> The long-standing debt could be as high as £80 or £100: T. Jones, op. cit., p. 113. For the use of the discharge note by employers, see J. H. Morris and L. Williams, 'The Discharge Note in the South Wales Coal Industry, 1841-1898', *Economic History Review*, X (1957).

<sup>25</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 29 March 1834. For an example of the sale of a wife, see *ibid.*, 7 March 1835. In 1841 the rent of half the houses in Blackwood was unpaid. *Employment of Children* (1842), appendix, part II, p. 550.



(the enemy of all fear). The name of this illegal organisation has puzzled many writers. Thomas Wood, the member of parliament for Brecon, believed that the term was derived from the hides worn by the workmen. Like certain breeds of Scotch cattle the colliers were supposed to be black-faced and ferocious. Dr. Evans, the historian of the south Wales miners, notes that several employers had Scottish cattle.<sup>26</sup> Another explanation—favoured by Professor David Williams—is that the name was adapted from the verb ‘to scotch’, and the present writer—clutching at straws—draws the reader’s attention to the presence on the coalfield of a troop of soldiers known as the Scotch Greys.

The origins of the Cattle are just as mysterious as their name. Several activities which were associated with them, especially the sending of threatening letters, firing of guns and attacks on railroads and canals, were not uncommon in the early years of the nineteenth century, and this would support Charles Wilkins’s contention that the Scotch Cattle first appeared during the years of the Peninsular War.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the leader of the cattle, a man called Ned, was said to have come into south Wales from Staffordshire.<sup>28</sup> The similarity to Nedd Ludd can hardly have been accidental. Significantly, Monmouthshire ironworkers resisted the wage reductions of 1813 by Luddite methods, holding ‘private meetings’, and ‘swearing or as they term it *Twisting in* by Anonymous Letters . . .’<sup>29</sup> According to Wilkins, ‘the Society’ was quickly crushed by the authorities, but it is possible that cells survived and made their own militant contribution to the strikes of 1816, 1818, and 1819. The Cattle did not, however, capture public attention until after 1820.

From 1820 until 1835 their activities continued with one long interruption in the prosperous years of the mid-1820s, when wage increases were obtained at Blaenavon, Clydach, Nantyglo, and elsewhere. In the recessions of 1822, 1830, and 1832, when the ironmasters and coalowners of Brecknockshire and Monmouthshire were forced to reduce wages below those in Glamorgan, and in the difficult but improving years of 1833–34, the Cattle terrorised most of the mining valleys, whilst in 1827 only the colliery villages were affected.<sup>30</sup> There were occasions, too, such as in the summer of 1823

<sup>26</sup> See Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>27</sup> C. Wilkins, *The History of the Iron Steel, Tinplate, and other Trades of Wales* (1903), p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Ignotus’ (pseud.), *The Last Thirty Years in a Mining District* (1867), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 42/133. Letter from W. Forman and others in the spring of 1813.

<sup>30</sup> An interesting feature of the movement is that it was confined to the valleys east of Merthyr, although there were various forms of intimidation reported at Aberdare and Merthyr. See P.R.O., H.O. 52/25; *The Cambrian*, 17 March 1827. In 1850 the ‘Cattle’ seem to have been active at Aberdare (*Monmouthshire Merlin*, 23 March 1850).

or the winter of 1828–29, when the *Tarw Scotch* confined his attention to one works. The violence usually occurred in the winter and spring and it took a variety of forms.

(a) *The meeting at night*

‘Scotching’, said an anonymous writer in 1867, ‘was a means employed by the ignorant and dissatisfied workman to coerce his fellow-labourer and to prevent him working otherwise than according to the united decree, determined at meetings held for that purpose.’<sup>31</sup> The meetings after work on the hill slopes were a traditional way of airing grievances and deciding upon action. In the southern district of the ‘Black Domain’, Crosspenmaen (near Blackwood), which could be reached by five roads, was a favourite spot; sometimes as many as a thousand colliers gathered there. Such places were central but isolated, and consequently there are few reports of what took place at the nightly meetings. One informer, who reached the fringes of a crowd at Sirhowy in October 1816, saw a book being passed from hand to hand.<sup>32</sup> Oaths may have been taken by the men; certainly they were expected to obey the resolutions passed by the majority.

Each of the ironworks had its own leaders, called ‘orators’ or ‘speakers’, men such as ‘Commander’ John (Josiah) Evans of Blaenavon or Harri Lewis (‘Cotton Balls’) of Ebbw Vale. They organised the strike of 1822 which covered a ten-mile area of north-west Monmouthshire and which lasted for thirteen weeks. Much of the responsibility for this strike rested with the ironmasters; faced by a falling demand for iron during the winter of 1821–22 the employers decided to cut their losses at the expense of their colliers. Without notice, to which the men were entitled, the price of cutting coal was savagely reduced from 2s. 4d. to 1s. 3d. per ton. The colliers at Nantyglo responded by leaving their work, and they were eventually joined by men from all the iron concerns. During the next weeks regular meetings were held for the purpose of extending, and then ending, the strike. By mid-June the strike had collapsed at one works after another, and the ‘orators’ were languishing in gaol. At the quarter sessions court, these leaders managed to convince the magistrates of the justice of their action, but from their masters they won only vague concessions which

<sup>31</sup> ‘Ignotus’, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 42/151 (letter from M. Monkhouse, 24 June 1816).



included a promise of weekly cash draws and monthly settlements. This strike of 1822 proved a lesson to the collieries to the south.<sup>33</sup> When their wages were reduced five years later the men protested as one united body, and in the depression of 1830 they held several meetings every week, established committees, and organised a fund for strikers.<sup>34</sup>

If peaceful negotiations failed to achieve their object, another kind of meeting was held on the mountains. Although the authorities could only guess at the business of these gatherings, they could hardly fail to hear them, for they were accompanied by the firing of guns, blowing of horns and beating of drums. Such proceedings, which people associated with the 'Scotch Cattle', often occurred when strikers were beginning to return to work.<sup>35</sup> The main purpose of these nightly demonstrations was to frighten both masters and men, and to consider action against blacklegs and unpopular contractors. Some idea of the militant nature of the discussion can be gauged from this line of a letter sent to Joseph Adams, a collier who lived near Risca church:

'I have twice spoken for your life to be spared, and have nearly lost my own'.<sup>36</sup>

The effect of these violent meetings requires little imagination. On the night of 29 March 1832 all the men at the Blaina ironworks raced home when they heard the sound of a horn and drum from a nearby hill.<sup>37</sup>

(b) *Warning notes and letters.*

The nightly meeting was followed by the sending of threatening notices and letters—an old method of intimidation, but one which the 'Scotch Cattle' made their own. Notices were posted up at the works for the purpose of bringing the men out or, more commonly, of ensuring that no one returned before the strike was over. They were frightening compositions, full of blood-curdling oaths and decorated with sketches of red bulls or other grotesque characters. The two examples below, the second of which was written in 'blood' (i.e. red

<sup>33</sup> The best account of the strike of 1822 is by E. W. Evans, op. cit., pp. 15–17. He gives a long list of sources, *ibid.*, p. 247, n. 2.

<sup>34</sup> On the 1827 strike, see *The Cambrian*, March, April and May 1827; P.R.O., H.O. 40/23, 41/7. For detail of the 1830 troubles, see *The Cambrian*, April and June 1830; P.R.O., H.O. 41/7, 52/9.

<sup>35</sup> The meeting on 9 February 1830, for example, occurred at the Varteg when the colliers were disappointed because their withdrawal of labour and their parades through Pontypool had not impressed their employers. P.R.O., H.O. 52/9; *The Cambrian*, 20 February 1830.

<sup>36</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 8 September 1849.

<sup>37</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/19 (Enclosure in a letter of W. Powell, 31 March 1832).

ink), appeared at ironworks on the opposite borders of the 'Black Domain' during the strikes of 1830 and 1832:

'This is to Certify that Whosoever Will Work on the Varteg will not only have is Goods all the pecises, but will have his Life Lost the first that will go into any of the Levells to cut 1 oz of coal he shall certainly Looss his Life from the 22nd of February.'

'To all Colliers, Traitors, Turncoats and others

We hereby warn you the second and last time. We are determined to draw the hearts out of all the men above named, and fix two of the hearts upon the horns of the Bull; so that everyone may see what is the fate of every traitor—and we know them all. So we testify with our blood.

X

Hoarfrost Castle

April 12th 1832<sup>38</sup>

The appearance of these notices had a tremendous effect, causing instant walk-outs at the collieries of Messrs. Leigh, George and Smith near Pontypool in 1822, and at the Clydach ironworks in October 1833.

Some warnings were directed to particular people, in letters sealed with black wax. Amongst the recipients were the unpopular Clydach agent, Rees Jones, and a person who was known to favour the expulsion of all Scotch Cattle members from Oddfellow societies. 'O Lord, look on thy situation', ran another letter to three Argoed colliers who were working *under price*, for you 'shall be in hell before Monday morning'.<sup>39</sup> The speed with which the *Tarw Scotch* could deliver his message was unnerving. When, on the morning of 17 July 1823, a few colliers decided to return to work at Clydach they had this welcome from the Bull:

'How many times we gave notice to you about going in to work before you settle all together to go on better terms than were before and better than what you ask at present?

<sup>38</sup> These notices can be found in P.R.O., H.O. 52/19 (letter from W. Needham, 20 February 1830); and H.O. 52/21 (Letter from the Marquis of Bute, 28 April 1832).

<sup>39</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 17 May 1834.

'Notice to you David Thomas John, and David Davies, and Andrew Crass, that the Bull and his friends are all alive, and the vale of Llanmarch is wide, and woe shall be to you, since death you shall doubtless have all at once, you may depend upon this. It may be that the night you do not expect, we shall come again, We are not afraid were you to go all at once to work.'<sup>40</sup>

By this intimidation the Clydach colliers were kept on strike, and concessions wrung from employers who had once relied on 'Starvation' working 'wonders'.<sup>41</sup>

(c) *The attack on company property.*

The next stage in the campaign of terror was the attack on property. Those who disobeyed warnings might find that an engine had been damaged, pit props removed or tools burnt. The favourite target was undoubtedly coal wagons, barges, and tram-roads; 'damn you', said one of the 'Cattle's' letters, 'you must not send your coal down to Newport, or else you shall be burned, you and the trams and the coal, to Hell, you damned set of toads that you are'.<sup>42</sup> In 1822, 1830, and 1833 wagons were set on fire and barges sunk. The purpose of this vandalism was to prevent coal from reaching either the ironworks to the north or the ships waiting at the coast. In March 1830 the workmen policed the canals and roads which led from the sale-coal collieries to Newport so effectively that the employers agreed to their demands.<sup>43</sup>

Thanks to the zeal of the magistrates, Moggridge and Powell, vivid accounts exist of attacks on coal wagons in the strike of 1822. The strikers were aware that as long as the ironmasters could obtain coal supplies they could hold out against them. Hence the desperation and anger of the colliers on 2 May. It had been known for some time that large quantities of coal would be taken on that day from Crumlin wharf, at the head of the Monmouthshire Canal, to the ironworks of Messrs. Harfords and Company some ten miles up the Ebbw valley. To prevent trouble, soldiers were stationed at both ends of the route.

<sup>40</sup> This paper was originally written in a mixture of Welsh and English. J. Lloyd, *The Early History of the Old South Wales Iron Works (1760-1840)* (1906), p. 195.

<sup>41</sup> For detail of this strike, see *The Cambrian*, May, June and August 1823; National Library of Wales (N.L.W.), Mayberry Papers, Nos. 3332-3351; and Evans, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

<sup>42</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 February 1843 (reference given by Evans, op. cit., p. 66).

<sup>43</sup> For the destruction in 1830 and 1833, see, for example, P.R.O., H.O. 41/7, 52/9; *The Cambrian*, 4 May 1833.

Before the horse-drawn wagons left Crumlin at about 10 o'clock, a scouting party of the Chepstow yeomanry set off to prevent the destruction of the railroad ahead. They had gone less than a mile along the narrow twisting valley when they saw above them three or four hundred colliers who began to bombard them with rocks. The cavalry made a short retreat, sounded a bugle, and waited for their friends from Crumlin to join them. When the remainder of the yeomanry and the coal wagons arrived, the Reverend James Davies, a magistrate from Usk, attempted without success to disperse the colliers who were by now covering the wooded hillsides. More assistance was obviously needed, and a messenger was sent to Ebbw Vale.

There a small company of the Scotch Greys under the command of Lieutenant Lloyd were ready to move at a moment's notice. They quickly rode within two miles of the besieged yeomanry. Then they ascended the hill above Llanhilleth, and from there, by a detour of three miles, came up behind the colliers. William Powell, who was accompanying these regulars, directed Lieutenant Lloyd to clear the slopes and this was done with the help of bayonets. The wagon drivers were now persuaded, not without some delay, to move forward up the valley.

About two miles above Llanhilleth they stopped again. The road was blocked by overturned wagons, but even when these had been removed the drivers refused to proceed any further. They were afraid of the huge and menacing body of colliers and women that had gathered on the surrounding hills. Edward Frere, the fiery ironmaster-magistrate of Clydach, grabbed hold of the reins of the leading horses in a bid to get things moving, but was struck on the head with a stick. This was the signal for a general assault: the colliers throwing stones and bricks as quickly as they could pick them up until the Greys fired a volley into their midst.

Having scattered the colliers the convoy could now move forward, but progress was slow because the road had been torn up in places and timber placed across the lines. About two or three miles from the last ambush the workmen once again attacked, rolling large stones down the hillside. This time there was no discussion between magistrates and drivers; the Greys dismounted, clambered up the hill and shot several of the mob. The battle was over; for the last few miles to Ebbw Vale the soldiers kept to the high ground. At 9.0 p.m. the coal finally arrived at the ironworks.



Throughout the night noisy bands of men could be heard on the hills overlooking the mining towns. They damaged over thirty coal wagons, pushing some into the Monmouthshire Canal's reservoir at Llanhilleth and burning their contents. One bonfire was still smouldering four days later. There were similar incidents in other areas during the weekend. In the late hours of Sunday and early hours of Monday the iron plates and stone blocks of half-a-mile of the Sirhowy tram-road were ripped up and thrown into the river. This was destruction without parallel in the history of the coalfield.<sup>44</sup>

(d) *The midnight visit.*

Those who ignored the warnings of the *Tarw Scotch* were also subjected to another kind of attack. This was the 'midnight visit', and it was usually carried out by small groups of from ten to twenty miners. The leaders of the party were disguised by masks, handkerchiefs, and cattle skins; the remainder had blackened faces, and wore women's clothes, 'their best clothes', or simply reversed jackets. They announced their arrival by blowing a horn, rattling chains, and making 'low' noises. At the home of their victim the 'Cattle' smashed the windows with stones or pick axes and broke down the door. Once inside, it was a relatively easy matter to destroy the furniture and earthenware, and to set fire to clothes and curtaining. The inhabitant might be ill-treated or given a further warning; then the 'Cattle' disappeared as swiftly as they had arrived, leaving their glistening red mark on the open door.

Those who suffered from their nightly visits were mainly people associated with the ironworks and collieries of the 'Black Domain'. The workmen singled out for punishment by the 'Bull' were the uncommitted, the blackleg, and the strike breaker. A typical victim was David Edwards, a lame collier who in February 1832 travelled northwards to Blaina in search of employment. Prospects were good because many of the men at the ironworks of Messrs. Brown and Company had refused to work under a new contract which had been made necessary by the Anti-truck Act. Edwards agreed to the new terms, but after three or four hours down the pit he heard that the 'Scotch Cattle' were about and he returned to his lodgings. A few days later, he was visited by a large gang and given a light beating. His experience was shared by all the strangers whom Thomas Brown had employed, and by some of the old and 'loyal' workmen.

<sup>44</sup> *The Cambrian*, 4, 11 and 18 May 1822; P.R.O., H.O. 40/17, 52/3.

One of the latter, Thomas Griffith, calculated that the damage of his property amounted to almost £5; he was obliged to borrow even a teacup from his neighbours. 'In Respect of going to Work', he wrote to Thomas Brown after the 'Scotch Cattle' had been to his home, 'I am Ready to your Command if you think propper only I am a feard of my life in til you will pleas to settel som way or a Nother with the men that we may work with peace'.<sup>45</sup>

Amongst the victims of the 'Cattle' during this strike were an agent and a bailiff. Such people were keen businessmen, whom the workmen often associated with unpopular policies. They were 'capable of vindictive feelings towards the operatives', and vice versa.<sup>46</sup> John Wilks, 'a long legged devil', who was agent and surveyor at the Argoed collieries, received advice to 'pray on God for mercy'. The 'Cattle' also visited the homes of David Peregrine, a clerk at Bute, and of an agent working at Llangattock.<sup>47</sup>

Even more vulnerable to the 'midnight terror' were the contractors, the master miners, who were both employers and workmen. These 'doggies' were well known by the men and lived amongst them. Unable to gain consistently high returns from mining, they made the most of their close ties with the public houses and company shops. Their unpopularity was legendary. 'Master, put down these doggys', said a worker to the manager of Clydach ironworks in 1833, 'and you will hear no more of the Scotch Cattle'. Launcelot Powell ignored the advice, and two of his contractors were punished according to the 'Scotch Law'.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most hated man in the mining valleys was the contractor who 'forgot' his working-class origins and sought to obtain the maximum profit from his level or pit. In May 1834 David Jenkins, a haulier who had recently been given a pit at the Bute ironworks, was one of several people accused of working for low prices and of employing day labourers underground. Both these practices made this 'kind, good-hearted' man of the newspapers 'obnoxious to the Scotch Cattle'. Jenkins, and the men who worked with him, were visited at their homes. The pit-master was shaken until he agreed never to work below price again.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/19 (letter from Brown, 30 March 1832, enclosed in one from W. Powell, 31 March 1832). For more detail on the events of 1832, see P.R.O., H.O. 40/30, 52/19; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, March, April and May 1832.

<sup>46</sup> *Commission on Education in Wales* (1847), part II, p. 299.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, *Merthyr Guardian*, May, June and September 1834; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 7 April 1832; P.R.O., H.O. 52/25 (Letter from T. Wood, 6 October 1833).

<sup>48</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 29 March 1834.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 May 1834; P.R.O., H.O. 52/25.

Sometimes the 'Bull' turned his attention to people who were neither employers nor workmen but who were regarded as enemies of the mining communities. Landlords and bailiffs (when making claims for rents and debts) were the most obvious targets, but there were others. In May 1833 every window in the Rhymney Turnpike house was smashed, probably as a reprisal for the recent prosecution of a miner who had refused to pay the toll.<sup>50</sup> To the south-east, in the parish of Bedwellty, several shops were broken into, and their ledgers set on fire. Dr. Thomas Rees of Craig-y-fargod, was particularly unlucky. He was unpopular with the workmen not only because of his shopkeeping but also because he denounced them for drinking heavily and for combining against their employers. In July 1834 about fifty men battered their way into his shop with tram plates, sacked its contents, and threw the ledgers onto the road outside. Thereafter Rees wisely barricaded himself in every night, but six months later the sound of musket fire and the crashing of doors and windows told him that his efforts had been in vain. His furniture was destroyed and his clothes and materials were thrown on the fire. One of the 'Cattle' caught a blazing curtain on the end of his pole, and then mounted the stairs in search of the shop-keeper. Rees, who was hiding in a servant's room, was ferreted out and beaten.<sup>51</sup>

Another shop at Blackwood was 'nearly demolished' in one of the largest raids ever made by the 'Scotch Cattle'. Very early in the morning of 11 April, between 250 and 300 men marched down the Bute or Rhymney railway three abreast. The leaders of the columns had the horns of cattle on their heads, and several men were armed with guns which they repeatedly discharged. At the junction with another railway they divided into two parties, which proceeded with 'sudden and uncouth sounds' to the homes of colliers. One party marched through the village of Trelyn (near Fleur-de-lys), where they posted up warning notices in Welsh and English, and knocked in the windows of almost 100 houses. Then they 'disappeared in a body, leaving not a trace'.<sup>52</sup> Similar gangs visited other colliery villages, dodging the soldiers with contemptuous ease. As a result, the strike, which had begun at Blaina, was extended to most of the works in the southern district of the 'Black Domain'.

<sup>50</sup> *The Cambrian*, 20 April 1833; *Merthyr Guardian*, 11 May 1833.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 26 May, 26 July, and 1 November 1834, and *Merthyr Guardian*, 24 January 1835.

<sup>52</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/21. Letter from J. H. Moggridge, 11 April 1832. See also *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 28 April 1832.

The 'Scotch Cattle' were truly the ghosts of the coalfield. There is no contemporary account of the leadership and organization behind their activities, but some years later an anonymous writer gave this popular version. The leader of the 'Cattle' was called Ned, although his real name was Lolly. 'He' was a typical folk-hero, a protector 'of a quiet harmless disposition, of good education, and superior manners; fond of a song and dance, but very averse to any public-house brawl . . .' Here was the *Rebecca* of the coalfield, and in one of 'his' letters 'he' wrote, very much as 'she' did, of his *naw mil o blant fyddlon* (9,000 faithful children).<sup>53</sup> The followers of both disguised themselves, held nightly meetings, fired guns and sent threatening letters. These practices, which were adapted from centuries-old mock trial (*ceffyl pren*), became fairly widespread in Cardiganshire during the post-war depression, and perhaps migrants from that county were the first 'Bulls of Basan'.<sup>54</sup>

It would be naive to assume that the 'Scotch Cattle' movement did not require considerable organization.<sup>55</sup> There may have been hierarchical and regional divisions. One letter was signed by 'BULL CALF—Risca and Abercarne'.<sup>56</sup> Leaders in one village consulted with their friends in the next, for the evidence supports the claim that blacklegs were not usually attacked by their fellow workmen. 'It appears', said John Moggridge of the incident at Trelyn, 'that the disturbances of the peace came from a distance, and were directed only as to the particular objects of their vengeance probably by persons well acquainted with the spot'.<sup>57</sup> We must not forget that the 'Cattle' were really members of a secret society, which the *Merthyr Guardian* likened to the Irish Terryalts. The work of the 'Cattle' was probably more co-ordinated, continuous and widespread than newspaper reports suggest. They played an important part in the strike of 1823, for instance, but the public of south Wales were not informed of this. The trade union and political clubs of English parentage, with which the 'Cattle' had brief and tenuous connections in 1832 and 1834, never had their continuous appeal. Even a decade later the marching gangs and threatening letters were still the most popular form of protest on the 'Black Domain'.

<sup>53</sup> 'Ignotus', op. cit., p. 5; *Merthyr Guardian*, 17 May 1834.

<sup>54</sup> Biblical comparison used by *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 10 March 1834.

<sup>55</sup> Compare the interpretation of the movement given in the next paragraphs with that of E. W. Evans and E. J. Jones. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations in the next five paragraphs are taken from their works.

<sup>56</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 8 September 1849.

<sup>57</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/21 (letter of 11 April 1832).



The gangs were composed chiefly of colliers. From the court records they do not appear to have been the 'worst elements' of society, but they were undoubtedly the most violent section of the industrial working class. On occasion they threatened to kill the less enthusiastic ironminers. Significantly the Varteg colliers in 1830 were prepared to bargain for the release of their leaders, and ignore an ironminer who had been imprisoned with them.<sup>58</sup> This caste spirit had racial overtones for almost all the 'Cattle' who were apprehended were Welsh-speaking Welshmen, like Will Aberhonddu and Shoni Coal Tar. The age-group of the 'herds' is a more difficult problem. What evidence there is tends to contradict the assumption that these militant colliers were 'the young and unruly members of the working classes'. The average age of those appearing in court was about twenty-seven, ranging from eighteen to thirty-three.

Their victims are less easy to analyse but they do fall into certain social categories. Names such as Withey, Wilkes and Peregrine or Ryan, Hoggerty and Jerry mark many of them out as immigrants. Others like Richard Jones, a miner of Cwm Nant-y-Bwch, between Rhymney works and Tredegar, can be distinguished by their attitudes and domestic conditions. His home was 'remarkably neat and rather better furnished than labourers cottages usually are'. These people were in a difficult dilemma when a strike polarised social divisions and threatened their standard of living. The *Tarw Scotch* knew this, and he took a peculiar delight in destroying their precious clocks and sashes. A typical victim of such an attack was the Irish mason, John Corbet, who lived at Blaen Rhymney. 'Corbet was better off than I', said his neighbour, 'We had no money or watch'. The Irishman, who was in constant employment, earned 18s. a week, and made a little on the side by keeping lodgers, and selling poultry and bacon. His cottage, which was half of a converted farmhouse, was 'pretty well furnished'.<sup>59</sup>

The character of the raids is difficult to describe because of the biased picture which both contemporaries and historians have painted. Newspapers of the time described the 'Cattle' as thieves who terrified innocent women and children. On several occasions—so we are told—only miracles prevented these unmanly brutes from murdering people and setting fire to their homes. In one attack,

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 52/9 (letter from W. Powell, 20 February 1830).

<sup>59</sup> For a little detail on Jones and Corbet, see *Merthyr Guardian*, 14 June, 20 September 1834, and 7 March 1835; *The Cambrian*, 7 March 1835.

reported the *Merthyr Guardian*, an old lady was beaten and her son's blood covered the floor, when, on his own testimony, he received only a cut finger and his mother a knock on the shins.<sup>60</sup> The *Monmouthshire Merlin* also indulged in hyperbole: 'no one can travel from Risca to Tredegar without shuddering at the works of violent and wanton devastation that presents itself to the eye' (July 1834).<sup>61</sup> This kind of evidence has been accepted by the two modern historians who have written of the Scotch Cattle. In 1926 E. J. Jones condemned their 'barbarous activities . . . atrocities perpetrated by gangs of villains', and in a recent book, Dr. Evans calls the movement a 'disreputable' one. 'There were', says the latter, 'at least as many criminals as idealists among the Scotch Cattle.'

Many attacks, Dr. Evans believes, were simply an excuse for robbery and pillage. This seems doubtful, for almost all the claims that goods and cash had been stolen were not substantiated in court. In particular, the 'Cattle' were said never to have touched food, nor the furniture on which it rested. The only proven case of stealing in these years occurred at the shop of Dr. Thomas Rees in January 1835, but this was probably more an act of revenge than an ordinary act of larceny. The 'Cattle' had a singleness of purpose which, said a writer who could remember them, was to terrify and not to steal.

He also stated that the occupant of a house was rarely molested unless he offered resistance.<sup>62</sup> Although this opinion appears strange in view of the reports of broken arms and legs, there may have been some truth in it. On their first visit it was common for the 'Cattle' to ignore victims such as David Jenkins and Thomas Rees. The latter suffered more when their houses were broken into for the second time, but the firing of guns was intended only to frighten, and the beatings were usually slight. There were several instances of a gang restraining its most militant members. William Jones, a miner of Blaencarno in the parish of Gelligaer, was particularly fortunate. He had just moved to the area, and was working under price with the unpopular David Jenkins. On the 'Cattle's' second visit to his home, he failed to prevent them entering the bedroom. He dived under the bed but the disguised colliers grabbed his legs.

<sup>60</sup> Edition of 17 May 1834; P.R.O., H.O. 52/25 (deposition of D. Jenkins, May 1834). *Merthyr Guardian* was a ferociously Tory newspaper which attacked the 'Scotch Cattle' week after week. See R. D. Rees, 'Glamorgan Newspapers under the Stamp Acts', *Morgannwg*, III (1959), 73.

<sup>61</sup> Edition of 26 July 1834.

<sup>62</sup> 'Ignotus', op. cit., p. 6; see also P.R.O., H.O. 52/23. For reports of broken arms, etc., see *Merthyr Guardian*, 17 May and 14 June 1834.

Desperately he clung to the bed whilst his wife held onto his waist. 'Damn you', the colliers shouted, 'you are not aware of the costs we are at in coming across the country so far for the sake of such tackle as you are'. Jones said he would go down on his knees to them if they would save his life—they then loosed me & told me to run away'. On the previous night the 'Cattle' had passed by the home of 'William Jones Rumney', a proud and independent miner who, unlike his namesake, had been at the Bute works for five years. 'We know your condition', the gang cried, 'but we don't do this for your sake but for the sake of your wife and your children'.<sup>63</sup>

Very few of the ironmasters and coalowners were attacked by the 'Cattle'. The worst incidents occurred in the spring of 1832 when the Browns of Blaina were hooted and pelted, and when windows were smashed in the homes of Moggridge and Powell. Yet during the same strike, Thomas Brown, his two sons and two agents, were able to walk alongside a 'Herd' for a few hundred yards without being assaulted.<sup>64</sup> Two years later another gang came upon Johnson, the proprietor of Bute ironworks, who was armed but alone. Although they also carried guns, they ran off when he fired at them.<sup>65</sup>

The purpose of most of the 'Cattle' attacks was to impose collective action on people who had neither an industrial tradition nor a strong bargaining position. The men at each works had to be prevented from cutting one another's throat. When Argoed colliers did not stand together in the spring strike of 1834 the *Tarw Scotch* was hurt and annoyed—'and you all Brothers . . .' 'You may think you are all independent', ran another letter to the Risca colliers, 'but unless you comply with our terms we will show you the worth of your lives'.<sup>66</sup> To extend a strike across several semi-isolated communities was an extremely difficult task. The Clydach colliers failed to do so in 1823, but by the early 1830s the ironworkers could bring the men of the collieries into their fight and vice versa. It was a remarkable achievement.

The 'Cattle' were opposed not only to wage reductions but also to the long pay and high shop prices. This resistance was, however, more sophisticated than appears at first glance. Necessary cuts at

<sup>63</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/25 (depositions of the two miners, May 1834).

<sup>64</sup> *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 7 April and 26 May 1832; *The Cambrian*, 21 April 1832; P.R.O., H.O. 52/19 (deposition of T. Brown, 7 March 1832). There was also an attempt to break into Woodfield House in 1833.

<sup>65</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 7 June 1834; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 14 June 1834.

<sup>66</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 17 May 1834; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 4 March 1843.

some works were accepted by the men, as were certain aspects of the truck system. Even in 1822, when their wages were lowered by 46 per cent, what they objected to most was that their employers had not given them the required month's notice of a reduction.<sup>67</sup> The men had their 'rights'; they were not prepared to be humiliated by 'tyrants'. Like guildsmen of old, the iron miners also wanted to fix the numbers of their workmen and restrict the output of ore. The permission of the 'Cattle' was needed before strangers or day labourers could be taken underground and taught the secrets of the trade. Disobedience brought a warning, and then punishment. 'The only reason assigned for these (Tredegar) men being attacked', said their master Samuel Homfray in June 1834, 'is that they are learning men to be miners; . . .'<sup>68</sup> The colliers were concerned, too, about the level of output and the selling price of coal at Newport. In 1830 the men of Crumlin and neighbouring works forced their contractors to limit production so that the price of coal would rise, a policy which was later adopted by the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union.

This collective action which was imposed by the *Tarw Scotch* was only one aspect of the strong communal feeling that has remained a feature of the 'Black Domain'. There was a tremendous amount of loyalty, kindness and self-sacrifice in the colliery villages. Typical comments from observers were: 'Workmen almost invariably, stuck together right or wrong, . . .' 'The work-people are very kind to each other, and will help each other in time of distress to an extent that would scarcely be believed, . . .'

These characteristics were very evident during a strike when shopkeepers refused to give credit. 'It is almost impossible to say how the men supported themselves', was a common remark; 'there was no attempt at plunder'.<sup>69</sup> When the miners' leaders were apprehended they were quickly rescued or the strike called off on the promise of their release. In May 1830 a group of people proudly told John Moggridge's family that the magistrate had just lost another prisoner.<sup>70</sup> If a miner appeared in court he was supported by large cheering crowds.

<sup>67</sup> Powell, op. cit., p. 41. This feeling of humiliation is a vital factor behind many strikes of the period. See I. G. Jones, 'The Merthyr of Henry Richard' in Glanmor Williams (ed.), *Merthyr Politics* (1966), p. 44.

<sup>68</sup> The activities of the 'Cattle' at this time were probably connected with the trade union movement. See P.R.O., H.O. 52/25 (letter of 13 June 1834).

<sup>69</sup> *Commission on Education in Wales* (1847), part II, p. 300; *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II, pp. 545-46, 592.

<sup>70</sup> P.R.O., H.O. 52/9 (letter from J. H. Moggridge, 11 May 1830).



The mining communities had their own code of conduct, of which the 'Scotch Law' was a part. Those who broke the code were ostracized. At one colliery the men demanded the dismissal of a steward whom they accused of favouring his own family in the distribution of work. Similarly, the colliers refused to work with people who had testified against their friends in court, whilst those who acted as special constables could expect to have their homes attacked.<sup>71</sup> James Hodge of Blackwood committed the unpardonable offence of turning Queen's evidence against John Frost and the other Chartist prisoners in 1839-40. No one in the village spoke to him, his house was stoned, and a bloodstained note was pushed under his door. He left in a hurry. The Irish and English immigrants also suffered. The Commission of Inquiry into Education in Wales (1847) reported that the prevailing sentiment in the mining villages was that if the Government wanted to help the workmen, it had better 'tackle their masters' and stop the Irish coming in. A few years earlier, Chartism had seemed the best solution, and everyone was expected to support the movement. 'We were not Chartists', said Sarah Edwards of *The Greyhound*, Pontllanfraith, 'but we were afraid to say so to the colliers'. At Blackwood, which had perhaps the largest percentage of Chartists in Wales, the colliers were told that only those with a Chartist ticket would be allowed down the pits. The final preparations for the Newport rising were probably made at Blackwood, and certainly the keenest supporters of Frost, Williams, and Jones came from the 'Scotch Cattle' areas. The disappointed miners threatened to 'scotch' the men from Merthyr who had refused to march on Newport.<sup>72</sup>

The greatest tribute to the unity and discipline in the mining valleys was the immense difficulty experienced by the authorities in convicting a member of the 'Cattle'. Magistrates gritted their teeth when someone at the Home Department talked smugly of 'the Terror of the Law'. The disguise of the colliers, and the rule that blacklegs were never visited by their fellow workmen, made detection a problem. The code ('Scotch Law') rendered it almost impossible. Those who went on raids were told that their families would be provided for in case of accident. The informer, on the other hand, could expect no mercy. The result was a conspiracy of silence which

<sup>71</sup> *Employment of Children in Mines* (1842), appendix, part II, p. 529; *The Cambrian*, 22 February 1840; H.O. 52/22 (letter from J. H. Moggridge, 24 May 1833).

<sup>72</sup> *Commission on Education in Wales* (1847), part II, p. 293. There were several attacks on Irish and English workmen in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s. For the material on Chartism, see David Williams, *John Frost* (1939), and N.L.W., MS. 16,157 B (reference kindly provided by Dr. W. R. Lambert).

made such an impression on the government inspector investigating the Newport Rising. No one 'of the same class' could be found 'to give the slightest information that may lead to the detection of the villains'.<sup>73</sup>

The machinery of law and order was partly responsible for this state of affairs. Magistrates were few in number and divided on how to deal with the recurring industrial unrest. Constables and specials could be completely ineffective in the mountainous terrain, whilst employers gave only fitful and half-hearted support, depending on the state of their business. On the other hand, there were several justices of the peace, notably the Reverend William Powell and John Moggridge, together with ironmaster Frere and Homfray, who were not only keen to apprehend the 'Cattle', but also brought in soldiers whenever necessary. Yet their failure was so obvious that in 1834 organs of 'respectable' public opinion demanded immediate action from government ministers. An editorial in the *Merthyr Guardian* buttressed its request by this moving picture of a visitor to the 'Black Domain':

'The way-faring traveller passes the scene of outrages often bordering on murder, in silence and fear; no sound escapes his pale lips, no gesture indicates the tragedy of which he is a witness; for all that he sees is a living proof, that from Dowlais to Abergavenny, TO HIM THERE IS NO LAW'.<sup>74</sup>

In the summer of 1834 the rising tide of trade unionism and a return of the 'midnight terror' at Rhymney and Tredegar convinced magistrates and employers of the wisdom of taking a firm stand. At a general meeting on 13 June they decided to crush the men's organisations and form their own mountain police of armed out-pensioners. All workmen were required to sign a declaration that they were not members of a union or secret society. After some resistance, especially by the miners of Blaenavon and the Varteg, they agreed to do so. The Calvinistic Methodists and the Independent Order of Oddfellows added their weight to this campaign, whilst the government trebled the rewards offered by private individuals for information leading to the arrest of the 'Scotch Cattle'.

This onslaught produced some results. Complaints by victims of night raids, which had been unheard of before 1832, now became more common. Yet it was still difficult to indict the 'Cattle' for

<sup>73</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 1 November 1834.

<sup>74</sup> Edition of 14 June 1834.

a serious offence because they were usually unarmed and made no effort to steal. Moreover, the evidence against them was often shaky: a child of eight years who was almost inarticulate, and a husband and wife who contradicted each other were not the most convincing witnesses.<sup>75</sup> The colliers managed to give an air of farce to such legal proceedings:

'David Elias (defendant)—"I have known John Corbet for a year".

Corbet—"I am sure he is the man that struck me".

David Elias—"It must be my spirit that you saw". (*Laughter*)

Corbet—"No, no; a spirit does not hit such hard blows".'

(Examination of prisoners before magistrates  
J. B. Bruce and W. Thomas, September 1834)<sup>76</sup>

Frustrated employers and magistrates were obliged to proceed against the workmen as a body, deducting money from their wages or fining a hundred for damages to property.

The breakthrough came in 1835 at the Monmouthshire Spring Assizes. Three of the 'Cattle' were sentenced to death. The sentence on John James (Shoni Coal Tar), and William Jenkins, who were convicted of burglary at Dr. Rees's shop, was commuted to transportation for life, but Edward Morgan, a thirty-two year old miner, was not reprieved. The incident involving Morgan occurred at the home of Thomas Thomas in the parish of Bedwelty. For some time the *Tarw Scotch* had warned a contractor at the Havodynyscloed (Hafod-yr-ynys?) colliery to sack Thomas and other workmen. The visit to his house was not therefore unexpected but it seems that the gang wanted only to break down the door and windows. On hearing the 'Cattle', Thomas hid under the bed, whilst his wife descended the stairs and tried to close the door with a broom. Someone fired a shot into the house, hitting Joan Thomas above the elbow. Her husband, who was scared out of his wits, waited several hours before sending for a doctor. Joan died a few days later, and it was for her murder that Edward Morgan stood trial at the Monmouthshire Assizes. Amongst the men brought into the witness box was fellow workman, William Lewis, who refused to give evidence in English, although he was said to have

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 16 August 1834; *The Cambrian*, 7 March 1835.

<sup>76</sup> *Merthyr Guardian*, 20 September 1834.

spoken it well, and the hated agent, John Wilks. The jury found the prisoner guilty, but recommended mercy on the grounds that Morgan did not fire the shot. Having been wanted for so many years, however, the authorities were in no mood to heed such pleas, and on 6 April the miner was hanged at Monmouth gaol in the presence of a large crowd of workmen. This was sweet revenge indeed; in the *Monmouthshire Merlin's* gory description of Morgan's death agonies one can sense the triumph.<sup>77</sup>

Edward Morgan became one of the martyrs of the coalfield, another Dic Penderyn. Myths soon began to grow around the murder and the execution. It was said, for instance, that Ned, the leader of the 'Scotch Cattle', left south Wales at this time. Yet his violent methods, like *taxation populaire*, remained one of the important elements of working-class action which were later fused together into the Chartist movement. Significantly, Blackwood and other villages on the 'Black Domain' were centres of bitter physical-force Chartism. 'I will tell you, Mr. Frost', the Chartist delegate of Abersychan is reported to have said, 'the condition upon which my lodge will rise . . . we shall not rise until you give us a list of those we have to remove—to kill'.<sup>78</sup> Partly because of Chartism, the 'Cattle' were less prominent in the mining valleys after the mid-1830s: newspapers wrote of 'this anomalous herd', and even the colliers admitted that in certain areas the 'Bull' was 'a stranger with you all . . . now'.<sup>79</sup> Each new outrage produced spasms of protests from the local *Merlin*—'have they forgotten John [Edward] Morgan at Monmouth Jail?'<sup>80</sup> No one had of course, for this was the great reality: 'famine' and 'distress' were never buried but the miners' leaders certainly were.

Swansea.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 11 November 1834, and 11 April 1835; *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 November 1834, and 11 April 1835; D. Williams, *John Frost*, pp. 117–18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>79</sup> Comments about the Risca strike, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 4 March 1843. The 'Cattle' were prominent in the winters of 1836–37, 1842–43, and in the autumn of 1849. According to E. W. Evans, the last report of their activities comes from Aberdare in 1850: *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>80</sup> See, for instance, *Monmouthshire Merlin*, 11 February 1837 and 18 February 1843.