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**'All Men Out and All Men In':**

**What does the relationship between the Taff Vale Railway Company and their workforce indicate about industrial relations within this South Wales railway at the end of the nineteenth century?**

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**30 May 2019**

**Dissertation for module A329 'The making of Welsh History'**

## Contents

Abbreviations	3
Chapter One – Introduction	4
Chapter Two – John Ewington	10
Chapter Three – Importing Men	18
Chapter Four – Conclusion	27
Appendices	
Appendix A – Timeline	31
Appendix B – Map of the Taff Vale Railway Company Network	33
Appendix C – Map of the location of signal boxes at Pontcynon and Treherbert in relation to John Ewington’s home	34
Appendix D - Taff Vale Railway Company: Invitation for Applicants	35
Appendix E - The Blackleg Circular: Are you willing to be known as a Blackleg?	36
Appendix F - ASRS Notes	37
Bibliography	
Primary Sources	38
Secondary Sources	43

## **Abbreviations**

ASRS	Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants Trade Union
TVR	Taff Vale Railway Company

## Chapter One

### Introduction

At midnight on 19 August 1900 the men of the Taff Vale Railway Company (TVR) went out on strike.<sup>1</sup> The railway's 124 mile long network (see Appendix B), which was one of the largest coal-carrying lines in Britain, formed a vital connection between more than seventy pits in the Glamorganshire coalfields and the docks at Cardiff.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, any withdrawal of labour had serious implications for the whole region. The *South Wales Daily News* predicted that 'if the struggle is prolonged, nearly 40,000 miners will...of necessity cease work, and the accustomed shipments from South Wales ports will be decreased by 200,000 tons per week'.<sup>3</sup> On 21 August the *Evening Express* reported 'the collieries in this district are at a standstill owing to the "stop-trucks" occasioned by the strike, and, consequently, thousands of men are idle',<sup>4</sup> whilst later in the week there were reports of men being discharged at the docks in Cardiff.<sup>5</sup> The action taken by 1,227 men, representing 98 per cent of the labour force, was 'the most complete yet organised on any railway in Britain'.<sup>6</sup> Unbeknown to them their actions would have far-reaching consequences. An injunction brought by the TVR against the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants trade union (ASRS) resulted in a landmark Law Lords' ruling that deprived trade unions of their legal immunity meaning that they could be held liable for losses suffered by an employer.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: The History of the National Union of Railwaymen* (London, 1963) p.212

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Davies (Ed.) *The South Wales Coal Annual for 1908* (Cardiff, 1908) p.168. The TVR carried eighteen million tons of coal per annum.

<sup>3</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (22 August 1900), 'A Horrible Prospect, The Real Bone of Contention' p.6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3746435/3746441/124/> (Accessed 12 May 2019)

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Express*, (21 August 1900), 'Position in the Rhondda, Collieries Stopped', p.3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3471566/3471569/30/> (Accessed 10 May 2019)

<sup>5</sup> *The Western Mail*, (23 August 1900), 'Futile attempts at Peace', p.5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4341845/4341850/68/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>6</sup> Philip S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.216

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Brodie, 'Taff Vale Railway Company versus Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants' in *The New Oxford Companion to Law* (Oxford, 2008), Available at <https://www-oxfordreference->

The judgement, which cost the ASRS a total of £42,000,<sup>8</sup> is considered to be one of the motivating factors behind the formation of the Labour party.<sup>9</sup> The passing of the Trade Disputes Act of 1906 denounced the 1901 Law Lords' ruling, thereby affording unions indemnification against civil proceedings and protection against claims for damages.<sup>10</sup> In their 1906 AGM souvenir booklet, the ASRS noted that the failure of the strike and the very action that had sought to quash union action ultimately 'produced results far more beneficial and widespread than its success could possibly have accomplished'.<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand the reasons for the dispute, it is important to place it within the economic, regulatory and political context that created the volatile environment of 1900. From its opening in 1841 until 1889 'no other important railway in the country paid such consistently high dividends'; however, a combination of rising costs, declining income and increasing local competition had serious economic consequences and returns to shareholders slumped.<sup>12</sup> Increased government intervention to improve safety and fix rates for passengers prevented railways from increasing their charges.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Boer War, which generated high demands for Welsh coal thereby creating a boon for colliers and ship owners that supported wage increases in those industries, compounded problems for the railways

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com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199290543.001.0001/acref-9780199290543-e-2150 (Accessed 4 March 2019). Legal picketing was limited and strike action rendered a powerless weapon

<sup>8</sup> Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.224

<sup>9</sup> 'The TVR case created the Labour party' G.D.H. Cole cited in John Davies, *A History of Wales* (2007) p.466

<sup>10</sup> John Butt, 'Trade Disputes Act, 1906' in *The Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford 2015), Available at <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199677832.001.0001/acref-9780199677832-e-4241> (Accessed 17 April 2019)

<sup>11</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/4/11/1 ASRS Reception Committee: '*Annual General Meeting Souvenir*', Cardiff 1906

<sup>12</sup> Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.209. Barry Railway opened in 1889 introducing competition the TVR had not previously experienced. In the ten years prior to 1891 dividends had averaged 12¾ per cent a year. By 1891 this had fallen to 2¼ per cent.

<sup>13</sup> The Liberal Act 1894 and the Railway Hours Act 1893 cited in Geoffrey Alderman, 'The Railway Companies and the Growth of Trade Unionism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' in *The Historical Journal*. Cambridge University Press, 14(1) (2000) pp. 129–152.

in South Wales who were constrained by historic agreements to maintain prices whilst living expenses rose<sup>14</sup>. *The Rhondda Leader* reported that ‘almost without exception, all workmen have received an increase in wages other than railwaymen’.<sup>15</sup> Whilst the TVR management sought to restore dividends to their former levels, their increasingly self-assured workforce were prepared to take action to demand advances in wages, shorter hours and the right to representation.

Much has been written about the strike, primarily focusing on the legal and political implications of the resultant court cases. Consequently, this dissertation will take a different approach and explore the relationship between the TVR and their workforce in order to consider what this indicates about industrial relations within the railway at the end of the nineteenth-century. The work that most comprehensively considers the industrial relations aspect of the dispute is Philip Bagwell’s 1963 publication, *The Railwaymen: The History of the National Union of Railwaymen*. Bagwell, described as ‘having an unshakable faith in socialist solutions’, was commissioned to undertake this research by the union.<sup>16</sup> He describes the change in industrial relations on the TVR, commenting that in 1890 they were ‘as harmonious as on any railway in the country. Ten years later they could scarcely have been worse’.<sup>17</sup> The former ASLEF union member<sup>18</sup> Frank McKenna is considerably more forthright in his condemnation of the TVR management arguing that the Taff Vale men were ‘ready to break from their industrial prison’.<sup>19</sup> By complete contrast, in his 1959 work *British*

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<sup>14</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/10 King's Bench: *The Taff Vale Railway v The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants* printed first day's proceedings, 3 Dec 1900, p.22. Claim that the average railwayman’s living expenses had increased by 5<sup>s</sup> a week since the war began.

<sup>15</sup> *The Rhondda Leader*, (25 August 1900), ‘The Taff Vale Strike’ p.5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3826641/3826646/39/> (Accessed 16 May 2019)

<sup>16</sup> Terry Gourvish, ‘Philip Sidney Bagwell’ in *The Journal of Transport History*, 27(2), p.xv (2006)

<sup>17</sup> Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.208.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen McKenna ‘Frank McKenna obituary’ in *Guardian* (2013)

<sup>19</sup> Frank McKenna, ‘Victorian Railway Workers’, in *History Workshop*, No. 1 (Spring, 1976), p.61

*Railway History*, the railway enthusiast Cuthbert Hamilton Ellis, described as someone who ‘reflected the glory of the railways’<sup>20</sup> commended the TVR’s paternal benevolence by asking ‘who, under such liberal management, would wish for union protection?’<sup>21</sup> These publications provide valuable reference material; however, their age and the inherent bias of the authors must be acknowledged.

More recently Harvey and Press in their article ‘Management and the Taff Vale Strike of 1900’ focused on the perspectives and actions of management suggesting that the TVR carefully manipulated the situation to win a crushing victory that shifted the balance between capital and labour to favour the railway.<sup>22</sup> In his Ph.D. thesis *Revolt and Revival in the Valleys*, Clark used TVR management records to investigate the dispute within a wider holistic study of the TVR workforce whilst also considering the significance of the General Manager, Ammon Beasley’s character and management style on industrial relations. Clark describes him as a principled man who stood out in TVR labour relations history, albeit that ultimately his obstinacy achieved ‘the very opposite of the principle for which he was fighting’.<sup>23</sup> This dissertation will explore records kept by the ASRS and the men themselves that were not used by these historians to build on their research and will adopt a case study approach in order to consider two important areas that expose the nature of industrial relations at the TVR at the end of the nineteenth-century.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, (29 July 1987) ‘Mr Cuthbert Hamilton Ellis’, p.14. Available at <http://tinyurl.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tinyurl/9ZwUn6> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

<sup>21</sup> Cuthbert Hamilton Ellis, *British Railway History: An Outline from the Accession of William IV to the Nationalization of Railways 1877-1947* (London, 1959) p.225

<sup>22</sup> Charles Harvey and Jon Press, ‘Management and the Taff Vale Strike of 1900’ in *Business History*, 42:2 (2000) p.82

<sup>23</sup> Dudley Clark, *Revolt and Revival in the Valleys: The Influence of Religion and Revivalism on the Politics and Labour Relations of the Taff Vale Railway, South Wales, 1878-1914*. The University of Leeds. p.246. [Online] Available at <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/12753/1/595653.pdf> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

Chapter two focuses on the case of John Ewington, the signalman whose relationship with the TVR management was the catalyst for strike action, by examining detailed statements written by Ewington and Beasley that also include copies of letters written by other related parties. When, after twenty years' service, this ASRS union representative who had been secretary of the Abercynon branch for the last ten years<sup>24</sup> was told he had been promoted and was consequently expected to make a completely unworkable move to a signal box sixteen miles from home the men considered he had been victimised because of his union activities. Ewington decided to put his case in the hands of the union and the men overwhelmingly supported him. The evidence this chapter considers suggests that the TVR directors, in seeking to impede trade union activity within the railway were able to remove Ewington from their employment whilst maintaining that the move constituted a promotion. However, the situation was more complex than a simple case of victimisation. The ASRS were able to use the treatment of Ewington, which on its own would have been unlikely to have resulted in strike action, to aggravate underlying unrest within the workforce and incite the men to send in their notices. Chapter three examines the meticulously kept Men's Committee Minute Book and affidavits sworn at the time of the strike to explore the TVR's use of imported labour. It will consider the TVR management's intransigent refusal to agree to meet with ASRS representatives, which it was widely agreed would have been likely to avert strike action and their preference to instead import completely unknown 'blackleg' labour to work on their railway. Both case studies demonstrate that the relationship between the TVR and their workforce at the end of the nineteenth century was poor. Management resolutely refused any trade union

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<sup>24</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (30 July 1900) 'Trouble on the T.V.R., Alleged victimising' p.6 Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3746255/3746261/143/> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

involvement in their railway, believing this policy would allow them to retain absolute control that was considered necessary in order to deliver the financial returns shareholders expected. At the same time, economic and political awareness was growing within an increasingly self-confidence workforce<sup>25</sup> who demanded improved working conditions and the right to be heard through trade union representation.

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880 – 1980* (Oxford, 1981) p.80

## Chapter Two

### John Ewington

Signalman John Ewington had spent what he described as 'the best years of [his] life'<sup>26</sup> working for the TVR. Nevertheless, in April 1900, despite pleading to remain at the Pontcynon signal box where he had worked for the past ten years, he was instructed to move to another box sixteen miles from his home on the basis that he had been promoted<sup>27</sup> (see Appendix C). This instruction to relocate to Treherbert ultimately incited strike action and resulted in Ewington losing his job. Ewington was an active member of the ASRS and had been a member of a deputation that made representations to the TVR directors regarding wages and conditions of service in February and March 1900.<sup>28</sup> Whilst the TVR agreed to meet with groups of employees, they consistently adopted a staunchly anti-union stance refusing to meet with any union representatives or to acknowledge any arrangement for collectivism. When the settlement terms of the strike were being negotiated it was agreed that Ewington's case would be submitted to Lord Ritchie, President of the Board of Trade for arbitration. He ruled that the final offer Ewington received was 'liberal and removed any ground of complaint'.<sup>29</sup> However, there is a substantial amount of evidence that opposes this view and suggests that the TVR directors, who sought to block trade union activity within the railway, were able to remove Ewington, who they considered

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<sup>26</sup> MRC MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/10. Edward Clarke, Counsel for the plaintiffs, High Court of Justice, Kings Bench Division, *The Taff Vale Railway v The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants*, printed first day's proceedings, 3 December 1902 p.15. Quotation from a letter used in evidence written by John Ewington to Richard Bell

<sup>27</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906) Q.1110

<sup>28</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906) Q.1109

<sup>29</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Letter from Lord Ritchie, Chairman of the Board of Trade, 20 October 1900

to be a union agitator, from their employment whilst maintaining throughout the subsequent investigations and court action that the move to another signal box constituted a promotion. Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook the advantage that the ASRS was able to gain from the situation. The TVR's treatment of Ewington created circumstances whereby the union was able to exploit the workforce's underlying discontent, the result being that when Ewington placed his future in their hands the substance of the dispute changed from personal victimisation to become a principled dispute between the TVR management and their workforce.

The evidence available suggests that far from being offered a promotion that he could accept or reject as he desired, Ewington was given no choice about the move to Treherbert. In mid-April 1900 he was informed by letter about the vacancy and asked if he would elect to go there.<sup>30</sup> At this time, it appeared that he was being offered a choice. By the end of the month the tone had changed dramatically; Blake, the station master, was instructed to send Ewington to fill the vacancy and Ewington was required to teach his job to another signaller who was posted to Pontcynon.<sup>31</sup> In a meeting on 5 May with Harland, the superintendent of the line, Ewington stressed that 'no other signaller had ever been compelled to accept promotion'.<sup>32</sup> However, in his statement Beasley confirmed that the relocation of other men that resulted as a consequence of Ewington's proposed move to Treherbert were initiated before Ewington had been informed of the transfer and that consequently the TVR management had no alternative but to confirm his appointment and inform him to move.<sup>33</sup> When Beasley

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<sup>30</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, general secretary of the ASRS, about the particulars of his case, 7 September 1900, p.1

<sup>31</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.2

<sup>32</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.3

<sup>33</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Ammon Beasley, Statement of facts relating to Signaller Ewington, 26 September 1900, p.3

gave evidence to the 1906 Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations,<sup>34</sup> he consistently referred to Ewington being offered a promotion, but if the position at Treherbert was a genuine offer Ewington would have had the opportunity to refuse it. Ewington was given no choice, he had been forced to leave the post at Pontcynon. It was not an offer; it was an order.

The TVR management prided themselves on being progressive employers with a generous paternalistic policy;<sup>35</sup> however, in Ewington's case they exhibited cold-hearted and dispassionate authoritarianism. Having been employed by the TVR for twenty years, during which time 'no fault whatever could be found with his work',<sup>36</sup> Ewington was removed from the Pontcynon signal box, which was situated a short walk from the home he shared with his wife and ten children<sup>37</sup> (see Appendix C). This location was important to him because following the death of their son Archie, who had been killed in 1897 whilst playing on the railway line,<sup>38</sup> his wife suffered from poor health and they relied on support from her mother and sisters.<sup>39</sup> For Ewington, a move to the Treherbert signal box, which was located on a branch line in another valley (see Appendix B), would have been domestically impossible. Ewington ensured that Harland was fully aware of his family circumstances; nevertheless, despite pleading with him to be allowed to remain, the TVR management maintained a detached stance

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<sup>34</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906)

<sup>35</sup> The TVR were particularly proud of the pension that was given to men aged over sixty years who met the appropriate criteria and had completed at least twenty-five years' service. Details provided in 12<sup>th</sup> Day Appendix No. 2, *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906), Statement re pension allowances for wages paid staff on the Taff Vale Railway, handed in by A Beasley in relation to Q1099.

<sup>36</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27. John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, description of conversation between Mr Harland and John Ewington, 24 July 1900 p.4

<sup>37</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27. John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.2

<sup>38</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (17 July 1897), 'Child killed at Abercynon' p.4 Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3739131/3739135/66/Ewington> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

<sup>39</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27. John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.2

insisting that the company wanted to move him because he had revealed as part of the deputation earlier in the year that he was not satisfied.<sup>40</sup> Whilst the TVR management would have been aware that it was the intention of this deputation to represent the views of the workforce, it appears that they chose to interpret it as an individual grievance to justify their actions.

At the time when Ewington was instructed to move to Treherbert and during subsequent months the TVR experienced a shortage of signalmen, yet, when Ewington was unable to move he was told that no other vacancies existed. On 28 April, in the same letter that Blake instructed Ewington to move to Treherbert he also wrote that he was 'so short of staff' that he could not spare him until some of the vacancies had been filled up.<sup>41</sup> This being the case it is difficult to understand the operational benefit that the TVR would realise by moving Ewington. The situation was complicated by Ewington's absence from work between 8 May and 24 July when he was seriously ill with Rheumatic fever.<sup>42</sup> By the time of his return both the post at Pontcynon and that at Treherbert had been filled and in a letter dated 23 July, Harland stated that 'there was no vacancy for a signaller at present'.<sup>43</sup> In response to Ewington's claim that the posts had been filled up much quicker than was normally the case when there was an absence due to sickness,<sup>44</sup> Beasley defended this action, stating that the post was kept open as long as possible and that circumstances rendered it necessary for the vacancies to be filled.<sup>45</sup> However, in the same statement he commented that he was experiencing 'considerable difficulty, through illness and

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<sup>40</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.2

<sup>41</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.2

<sup>42</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.3

<sup>43</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.3

<sup>44</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.3

<sup>45</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Ammon Beasley, Statement of facts relating to Signaller Ewington, p.6

other contingencies in supplying all the vacancies then existing in the various signal boxes' and cited a letter from the station master at Abercynon, the nearest station to the Pontcynon signal box, requesting the appointment of a temporary hand.<sup>46</sup> This concern for the amount of staff vacancies appears inconsistent with there being no permanent position available for a signaller with Ewington's experience.

On 11 August, Ewington, accompanied by two fellow workmen, presented his case to remain at Pontcynon to the TVR directors;<sup>47</sup> however, there are significant inconsistencies between how Ewington and Beasley recounted the outcome of the meeting. When Ewington requested that the offer presented to him be put in writing Harland wrote that 'the position is that of Sick Relief man for the Aberdare District'.<sup>48</sup> The offer detailed in Beasley's statement is markedly different. He stated that Ewington had been asked to trial the sick relief position for a month and if after this period it was not suitable he would 'find him a post (at the same or higher wages) in one of the signal boxes at or in connection with the Abercynon station and not further from that station than the Pontcynon box in which he formerly worked'.<sup>49</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that this was also the offer given in evidence to the Board of Trade for their ruling, which they found to be 'liberal and removed any ground of complaint'.<sup>50</sup> From the evidence available it is not possible to conclude with certainty what position Ewington was offered and important questions remain unanswered. In particular, why there is no evidence available from the perspective of the two workmen who accompanied Ewington, why the letter Harland wrote was silent about the offer of a permanent role and why, if a permanent position could be found easily, the TVR

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<sup>46</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Ammon Beasley, Statement of facts relating to Signaller Ewington, p.6

<sup>47</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.8

<sup>48</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Letter sent by T.E Harland to John Ewington, 11 August 1900

<sup>49</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Ammon Beasley, Statement of facts relating to Signaller Ewington, p.6

<sup>50</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Letter from Lord Ritchie, Chairman of the Board of Trade, 20 October 1900

directors insisted that this experienced signalman should work for a month in a relief role before being found a role close to home. These uncertainties raise doubts about the evidence given by Beasley and support the contention that they wanted to remove Ewington from their company.

When summing up in the TVR's claim for damages against the ASRS in December 1902, Mr Justice Wills of the King's Bench Division, commented that answers provided in respect of Ewington's case were unsatisfactory and inconclusive. He referred to Harland's evidence as 'barely denying that he did say to Ewington what was stated to have been said',<sup>51</sup> namely that he 'ought to be ashamed of himself to be continually causing disturbances [and that] anyone who had been agitating the men...ought to be dismissed'.<sup>52</sup> In addition, he found it unsatisfactory that two fellow workmen who accompanied Ewington to the meeting with the directors and could have helped to explain why they wanted to move Ewington were not called to give evidence. He concluded that from his experience he could sympathise with the workforce's sentiment that 'here is a man who has put forward our case and who has acted for us...is suffering for it, and we will stick by him'.<sup>53</sup> Earlier in the proceedings, Sir Edward Clarke K.C, counsel for the plaintiffs, made it clear that the TVR directors did not want ASRS members working in their signal boxes and were 'anxious about putting Ewington back into that box'. He claimed that a union representative posed a

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<sup>51</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906). 13<sup>th</sup> Day, Appendix No.2, Summing-up of Mr Justice Wills, *Taff Vale Railway Company versus Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants et al*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1902, p.64. Handed in by Mr A Beasley in relation to Q.1165

<sup>52</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 John Ewington, Statement sent to Richard Bell, p.4

<sup>53</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906). 13<sup>th</sup> Day, Appendix No.2, Summing-up of Mr Justice Wills, *Taff Vale Railway Company versus Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants et al*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1902, p.64. Handed in by Mr A Beasley in relation to Q.1165

threat because he could make use of telegraphic communications to organise a strike without the knowledge of the directors and that the directors would not make a 'special effort' in order that Ewington should be allowed to be in that position.<sup>54</sup> The directors were undoubtedly concerned about a prominent union representative having access to effective communication methods and their desire to avoid having Ewington employed in a signal box is evident.

When considering industrial relations, the part that the ASRS played in exploiting Ewington's position to provoke strike action should not be overlooked. Underlying issues relating to a call for reduced working hours and the lack of wage increases despite the boon the Boer War created had been smouldering and the sentiment generated by the treatment of Ewington was the catalyst to ignite them. When the men met in Pontypridd on 29 July 1900, Ewington announced that 'as this was a matter of principle he placed his case in the hands of the meeting and would do whatever they decided', to which the chairman replied that it was their duty to 'protect one who had been so cruelly treated'.<sup>55</sup> As an ardent union supporter, Ewington drew upon the solidarity he had with his fellow workmen, who as the *South Wales Daily News* reports, supported him 'with unanimity and great enthusiasm'.<sup>56</sup> This sentiment is borne out by the minutes of the 'Men's Committee' dated 27 August 1900, which state that 'the first point for discussion with the Chairman of the Company this afternoon to be the reinstatement of Ewington'.<sup>57</sup> In an interview in the *Western Mail*, James Holmes, the organising secretary of the ASRS, stated that by supporting

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<sup>54</sup> MRC MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/10. Edward Clarke, Counsel for the plaintiffs, High Court of Justice, Kings Bench Division, *The Taff Vale Railway v The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants*, 3 December 1902. Transcript from First Day p.17

<sup>55</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (30 July 1900) 'Trouble on the T.V.R., Alleged victimising' p.6

<sup>56</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (30 July 1900) 'Trouble on the T.V.R., Alleged victimising' p.6

<sup>57</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" Minutes of meeting, 27 August 1900

Ewington 'the men have decided that the whole question shall be narrowed down to a conflict between the company and the society'.<sup>58</sup>

Beasley defended the TVR's actions with the statement that 'far from Ewington having been treated with harshness or subjected to any disadvantage... he has been treated with the utmost kindness and consideration'.<sup>59</sup> However, the actions of the TVR management do not bear this out, rather they suggest that they exploited an opportunity to remove a man they considered to be a threat from their employment. The census returns show that by 1901 Ewington had become a coal hewer.<sup>60</sup> The TVR's insistence that Ewington take a promotion he could never fulfil forced him out of a job, whilst also providing a justification for their actions. As a result, the ASRS were able to incite an already unsettled workforce to take strike action and inflame the already strained relationship between the TVR management and the railwaymen.

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<sup>58</sup> *The Western Mail*, (14 August 1900) 'Preparations for a Fight on the T.V.R.' p.7. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4341773/4341780/123/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>59</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Ammon Beasley, Statement of facts relating to Signalman Ewington, p.11

<sup>60</sup> 1901 England, Wales & Scotland Census, for 34, Abercynon Road, Abercynon. Records John Ewington and his eldest son as coal hewers. Available at <https://www-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1901/0030755466#learn-more-content> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

## Chapter Three

### Importing Men

Ammon Beasley's strategy to frustrate the ASRS's strike action was to import labour and in the days before the impending dispute the TVR management resolutely sought a replacement workforce. On 17 August the ASRS newspaper, the *Railway Review*, reported that there were such widespread advertisements for men that the TVR even addressed one to them. It was printed without objection, albeit with the addition of the line 'we hope no railwaymen will be foolish enough to aid the company in their efforts'.<sup>61</sup> Beasley also drew upon the National Free Labour Association, an organisation founded in 1893 by William Collison that became 'the foremost strike-breaking organisation in Great Britain'.<sup>62</sup> The TVR acted quickly, recruiting and finding accommodation for men from all over the country as they demonstrated their determination to rebuff any negotiations with union representatives, preferring instead to employ a completely unknown workforce. As a consequence, recognised principles of hierarchy and promotion were ignored and those in peripheral roles, such as porters, who refused to handle goods brought in by imported men were dismissed. The TVR management's refusal to remove the imported men at the end of the strike became a bitter point of contention that was never completely resolved.

The notion that the strike could have been averted had Beasley been prepared to meet with the men's union representatives was widely held, yet, his refusal to do so was unequivocal as he doggedly sought to employ a workforce of unknown men rather than acknowledge the ASRS. Evidence obtained by the High Court in Cardiff in

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<sup>61</sup> MSS.127/AS/4/1/7 *Railway Review* 1900, 17 August 1900

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, The National Free Labour Association, in *International Review of Social History*, 21(3) (1976), p.313.

respect of the injunction brought by Beasley against ASRS pickets includes an affidavit sworn by George Beadon, an ASRS member who was appointed to the deputation to meet officials of the railway on 18 August 1900. He recounts their refusal to admit Holmes, the ASRS organising secretary, and the men's resultant withdrawal from the meeting.<sup>63</sup> Beasley refused the Mayor of Cardiff's offer to bring the parties together,<sup>64</sup> whilst the *Evening Express* editor, commenting on the TVR director's stance, exclaimed 'oh, for a man strong enough to abandon haughty obstinacy for a policy of reason!'<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the awareness that other industries such as those employing miners and iron and steel workers all recognised collectivism illustrates the TVR director's outdated attitude. In an interview with the *South Wales Daily News*, Mabon, the renowned mining trade union leader<sup>66</sup> commented that the TVR directors sought to 'satisfy a sentiment which the real and great employers therein have given in upon for so long a time' and that the TVR 'would do itself far more credit in relinquishing its present sentiment of non-representative interference than in preserving it'.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, Beasley uncompromisingly maintained that his board would never yield to calls for union representation.

The TVR directors demonstrated a single-minded determination to engage and accommodate imported labour from all parts of Britain as their profits and principles took priority over any concern for their existing workforce. In a letter sent on 19 August all potential imported men were reassured that 'ample arrangements will be made for

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<sup>63</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900

<sup>64</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (22 August 1900) 'Mr Bell's Credentials Repudiated' p.5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3746435/3746440> (Accessed 12 May 2019)

<sup>65</sup> *Evening Express* (25 August 1900) 'Railway War' p.2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3471706/3471708/22/> (Accessed 10 May 2019)

<sup>66</sup> John Williams, 'Abraham, William [pseud. Mabon]' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2011)

<sup>67</sup> *South Wales Daily News*, (22 August 1900) 'Mabon on the T.V.R. Strike', p.6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3746435/3746441/124/> (Accessed 12 May 2019)

[your] protection... [together with] free quarters for the first fortnight.<sup>68</sup> Posters advertising for men (See Appendix D) were widely distributed including being 'extensively placarded over Belfast',<sup>69</sup> trains arrived from all parts of Britain including Liverpool, Hull, London and Glasgow<sup>70</sup> and barracks at the Cathays Yard were furnished to provide accommodation for approximately 400 men.<sup>71</sup> Beasley's determination to engage imported labour even extended as far as arranging for trains to arrive in the early hours of the morning in an attempt to evade the pickets. The affidavit sworn by William Scott, the Cardiff Constabulary's Chief Detective Inspector, refers to a train from London that arrived at 2.30 a.m. carrying about 45 workmen for the TVR.<sup>72</sup> The director's pledge that 'they would retain in the service all men who came during that time who conducted themselves properly and were anxious to remain',<sup>73</sup> illustrates the board's resolve to maintain absolute authority over who was employed by the company.

The TVR claimed to have received applications from 5,000 men, of which only about 190 were ultimately deemed suitable; however, the most significant figure was that of the seventy or eighty men who remained in service after the strike ended.<sup>74</sup> The men who travelled to Cardiff in search of employment appear to have had inconsistent understandings of the circumstances that awaited them. Whilst the letter the TVR sent

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<sup>68</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/1 Taff Vale Railway Company: printed circular - rates offered to those taking up employment, 19 August 1900

<sup>69</sup> *South Wales Echo* (22 August 1900), 'Advertising for Men' p.3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4234590/4234593/12/> (Accessed 10 May 2019)

<sup>70</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900

<sup>71</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906) Q.1061

<sup>72</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900

<sup>73</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906) Q.1062

<sup>74</sup> MRC MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/10 High Court of Justice, Kings Bench Division, *The Taff Vale Railway v The Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants*, 3 December 1902. Transcript from First Day p.36

did state that ‘the vacancies have been caused in consequence of the staff...having sent in their notices’,<sup>75</sup> there are reports of men arriving in Cardiff without prior knowledge of the strike. A man from Glasgow who was recruited by the National Free Labour Union told the *Evening Express* that ‘he only “tumbled” to the fact that they were going to take the places of those men on strike when they arrived in Cardiff’.<sup>76</sup> After the strike ended the ASRS attempted to trace men who had been sent to the TVR during the dispute to encourage them to testify that the TVR has misled them. The mainly futile attempts to locate men who often provided false addresses or who had absconded are recorded in letters written by John Dobson, the organising secretary of a branch of the ASRS based in South Tottenham. Dobson describes a man he did find as ‘a disreputable fellow’ and others as ‘the scum of the country’.<sup>77</sup> The TVR retained some of the imported men for many years and on that basis they must have been satisfied with their work; nevertheless, Dobson’s letters demonstrate that some of those who travelled to Cardiff were undesirable characters who were probably out of work and attracted by the prospect of employment and high wages.

The TVR engaged imported labour in positions that often took men years to achieve and in doing so undermined the conventional progression structures that existed within the railway. The letter that was sent to those that applied for work clearly stated that if found suitable they would be ‘placed on the Company’s regular staff’,<sup>78</sup> an action that angered existing employees. The men’s strike committee minute book

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<sup>75</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/1 Taff Vale Railway Company: printed circular - rates offered to those taking up employment, 19 August 1900

<sup>76</sup> *Evening Express* (25 August 1900), ‘Free Labour Men at Cathays’ p.2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3471696/3471698/28/> (Accessed 10 May 2019)

<sup>77</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/9/1-39 Correspondence with branch secretaries about tracing blacklegs involved in 1900 strike.

<sup>78</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/1 Taff Vale Railway Company: printed circular - rates offered to those taking up employment, 19 August 1900

includes the draft of a letter sent to Beasley on 27 November 1900, in which the men of the ASRS alleged that the TVR had 'violated the principles on which positions are gained in the railway service'.<sup>79</sup> This letter was written almost three months after the strike ended; nevertheless, the strike committee was still meeting to argue for the removal of retained imported men. They contending that these men had been given posts that not only circumvented the years of service considered necessary to reach the more senior positions but also relied on men who had worked on the railway for many years to instruct them and to take responsibility for the railway's safe working.<sup>80</sup> The actions of the TVR directors to retain imported men further supports the contention that they were determined to have complete authority over who was employed at all levels within the railway.

The striking members of the ASRS sought to dissuade the imported men from taking up employment and in doing so some defied union instructions<sup>81</sup> and resorted to illegal tactics of intimidation and non-peaceful picketing that damaged the reputation of the union and began the chain of events that ultimately led to the ASRS being sued. Pickets who were 'well organised'<sup>82</sup> met the trains carrying the imported men in order to enter the carriages and offer to pay their return fares or claim to be representatives of the TVR so they could take them to the strike headquarters.<sup>83</sup> *The Western Mail*

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<sup>79</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" Meeting held at the Colbourne Hotel, 27 November 1900

<sup>80</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" Meeting held at the Colbourne Hotel, 27 November 1900

<sup>81</sup> Richard Bell, the ASRS General Secretary stated that picketing should be carried out 'without violence of any description' *The Cardiff Times* (25 August 1900), 'Peaceful Negotiations' p.6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3426719/3426725/137/> (Accessed 27 May 2019)

<sup>82</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900. Affidavit of William Scott, Chief Detective Inspector in the Cardiff Constabulary Force

<sup>83</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900. Affidavit of John Harry Matthews, GWR Detective Officer

reported that over 500 men were engaged in picketing duties in Cardiff alone.<sup>84</sup> There were acts of violence and damage including the forceful removal of a TVR watchman from his post at the Cathays Yard accommodation,<sup>85</sup> the severing of signalling and other wires,<sup>86</sup> interference with a passenger train involving the disconnection of a brake pipe<sup>87</sup> and violent conduct that resulted in two of the ASRS pickets being 'imprisoned with hard labour'.<sup>88</sup> On 23 August, Richard Bell, the ASRS General Secretary, issued what became known as 'the Blackleg Circular' (See Appendix E) and this action, when considered in light of *Lyons v. Wilkins*, [1896 and 1898], in which Mr Justice Byrne ruled that picketing that constituted 'molesting or obstructing any person, by watching or besetting [was] unlawful except such as is merely for the purpose of obtaining or communicating information',<sup>89</sup> was enough to secure Beasley the injunction he had resolutely pursued. Granted on the last day of the strike, it was extended on 5 September at which time it was determined that a union could be sued in its registered name.<sup>90</sup> This ruling started the series of unprecedented events that ultimately led to the ASRS being sued and the strike being enshrined in trade union history.

The arrangements regarding the future employment of the imported men was a serious point of contention in the settlement of the dispute. The men returned to work

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<sup>84</sup> *The Western Mail* (23 August 1900), 'Men more determined' p.5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4341845/4341850/68/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>85</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900. Affidavit, I Crockes, TVR workman

<sup>86</sup> *Evening Express* (24 August 1900) '£100 Reward' p.2. Available as <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3471651/3471653/4/> (Accessed 10 May 2019)

<sup>87</sup> *South Wales Daily News* (21 August 1900), 'Large Reward Offered' p.6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3746426/3746432/104/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>88</sup> *The Western Mail* (23 August 1900), 'Two Men Sent to Prison' p.6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4341845/4341851> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>89</sup> *J Lyons & Sons v Wilkins* (No.2), Court of Appeal, 20 December 1898, Case Analysis, Available at <https://login.westlaw.co.uk/maf/wluk/app/document?src=doc&linktype=ref&context=17&crumb-action=replace&docguid=ICB4A42B0E42711DA8FC2A0F0355337E9> (Accessed 8 May 2019)

<sup>90</sup> Bagwell, *The Railwaymen*, p.222

'on the understanding that the imported men would be got rid of'<sup>91</sup> within a month and on the commitment from Vassell, the TVR Chairman, in a letter dated 28 August that 'no effort or expense will be spared by the company to secure peace'.<sup>92</sup> In a direct contradiction to this understanding Beasley wrote that 'the company would maintain a "free hand" in dealing with the imported men',<sup>93</sup> something the men contended they were unaware of until after they had agreed to return to work.<sup>94</sup> Beasley maintained his stance with some imported men being retained whilst some 'old servants' were not reinstated. James Knox and five other men who anticipated being able to resume duties after the strike were informed by the TVR Goods Manager that 'some of those positions have necessarily had to be filled by the appointment of other men. There is no intention on the part of the Company to call upon you to resume duties which you voluntarily abandoned'.<sup>95</sup> When giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes in 1904, Beasley reinforced his contention to have complete authority over who the TVR employed by confirming that the pledge the TVR directors made 'to retain in service all men who came during that time who conducted themselves properly and were anxious to remain' had been kept.<sup>96</sup>

The retention of imported labour was an ongoing issue of animosity and bitterness between the TVR and the men. Whilst the men returned to work on 1 September 1900, the men's strike committee continued to meet and the theme of

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<sup>91</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" 1 October 1900

<sup>92</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" 27 November 1900

<sup>93</sup> *Evening Express* (1 September 1900), 'Danger of Complications' p.3. Available at [https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3471886/3471889/37/\\_](https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3471886/3471889/37/_) (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>94</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" 29 November 1900

<sup>95</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/7 Taff Vale Railway Company, Goods Manager's office: letter to James Knox about his willingness to resume duty and company policy, 4 Sep 1900

<sup>96</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906), Q.1062

imported men ran through the minutes of their meetings, with many references to the TVR having violated the terms of the settlement and requests made to neighbouring railways to 'join hands with us in getting the imported men removed'.<sup>97</sup> Along with the anger, feelings of betrayal are also evident. The minute book includes the draft of a letter dated 27 November in which they remind Vassell that whilst he had promised to arrange to 'remove the largest possible proportion of the men engaged' it seemed that no effort had been made to do so.<sup>98</sup> This atmosphere of resentment and mistrust led to incidents where the 'old servants' refused to work with the imported men or engaged in malicious acts against them. An undated list of TVR employees not reinstated immediately upon the settlement of the dispute includes a note that 'the station master at Ystrad has orders to immediately dismiss the goods porters (seven in number) who refused to unload goods brought by blacklegs'.<sup>99</sup> The final entry in the men's committee minute book records a deputation from the ASRS meeting with a deputation from the miner's council on 17 February 1901; the first item for discussion was minuted as 'the removal of the imported men'.<sup>100</sup> This action indicates the seriousness the union placed on their retention; however, Beasley appears to be, or has chosen to be, dismissive of the impact his actions had on the 'old servants'. In his evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes he demonstrates sympathy for the imported men, stating that they were made to feel uncomfortable, maltreated or "sent to Coventry"<sup>101</sup> and to emphasise his point, he recounted an incident from March 1904 in which an imported driver found a sheet of paper displaying the word "Blackleg"

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<sup>97</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" 30 September 1900

<sup>98</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" 27 November 1900

<sup>99</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/9 List submitted by James Taylor of Taff Vale Railway employees not reinstated immediately on settlement of strike, undated

<sup>100</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/1/1/1 "Men's Committee Minute Book" 17 February 1901

<sup>101</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906), Q.1063

nailed to a telegraph post within a few feet of his front door.<sup>102</sup> This act and reports of violent confrontations that occurred years after the strike ended<sup>103</sup> demonstrate that the acrimony did not abate and that deep-seated poor relationships between the 'old servants', and the directors and imported men persisted.

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<sup>102</sup> Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations. *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906), Q.1064

<sup>103</sup> *Evening Express* (3 June 1908), 'I've got you now' p.2. reports on the assault of one of the imported drivers still working on the TVR, Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4190415/4190417/28/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

The case studies of John Ewington and the engagement of imported men indicate that industrial relations within the TVR at the end of the nineteenth century were strained. Whilst dissatisfaction with pay and working conditions led to underlying discontentment, the more fundamental issue was the directors resolve to impede union activity in direct opposition to the men's demands for union recognition. The strike of 1900 pitted the railwaymen who 'believed [their] union to be a legitimate organisation'<sup>104</sup> that should be afforded the right to represent the workforce against the TVR management who feared losing control and were prepared to go to great lengths in order to deny any form of collective negotiation or union influence. As General Manager, Beasley was an employee and not an owner of the railway and consequently he can be regarded as a representative of the board and the shareholders; nevertheless, he stubbornly refused to afford the workforce similar representation. On 25 August, the weekly liberal and labour newspaper<sup>105</sup> *the Rhondda Leader*, declared its sympathy for the striking railwaymen and summed up the essence of the hostility by offering the opinion 'that the battle is waged on differences of capital and labour there can be no dispute'.<sup>106</sup>

The case studies have exposed the ingenious, yet often unscrupulous tactics of TVR directors and their General Manager, Beasley to inhibit union involvement in the railway. A prominent union representative was instructed to move to a position they

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<sup>104</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/7/LE/1/1-18 Writ, summons and affidavits. Aug 1900. Affidavit of George Beadon, member of the ASRS local branch and of the deposition that waited on TVR officials on 18 August 1900

<sup>105</sup> The National Library of Wales, 'The Rhondda Leader', Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/3826298> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>106</sup> *The Rhondda Leader* (25 August 1900), The "Mabon" Principle, p.4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3826641/3826645/18/> (Accessed 10 May 2019)

knew he would not be able to fulfil and was consequently removed from employment at the TVR, significant numbers of unknown men were imported from all parts of Britain because the TVR refused to speak with a union representative and the union was tenaciously pursued in court action that resulted in the ASRS paying a substantial sum in damages. All of these actions resulted from the TVR's determination to obstruct the ASRS's influence, which supports the assertion made by Harvey and Press that the TVR manipulated events in order to shift the balance of power in their favour.<sup>107</sup>

Any credence placed on TVR claims of progressive welfare policies is dispelled by the authoritarian practices they used to curtail union influence within the railway. The TVR management insisted on transferring Ewington to a new position when they were aware that his personal circumstances would render any such move impossible. Nevertheless, they ignored his appeals to remain at Pontcynon whilst at the same time creating a legitimate justification that could be used to satisfy the authorities of their good intentions. In a similar manner, the TVR was content to condone ongoing animosity between the 'old servants' and the imported men, and to circumvent conventional progression structures, which caused considerable resentment amongst the existing workforce. In complete contradiction to Hamilton Ellis's claims of 'paternal benevolence',<sup>108</sup> these actions demonstrate that the TVR prioritised maintaining control over any concern for employee wellbeing and that welfare was seemingly limited to the much proclaimed pension scheme.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Charles Harvey and Jon Press, 'Management and the Taff Vale Strike of 1900' in *Business History*, 42:2 (2000) p.82

<sup>108</sup> Hamilton Ellis, *British Railway History*, p.225

<sup>109</sup> *Minutes of evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes & Trade Combinations together with index and appendices* (1906), 12<sup>th</sup> Day Appendix No. 2, Statement re pension allowances for wages paid staff on the Taff Vale Railway, handed in by A Beasley in relation to Q1099.

When considering industrial relations on the TVR the personal influence of Ammon Beasley cannot be ignored. His obstinate adherence to anti-union principles and refusal to make any concession to union representation created a climate of hostility between the TVR management and many of their workforce. The editor of the conservative *Western Mail* commented that it is 'astonishing why [Beasley] holds on to the notions which rightly belong to the period when Trades Unions were held to be illegal'.<sup>110</sup> In his defence, Beasley was subjected to a unique and complex set of circumstances created by increased government regulation and local competition that had significantly reduced dividend returns and he was under intense shareholder pressure to restore their earnings to the levels they had previously enjoyed. However, as Clark concluded, his obstinacy and determination to quash the ASRS ultimately had completely the opposite outcome when the passing of the Trade Disputes Act 1906 afforded unions immunity from claims for damages.<sup>111</sup>

When the Taff Vale railwaymen demanded a voice in order to challenge the management's actions, it was the union that provided them with the means to do so. The formal and meticulous recording of events in the 'Men's Committee Minute Book' conveys the important role it played. Whilst some of the men defied union instructions and engaged in illegal activities, for most, the ASRS was a unifying force that gave them the confidence to hand in their notices in support of Ewington, a serious act that could have grievous implications and consequently should not be underestimated. Included within the correspondence relating to his case is an unsigned and undated handwritten list (see Appendix F) that appears to be notes made in preparation for a meeting with the TVR management. It refers to some important aspects of the dispute,

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<sup>110</sup> *The Western Mail* (18 August 1900), 'Ruin for a Settlement', p.4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4341809/4341813/25/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>111</sup> Dudley Clark, *Revolt and Revival in the Valleys* p.246

including an interesting question about whether the TVR would reinstate Ewington if the union gave up its demands for representation, a possible point for negotiation that could be interpreted as an indication of the importance the men of the ASRS placed on supporting Ewington. Whilst it is only a single sheet of notes there is one statement on the page that stands out from the others. This phrase epitomises the essence of the union, and the determination and solidarity it imbued within the men, but above all it conveys the fundamental principle that gave the union its strength; 'All men out and all men in'.<sup>112</sup>

**Word Count: 6287**

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<sup>112</sup> MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1 Handwritten list of ASRS questions included within MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Correspondence about the settlement of the strike and Signalman Ewington's case. Aug – Nov 1900

## Appendix A

### Timeline

DATE	DESCRIPTION
<b>1890</b>	
<b>14 August</b>	TVR management and Union representative speak on same platform about a strike settlement on the basis of a 60 hour working week and guaranteed pay for all full time employees
<b>1900</b>	
<b>9 February</b>	Meeting between deposition of men's representatives and TVR directors on the subject of wages and conditions of service
<b>5 March</b>	Further meeting between deposition of men's representatives and TVR directors
<b>Mid-April</b>	Ewington made aware of vacancy at Treherbert and asked if would elect to move
<b>28 April</b>	Letter from Blake to Ewington instructing him to transfer to Treherbert
<b>5 May</b>	Ewington interview with Harland
<b>8 May</b>	Ewington instructed to teach his replacement his duties
<b>8 May</b>	Ewington taken ill with Rheumatic fever
<b>23 July</b>	Letter from Harland to Ewington stating that there were no vacancies for a signalman
<b>24 July</b>	Ewington fit for work after illness
<b>24 July</b>	Ewington second interview with Harland
<b>29 July</b>	Public meeting held in Pontypridd looking to secure better wages and shorter hours on the TVR
<b>11 August</b>	Ewington and two of his fellow workmen met with Vassell, Robinson, Beasley, Harland and Riches of the TVR
<b>11 August</b>	Letter to Ewington from Harland offering him the post of Sick Relief man for the Aberdare District
<b>18 August</b>	ASRS deposition withdrew from meeting with TVR officials due to their refusal to admit Holmes, the ASRS organising secretary
<b>19 August</b>	TVR issue letter (signed by Harland) listing conditions of service for imported labour
<b>20 August</b>	First full day of strike action
<b>23 August</b>	Bell issues 'Blackleg Circular'
<b>23 August</b>	Beasley applies for injunction against Bell, Holmes and the union.
<b>24 August</b>	Imported men arrive from Glasgow and Paddington
<b>25 August</b>	Imported men arrive from Hull
<b>25 – 28 August</b>	Affidavits sworn in the Cardiff High Court as evidence in respect of Beasley's injunction against the ASRS, Bell and Holmes for picketing
<b>28 August</b>	Vassell writes that 'no effort or expense will be spared by the company to secure peace'
<b>31 August</b>	Last day of strike action
<b>31 August</b>	Mr Justice Farwell granted an interim injunction against Bell and Holmes – Picketing only permitted for 'the communication of information' to non-strikers
<b>1 September</b>	Men return to work
<b>5 September</b>	Injunction extended to the union. Mr Justice Farwell declared that a union could be sued in its registered name.
<b>12 November</b>	Appeal overturned Mr Justice Farwell's ruling and found in favour of the union.
<b>27 November</b>	ASRS Committee write to Vassell regarding lack of action in removing imported labour

<b>1901</b>	
<b>17 February</b>	ASRS deputation meets with deputation from the Miner's Council
<b>21 July</b>	Five law lords unanimously overturned ruling of 12 Nov 1900 and found in favour of the TVR
<b>13 December</b>	Claim for damages against the ASRS lodged by the TVR
<b>1902</b>	
<b>3 to 19 December</b>	TVR's claim for damages heard by King's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice
<b>1903</b>	
<b>23 March</b>	Cheque issued from ASRS to TVR for £42,000
<b>6 June</b>	Royal Warrant issued for enquiry into Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations and the law affecting them
<b>1904</b>	
<b>14 March</b>	First day of evidence in the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations
<b>1905</b>	
<b>5 April</b>	Twenty-eighth and final day of evidence in the Royal Commission on Trade Disputes and Trade Combinations
<b>1906</b>	
<b>21 December</b>	Trade Disputes Act gains royal assent, thereby affording unions indemnification against civil proceedings and protection against claims for damages

## Appendix B

### Map of the Taff Vale Railway Company Network

**\*Image Removed for Copyright Reasons\***

Welsh Railways Research Circle, Taff Vale Railway (and related lines), Available at  
<http://www.wrrc.org.uk/taffrc.php> (Accessed 26 May 2019)

## Appendix C

### Map of the location of signal boxes at Pontcynon and Treherbert in relation to John Ewington's home

**\*Image Removed for Copyright Reasons\***

**\*Image Removed for Copyright Reasons\***

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These maps show the signal boxes at Pontcynon and Treherbert in relation to Ewington's home in Abercynon.

Available at <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/roam/map/historic> (Accessed 12 May 2019)

## Appendix D

### Taff Vale Railway Company: Invitation for Applicants

**\*Image Removed for Copyright Reasons\***

The National Archives, MFQ 1/672 Posters concerning the Taff Vale Railway strike. Available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/railways/> (Accessed 12 May 2019)

## Appendix E

### The Blackleg Circular: Are you willing to be known as a Blackleg?

**\*Image Removed for Copyright Reasons\***

The National Archives, RAIL 1057/2854 Poster warning others not to work in the place of striking railway workers in Taff Vale. Available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/humanrights/1848-1914/doc-railway-image.htm> (Accessed 12 May 2019)

## Appendix F

### ASRS Notes

**\*Image Removed for Copyright Reasons\***

MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1 Handwritten list of ASRS questions included within  
MSS.127/AS/TV/3/5/1-27 Correspondence about the settlement of the strike and Signalman  
Ewington's case. Aug – Nov 1900

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MSS.127/AS/TV/3/9/1-39 Correspondence with branch secretaries about tracing blacklegs involved in 1900 strike

MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/1 Taff Vale Railway Company: printed circular - rates offered to those taking up employment, 19 Aug 1900

MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/7 Taff Vale Railway Company, Goods Manager's office: letter to James Knox about his willingness to resume duty and company policy, 4 Sep 1900

MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/9 List submitted by James Taylor of Taff Vale Railway employees not reinstated immediately on settlement of strike, undated

MSS.127/AS/TV/ADD/3/7/10 King's Bench: Taff Vale Railway Company versus ASRS etc. printed first day's proceedings, 3 Dec 1902

MSS.127/AS/4/1/7 *Railway Review* 1900

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