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The Making of Welsh History

A329 EMA

‘Remarkable Conversions Underground’ -

An assessment of the influence of anxieties concerning trade union militancy in *Western Mail* reporting of the Welsh Revival 1904-5

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May 2024

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Introduction

And let me say to you, one of the most remarkable things is the attitude of the Welsh press. I come across instance after instance of men converted by reading the story of the revival in the Western Mail...

(Campbell Morgan, G, 1905, p. 43)

The Welsh Revival 1904-5 was a significant religious phenomenon that was widely publicised in Welsh newspapers. The importance of newspapers to the spread of the revival can, in part, be elucidated by the concurrence of the revival with the ascent of the commercial newspaper and the contemporary innovations in newspaper production and distribution that enabled proprietors to reduce prices and circulate newspapers at a speed and scale previously unknown (Wiener, 2017, p.275).

A significant aspect of the Welsh newspapers reporting of the revival was the enthusiasm in which it was portrayed. This was particularly noteworthy to contemporary observers in the case of the *Western Mail*, a Cardiff based conservative daily newspaper that invested considerable coverage in the revival and its public figurehead Evan Roberts (Lewis, 1906, p.74). The lack of an explanation for the *Western Mail's* eager support of the revival was apparent. That 'the most conservative daily newspaper in south Wales' supported a movement that opposed the gambling under which 'journalism lives and thrives' represented a paradox that could only be explained as in unity with the ephemeral nature of the revival, 'the wind bloweth where it listeth' (Stead, 1905, p. 59).

It can generally be assumed that a principal interest of the *Western Mail* was to reflect the interests of its readership in south Wales to sell newspapers. To this extent, the extensive media treatment of a movement that aroused great public interest is explicable even if it ostensibly appeared to undermine the economics of print advertising. Therefore, the conservative inclination of the *Western Mail* becomes of interest when searching for a broader explanation as to the apparent encouragement of the movement within its editorial content.

The complex origins of the revival, which were embedded in the profound social changes in Wales during the period create challenges in assessing the contemporary responses and causes in historiography (Davies, 2007, p.492). It has been identified that prior to the revival, the non-conformists in Wales, who represented the dominant cultural and political influence, were alarmed at the growth of new cultural activities amongst colliers that they correlated with excessive alcohol consumption and public disorder and to which they perceived a denunciation of traditional standards of morality (Williams, 1952, p.245).

In effect, this precipitated a decline in non-conformist cultural power which was further exacerbated by a perceived lack of support and participation in the concerns of colliers and to which socialism offered an alternative political force (Williams, 1952, P.246). There is consensus between historians that south Wales was uniquely rancorous in industrial relations in Britain during the period due to both the economic boom of the south Wales coalfield that established its dominance in the Welsh economy and the reliance of Welsh coal exports on foreign trade that caused the price of coal and consequently wages (due to the Sliding Scale) to fluctuate often (Morgan, 1980, p.63). Further, the immigration of English colliers into the region, attracted by the economic boom of the south Wales coalfield, imported new cultural activities and radical socialist ideas that advanced a more militant conceptualisation of class struggle and thereby threatened the importance of chapel culture in south Wales (Morgan, 1980, p.72).

Historiography as it relates to the growth of trade unionism and socialism in Wales develops this further by locating a perceived deterioration of morality within non-conformist decline. This decline of morality and the new socialist political ideas began to challenge not only the cultural power of non-conformism but crucially the political consensus that the partnership of non-conformism and early trade unionism had developed. Many of the earlier trade union gains in industrial relations in south Wales, led by the non-conformist preacher and Lib-Lab MP William Abraham (Mabon), were achieved through conciliatory practices and the promotion of moral populism, the notion that unionised colliery workers were moral men with good character. In effect, a reflection of their non-conformist character (Croll, 2007, p.50). To this extent, it can be considered that the moral populism in the earlier form of trade unionism in south Wales was distinctly non-conformist. Historiography therefore suggests that a non-conformist tradition of leadership in trade unionism represented a cultural and political status quo and to which the revival can be considered partly a reaction to the decline thereof (Pope, 2006, p.516).

Whereas historiography of the cultural and political milieu of south Wales during the period has noted the importance of the revival as a reaction to the aforementioned developments, the role of newspapers has been underdeveloped. There is scant scholarship on the subject of newspaper reporting of the revival beyond its importance in the spread of the revival, or some observations on the promotion of the social effects of the revival (Williams, 1952, p.253). This dissertation intends to address this imbalance by specifically considering the *Western Mail* as a political actor and assessing the newspapers coverage of the revival within the predominant political context of the period, namely industrial relations and the conflict between capitalist and labour perspectives.

The aim of this enquiry therefore is to establish to what extent the *Western Mail* reporting of the revival was influenced by anxieties relating to increasing militancy in trade unionism. Further, can the emphasis on social improvement and morality as benefits of the revival to colliers be situated in concerns regarding the decline of traditional forms of political power in south Wales. Or, to frame this question in another way, was the threat of trade union militancy perceived sufficiently worrisome to the conservative *Western Mail* that the revival could represent an appeal to a return of the conciliatory status-quo in industrial relations?

The first chapter of this dissertation will therefore consider the *Western Mail* editorial record concerning the Coal Miner's Strike of 1898. By analysis of illustrations depicting the dispute and editorial comments published at the end of the strike, this chapter will assess if the *Western Mail's* political position in respect of trade unions and industrial relations can be categorised as generally pro-capitalist though respectful of the conduct and morality of the colliers. This chapter will argue that crucially, the *Western Mail* can be understood to be fundamentally anti-radical.

The second chapter will consider the period following the strike and leading into the revival in the *Western Mail* editorial record including the growth of the Fed, increasing industrial tensions and reports of rising militancy. By assessing the *Western Mail* presentation of the Fed with particular examination of its use of 'moral terrorism' to describe the Fed's radical tactics, it will be further considered if capitalist perspectives published in the newspaper, with comparisons of the Fed to the United Irish League reveal that concepts of moral degeneracy and the growth of a more militant trade unionism were correlated with capitalist fears of economic decline.

The third chapter of this dissertation will then interrogate if fears of trade union militancy and moral decline can be observed in the *Western Mail* promotion of the moralistic aspects of the revival. By utilising editorial commentary and illustrations produced during the revival, consideration will be given to the extent to which the promotion of the revival for the purpose of social improvement of converted colliers advanced a possible neutralisation of a militant threat and a return to the political status-quo in industrial relations in the south Wales coalfield.

Chapter I

'The moral effects of the struggle are even more serious still' - The Coal Miner's Strike (1898)

What may be called the moral effects of the struggle are even more serious still and will leave deeper traces on the community - traces that will take at least a generation to wipe out.

(Western Mail, 2 September 1898, p. 4)

The Coal Miner's Strike of 1898 was not the first strike in the south Wales coalfield, though it was highly meaningful due to its length, scale, and the eventual overwhelming defeat of the colliers (Morgan, 1980, p.60). The enduring pivotal lesson of the defeat to the colliers was the need to organise into a centralised trade union authority which eventually became the South Wales Miners Federation (the 'Fed'). This was to be the genesis from which ultimately through the turn of the century concerns would be aroused in the *Western Mail* at the growth of trade union militancy and a decline of morality amongst colliers in south Wales (Wright, 2017, p.106).

The origins of this anxiety were indeed present during the strike. The newspaper was forceful in what can be observed as an anti-radical perspective, stating that it was 'a heinous thing' for the colliers to urge a community to starvation without the likelihood of attaining any material benefit while risking permanent harm to the primary industry in south Wales (*Western Mail*, 5 Sep 1898, p.4). This does not suggest however that the newspaper could not be even handed in its evaluation of industrial relations, as the newspaper observed 'it is easy to find fault with the principal actors on both sides and the question was left open as to who would be considered more blameworthy in the longer term (*Western Mail*, 2 Sep 1898, p.4). Nevertheless, the newspaper took issue with the motivation for perceived futile actions advanced by some trade union leaders that advocated for the continuance of the strike based on principle alone. Or, rather that radical ideology both undermined the colliers' interests as well as industry and capital. This suspicion of radicalism was articulated in the illustration 'On Principle' whereby a trade union leader exhorts 'Give in? Never! I would rather see women and children die of starvation than give in'.



Figure 1. 'On Principle', *Western Mail*, 23 June 1898, Amgueddfa Cymru Collections Online

It is in this context that the concern for the perceived moral effects of the strike as suggested by the newspaper are compelling as it relates to ideology and radical action. The perception that ideology had been in some respects prioritised over resolving industrial disputes amicably is observable in the *Western Mail* plea to colliers to 'resume the old relations which make for permanent peace and prosperity' (*Western Mail*, 2 Sep 1898, p. 5). The 'old relations' of conciliatory industrial relations that was preferred by the newspaper was closely correlated with Mabon's advancement of unionised colliers as having a high moral virtue and that were charitable and selfless (Croll, 2007, p.52). By the presentation of radicalism in this way, the *Western Mail* appears to suggest at the potential moral harm to colliers due to ideologues. In effect that if principles were a primary force in compelling colliers to continue to strike then it would result in eventual starvation and devastation.

The Lodger.



Figure 2. 'The Lodger', *Western Mail*, 10 May 1898, Amgueddfa Cymru Collections Online

To some extent, the strike established an adversarial tone between striking colliers and the *Western Mail*. The newspaper was notably absent from a list of newspapers to which the collier's expressed gratitude at the end of the strike (*Western Mail*, 5 Sep 1898, p. 4). It would not be accurate to characterise the newspaper as hostile to the striking colliers, though it could be described as generally pro-capitalist. The importance of the price set by international markets for coal exports appears to have been understood to be a material risk to capital and industry to which it was suggested the colliers already share in prosperity or in risk by the Sliding Scale. The newspaper was thus critical of the extremity of a strike and the central demand (a minimum to the scale) of which it surmised the industrialists could not meet (*Western Mail*, 5 Sep 1898, p.7).

The emphasis on the importance of the prosperity of industry in south Wales informed the coverage of the strike that accentuated economic devastation and a loss of a vast and incomprehensible sum of capital in the region (*Western Mail*, 2 Sep 1898, p.4). To this end, the newspaper considered its advice at settlement to the colliers to be realistic and truthful given the importance of the success of the coal industry to south Wales and the colliers dependence on it as a source of employment (*Western Mail*, 5 Sep 1898, p. 4)

In this respect, the newspapers perspective at the futility of the strike action appeared to suggest it was a result of both the demands of the trade unions and the departure from conciliatory industrial relations toward an ineffectual and damaging radicalism. In the illustration ‘The Prodigals Return’, the newspaper used an accompanying text to imagine the strike in a biblical metaphor. In prose it describes the demands of the colliers with the dereliction of employment causing a famine to which the collier turns to the trade unions for resolve until he comes to his senses and is reconciled with the industrialist ‘father’. The illustration portrays Mabon returning back from the destitution experienced due to the strike action which appears to infer at the abandonment of a reckless radical action and a return to reconciliation in industrial relations, itself a cause for celebration though without the minimum to the Sliding Scale originally demanded by the colliers (*Western Mail*, 2 Sep 1898, p. 5).

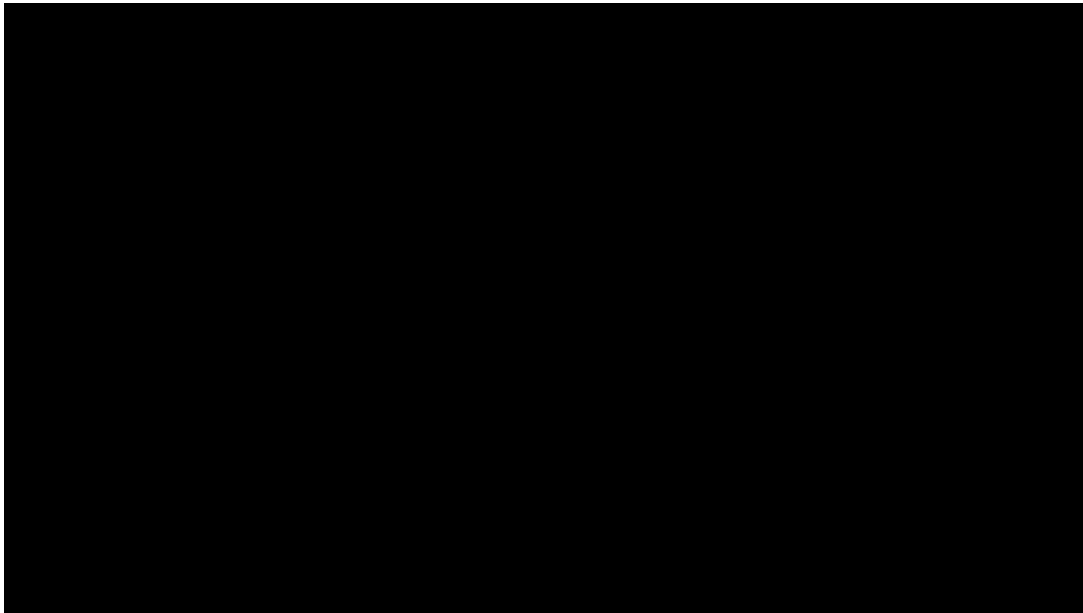


Figure 3. ‘The Prodigals Return’, *Western Mail*, 2 September 1898

It was hoped that with this industrial reconciliation that there would be ‘no repetition of such a strike for a generation, if all time’ (*Western Mail*, 5 Sep 1898, p.7). This may explain the rapprochement with the colliers at the end of the strike, where with the strike now settled, due praise was to be given to both the trade union leaders and the colliers for their remarkable conduct. While it was acknowledged that the *Western Mail* was often unsympathetic to the trade

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union leaders they noted the 'honesty and integrity of purpose' and praised the moral conduct of the colliers as 'simply magnificent', a direct outcome of the influence of the chapel as 'the mighty factor in the moral and social life' of the region that contributed to 'the high sense of law and order and self-respect inherent in the Welsh people' (*Western Mail*, 2 Sep 1898, p.4)

Chapter II

'Moral terrorism' - The Fed and coercion in the coalfield (1898 - 1904)

That the policy of coercing south Wales colliers into joining the Federation is really an organised conspiracy may be placed beyond all doubt. For bitterness it approaches the worst excesses of the United Irish League, and for financial loss and trade dislocation it far exceeds anything that the boycott has accomplished in Ireland

(Western Mail, 2 August 1902, p.4)

If a sort of rapprochement in the *Western Mail* and the trade unions was to be found at the end of the 1898 strike it was short lived, and the so-called moral effects of the strike were to become visible once more. The settlement admired in the pages of the *Western Mail* were rapidly disrupted by agitation at the forsaking of Mabon's Day. That many colliers refused to work on this day of the former holiday in breach of their employment contracts and industrial settlement was, in strident editorial comments, both 'in the character of law-breakers' and a fall from grace by the colliers (*Western Mail*, 4 October 1898, p.4). There is certainly an irony that this fall from grace in the *Western Mail* perspective was to occur only one week prior to the establishment of the Fed and the installation of Mabon as its inaugural president (Davies, 2007, p.462). If this was of broader significance to the *Western Mail* assertion at the time, it appears to be absent, but it cannot be without note that the emergence of a progressively centralised trade union correlated with *Western Mail* concerns of a decline of morality following the end of the strike.

These concerns regarding general conduct specifically linked to the centralisation of the Fed can be considered further in the context that from 1901, a more militant form of pan-British trade unionism was beginning to develop in the region that contributed to a growing hostility to capitalism in south Wales (Davies, 2007, p.476). Accordingly, there is a clear sense that by 1902, the *Western Mail* observed an ideological shift within the leadership of the Fed, which was evident in the public assertions of William Brace, the Vice President of the Fed. The Fed was likened by Brace to an 'imperial authority' where non-unionised colliers were compelled to the authority of the Fed given the benefits conferred on them by the achievements of the trade union (*Western Mail*, 2 August 1902, p.4). This was an anathema to the generally pro-capitalist *Western Mail* that observed this approach as entirely inconsistent with the liberty of non-unionised men to sell their labour (*Western Mail*, 2 August 1902, p.4).

That the *Western Mail* was anxious at this development of a potentially more militant and centralised trade union can be further observed in the underscore of its perception that a 'radical' majority within the Fed had initiated a new doctrine of intimidation (*Western Mail*, 23 Jan 1903, p.4). The former lauding of colliers as 'imbued with a high sense of law and order' (*Western Mail*, 4 October 1898, p.4) was thus superseded by simmering fears of coercion by the Fed in the coalfield. This was particularly prominent in the newspaper reports of the intimidation of non-unionised colliers whether by the initiation of stop-days at collieries in response to perceived slights to the trade union, or by intimidation outside the home of non-unionised workers by large crowds conveying a sense of chaos (*Western Mail*, 23 Jan 1903, p.4). The *Western Mail* observed this continued agitation by the Fed as a great form of public disorder that was dangerous and harmed the community of the coalfield as a whole (*Western Mail*, 23 Jan 1903, p.4).

This anxiety regarding the Fed was manifest not solely in respect of radical statements of the Fed's imperial authority that allegedly encouraged public disorder, but also in the expression of this by colliers socially and individually. The newspaper denounced accounts of unionised colliers allegedly describing their non-unionised counterparts as parasites and vermin that 'feed on the blood' of unionised workers (*Western Mail*, 25 Aug 1902, p.4). From the *Western Mail* perspective, the harassment of non-unionised colliers was intimidation and amounted to a form of 'moral terrorism' that the Fed was responsible for bringing to the south Wales coalfield (*Western Mail*, 13 July 1903, p.4).

A relationship can therefore be observed between the growth of the Fed and anxieties in the *Western Mail* of the emergence of a radical and militant form of trade unionism expressed by the Fed. Crucially, the *Western Mail* associated this decline of morality with the deterioration of their favoured approach of the non-conformist conciliatory practices of Mabon, occurring as it was with the ascendancy of this militant approach in the Fed that was influenced by an emergent socialist discourse (Wright, 2017, p.106). The newspaper suggests at this by plainly delineating that it took issue not with what it considered the 'legitimate' advancement of colliers through participation in trade unionism but rather it opposed unlawful action and coercion that was in their view 'tyrannical' in method and intended to cause maximum disruption to capital and industry (*Western Mail*, 22 Sep 1902, p.4).

From the *Western Mail* perspective these fears were well founded, the emblematic transition of power to the radicals was to occur just prior to the outbreak of the revival in August 1904 with the question of further strike action in support of a minimum wage. Brace's tactic to encourage a general strike was met by the newspaper with alarm at the extremity of the proposal and the observation that 'Mabon's moderation stands but a poor chance' (*Western Mail*, 31 Aug 1904, p.4).

The implication was therefore that Brace intended to rouse support amongst the militant radicals within the Fed thereby confirming to the newspaper that the era of Mabon's conciliatory industrial relations and, by extension, traditional forms of non-conformist political leadership in south Wales trade unionism was over.

To illustrate how these conservative anxieties can be further understood, by 1904 there was considerable political momentum behind an evolving socialist movement in south Wales as represented by the growth of the Independent Labour Party ('ILP') that was allying with trade unions in a collective political expression (Wright, 2017, p.82). The so-called 'magnetic south' had developed a burgeoning socialist environment that was well signified by the election of the ILP member Keir Hardie as MP for Merthyr Tydfil in 1900 and the 1904 ILP conference being held in Cardiff (Wright, 2017, p.53). Accordingly, the perceived militancy within the Fed was correlated not only with the decline of non-conformist conciliatory industrial relations but also with profound political change that young militant colliers perceived as a coming 'social apocalypse' (Morgan, 1980, p.80). It seems likely in this context that correspondence by a collier to the *Western Mail* from 1893 which proclaimed that 'socialism... will sweep everything before it' now seemed alarmingly prophetic to the newspaper (Wright, 2017, p.90).

As was aforementioned, the *Western Mail* considered a more militant form of trade unionism to be a detriment to the south Wales coalfield as a whole. As was observed in *Western Mail* reporting during the 1898 strike, the economic impacts of industrial and labour disputes were of a primary concern to the conservative newspaper, and this was later reflected in anxieties produced by the tactics of the Fed. Consequently, in general terms the editorial position in the *Western Mail* was that radicalism and immoral militancy were detrimental to economic stability and prosperity in south Wales. Indeed, from 1902 comparisons of the Fed to the United Irish League appear to emerge in the *Western Mail* with particular emphasis on the hostility of the leadership of the Fed and the resultant effects of 'trade dislocation' (*Western Mail*, 2 August 1902, p.4).

The parallel drawn between the Fed and the United Irish League is worthy of consideration, particularly as they emerged as political agitators at similar times. The complexity of the origins of the United Irish League cannot be sufficiently considered herein, however, it can be suggested that both organisations were agitating for forms of economic redistribution, and both were perceived to be militant due to a revolutionary rejection of authority (Arnold-Baker, 2001). To this extent, comparisons in the *Western Mail* correlate the one with the other in their radical approach, with the Fed appearing to represent an even severer threat.

What is particularly revealing in the comparisons of the Fed and the United Irish League in the *Western Mail* is the consideration given to the economic effects of political agitation and its relationship with morality and 'manhood'. The relationship between capitalist perspectives on industrial decline, a perceived degeneration of manhood and the Fed in the *Western Mail* can be best exemplified by the publication of opinion by the prominent industrialist Hiram Maxim in 1904.

Maxim's article forms part of a correspondence with Brace published in the newspaper. To that end, the *Western Mail* appears to have adopted a balanced editorial position with dialogue between the opposing contributors. However, upon consideration of both earlier *Western Mail* perspectives on radical ideologues and closer examination of editorial comments, there is implied support toward Maxim's views. This is evident by the editorial comment that remarks that Maxim's opinion is worthy of consideration to the readership, particularly within the context of the newspaper's adversarial criticism of the ILP's assertions regarding the causes of unemployment in south Wales. In Maxim's opinion (and it is inferred the newspaper's opinion) that it is the revolutionary 'professional agitator' who harms working men by counselling them against their economic interests in an irresponsible manner by threats of revolution and civil war. It is the use of radicalism Maxim argues that is responsible for poverty due to the frequent occurrences of labour disputes that inhibits capital and industrial growth in south Wales (*Western Mail*, 29 Dec 1904, p.4).

Further, in a resonance to the earlier *Western Mail* comparison of the Fed to the United Irish League, Maxim hypothesises that the spectre of radicalism and militancy in Britain and south Wales is related to the degeneration of men. By the example of Ireland, Maxim states that it is Irish men and a lack of 'exalted values' that have made investment in Ireland a material risk with no guarantee of profitability, and it is this that precipitated decline and poverty. What is fundamental in Maxim's comparison is the correlation of political agitation with a 'decay of manhood' which he argues has caused a 'continual curse' in Ireland. The rather provocative suggestion being that a similar fate could befall south Wales should a perceived militancy be permitted to continue - 'Shall we allow the professional agitator and the political demagogue to put us in a position that will cause a continual curse to rest upon this country? I say, No!' (*Western Mail*, 29 Dec 1904, p.4).

Chapter III

'An Improvement' - The Welsh Revival (1904-1905)

A certain collier in Cilfynydd has been "cropped" for "filling dirty coal". In anger and with threats he tells the officials he will make trouble for them. He'll take it up with the union, and the union will make the officials understand what they can do, and what they can't do. He goes back to hear Evan Roberts, and he comes back from the meeting in a totally new spirit. "I'm not going to say anything to the union" he tells the officials, "and I'll go back to work"

(Goodrich, A., 1905, p.29)

It is observable that *Western Mail* anxieties of militancy within the authority of the Fed, or more broadly the radical movement that the Fed came to represent corresponds with the outbreak of the revival in late 1904. A contrast thus emerges between two parallel movements. On one hand, a perceived radical insurgency represented by the Fed and socialism and on the other, a non-conformist religious revitalisation. While the revival was a religious movement, the political power of non-conformism and its role in conciliatory industrial relations cannot be separated as it relates to trade unionism in south Wales. To that end, it can be argued that to some degree non-conformist leaders and the conservative *Western Mail* had a common radical opponent. It is in this context that any consideration of the benefits of the moral aspects of the revival as promoted by the *Western Mail*, particularly as it relates to colliers, must account for these existing political arrangements and prevailing capitalist perspectives in south Wales during the period.

Whereas non-conformist leaders may have considered immorality from a socio-cultural perspective with the growing displacement of old religious institutions and values by a growing socialism and the development of an un-Welsh working-class culture, from a socio-economic perspective, immorality had become bound, as this thesis argues, to the threat of socialism and trade union militancy in the conservative political imagination in the *Western Mail*. If the so-called moral effects of trade union agitation after the 1898 strike had endured and would, in the newspaper's speculation take a 'generation to wipe out' then it appears with the revival that this moment had arrived. Advocates of the revival applauded the improvement to the moral condition of the colliers with a repudiation of the new activities such as gambling and sport and a return to chapel culture (Stead, 1905, p.62). Indeed, employers were remarked to have stated that the quality of the colliers' work had improved, and they worked with a 'new spirit of gladness' which in many cases was attributed to Evan Roberts as the figurehead of the revival (Stead, 1905, p.62).

The *Western Mail* reported on Evan Roberts and the development of the revival with excitement publishing special correspondent articles, pamphlets, and dedicated sermons. The earliest mention of Evan Roberts in the *Western Mail* appears to be November 1904 where reference is made to his great preaching abilities and rousing of public interest. Intriguingly, the newspaper references that on the following day there is little attendance by colliers to these revival services as the time of the service is too close to the end of the working day to give colliers suitable time for them to be sufficiently presentable for the chapel (*Western Mail*, 15 Nov 1904, p.5).

This observation by the newspaper is particularly curious as it is possible therefore, that a lack of engagement by colliers may have informed the *Western Mail* decision the following day to assign a special correspondent to report on revival services and to commission a special photograph of Evan Roberts with fellow revivalists that would have increased awareness of Evan Roberts and the revival further (*Western Mail*, 16 Nov 1904, p.6). This certainly appears to have triggered an intensification in the volume of reporting on the dramatic accounts of meeting activities and the emphasis on revival conversions that became reported daily. By the end of November 1904, the newspaper was reporting itself as being praised as being the 'leader of the press' in their support of the revival (*Western Mail*, 29 Nov 1904, p.6).

It is thought-provoking that the *Western Mail* was keen to emphasise the role of Roberts (himself a former collier) in the revival and was forceful in its defence of him as its source (Pope, 2006, p.518). If the newspaper was anxious at the rise of a revolutionary socialism and sought to publicise the revival amongst young militant colliers, then it is informative that much of Robert's appeal was based on his youth and a break from traditional forms of non-conformist organisation and oratory style in revival services (Morgan, 1980, p.80). The *Western Mail* made much of Robert's plain-speaking style, with his words being 'to the point' and colloquial (Pope, 2006, p.520). This rather suggests at Roberts as an orator that could speak directly to young colliers, with the newspaper providing approving descriptions of 'rough uneducated miners' discovering a newfound confidence and eloquence as a result of revival services (*Western Mail*, 24 Dec 1904, p.6). This refinement amongst colliers due to the revival was further expressed in the reports of the social improvement of those colliers that were converted with reduced drunkenness and the settlement of debts (*Western Mail*, 24 Dec 1904, p.6). These descriptions adequately support an interpretation of the *Western Mail* promotion of Roberts as a modern representation of the moral populism previously proclaimed by Mabon, a new manifestation of non-conformist authority reflected in collier morality.

Throughout December 1904, the *Western Mail* reported feverish accounts of colliers returning to the old faith due to the 'ups and downs' of colliery life (perhaps a reference to the instability of wages and accompanying industrial disputes) (*Western Mail*, 24 Dec 1904, p.6). This upsurge of conversions in the

collieries had a dramatic portrayal in the newspaper with accounts of a foregoing of the new leisure activities and colliery officials eagerly beseeching converts to support them in prayer (Western Mail, 22 Dec 1904, p.6). Further, revival meetings were being held in mines throughout south Wales, even in Anglicised areas where hardly any Welsh was spoken (Western Mail, 22 Dec 1904, p.6). In this regard, the sense was that the revival and improved morality had fully infiltrated the mines resulting in 'remarkable conversions underground' throughout the breadth of south Wales (Western Mail, 22 Dec 1904, p.6). For young militant colliers the magnetism of the revival due its presentation in newspapers is quite discernible with details of the burning of atheist books and sports kits representative of a revolution (Pope, 2006, p.528).

This coverage of the conversions in the mines is particularly noteworthy given the references to the renunciation of new leisure activities, the conversion of colliery officials and the spread of the revival to Anglicised areas of the south Wales coalfield which all connect symbolically at least to influences of a growing socialism within a pan-British labour movement (Wright, 2017, p.140). Therefore, this can suggest to an inhibition of those contributing factors to the growth of socialism and the Fed as colliers converted back to the old ways of non-conformist authority. Given the *Western Mail* characterisation of the Fed as a morally dubious authority that resorted to 'moral terrorism' and represented a dangerous socio-economic threat to the community of the south Wales coalfield, the newspapers praise of moral improvement can be considered to represent a form of push back against this perceived moral degeneration. In this context, *Western Mail* promotion of Roberts and the modern energy of revival services can be contextualised in the importance of young colliers to the spread of the revival. A reflection of the power of conversion was manifest in the foregoing of new un-Christian habits or thoughts and the revival should be preached as gospel by participation in the youth 'crusade' (Morgan, 2005, p.441).

The *Western Mail* promotion of the revival to convert colliers as expressed in morality and prosperity can be well summarised by its publication of an illustration of a gleeful family scene at Christmas in 1904 with the converted collier at the table head. The illustration echoes the *Western Mail* accounts of the pleas of the wives of colliers to save their husbands from sin (Morgan, 2005, p. 442). The newspaper accordingly presents an illustration of domestic life that appears to act as something of a counterpart to the criticism it levied at the effects of the radical strike of 1898 in 'The Lodger'. The conversion of the colliers could simply be encapsulated as 'An Improvement'.

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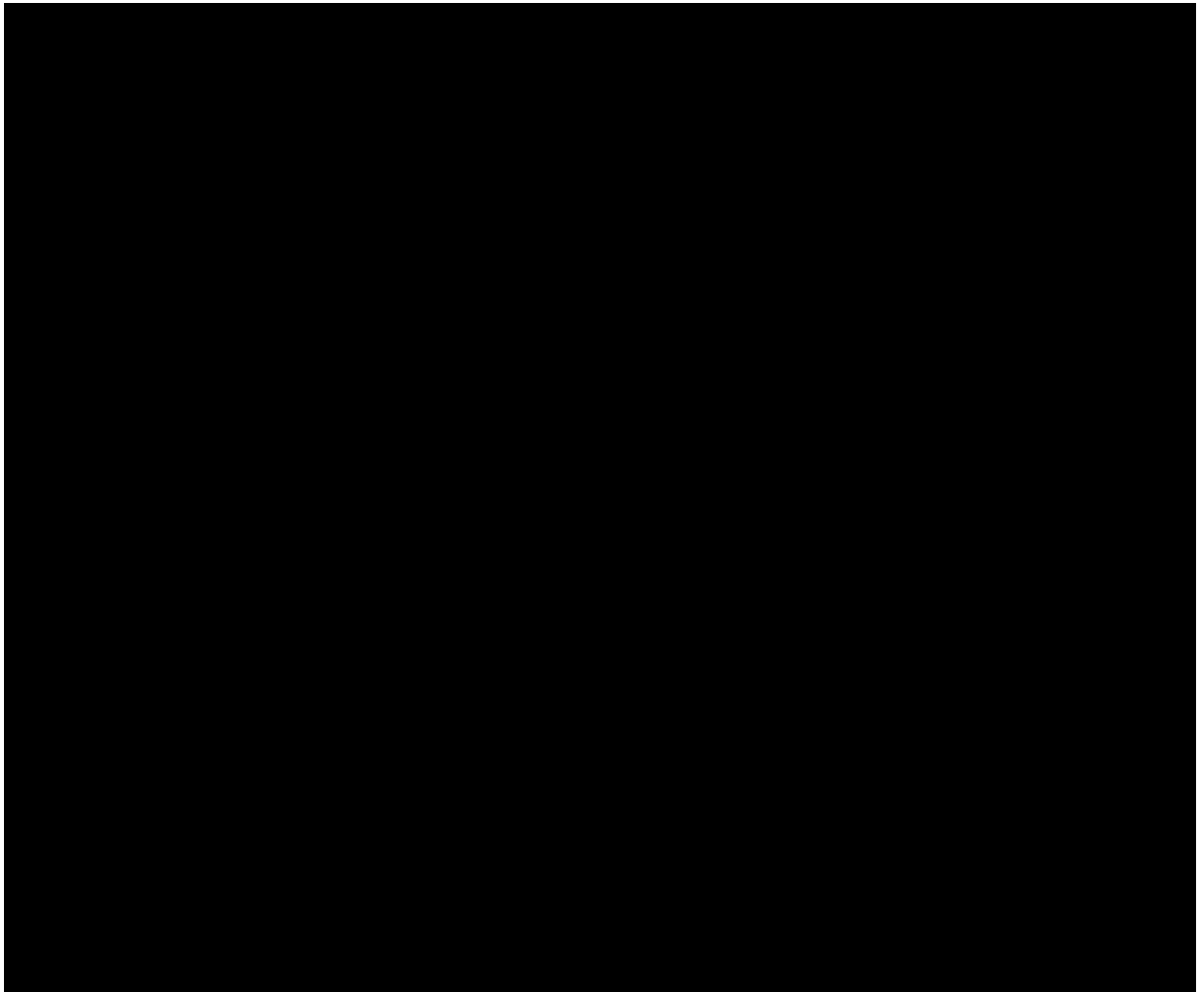


Figure 4. *Western Mail*, 26 December 1904, p. 6.

The proclaimed moral improvement due to the revival can be directly connected to anxieties regarding the moral degeneracy of colliers and industrial decline by reference to the aforementioned commentary from Maxim (to which the newspaper indicated support) itself published in December 1904 at the peak of revival reporting. In correspondence placed adjacent to Maxim's capitalist anti-agitation treatise, the correspondent asked the newspaper as to the rationale of supporting a revival that may cause a financial detriment to the publication. The *Western Mail's* illuminating reply suggests that its publicising of the revival is possibly as a maintenance of a former status-quo, particularly as it relates to the Fed and perceived radical and immoral tactics. The newspaper posits that the moral benefits of the revival can materially advantage the community and that prosperity itself cannot grow with the 'maintenance of immorality' (*Western Mail*, 29 Dec 1904, p.4).

Conclusion

The central aim of this thesis has been to assess *Western Mail* reporting of the Welsh Revival 1904-5 as a political actor and to interrogate ambiguity regarding its enthusiasm for the revival in historiography and to reveal the extent to which reporting of the revival was influenced by anxieties related to a more militant form of trade unionism. When analysing reporting of the revival in isolation there is an abundance of content in the *Western Mail* that points to a dynamic, dramatic, and often contradictory religious phenomenon and much of this nature of the revival is evident in historiography. It would not be judicious to suggest that the *Western Mail* reporting was entirely a political endeavour, there are plainly commercial and cultural considerations and the *Western Mail* appeared to intend to reflect the interests of its readership as a distinctly Welsh publication. Nevertheless, it can be argued that to a great extent anxieties regarding trade union militancy were influential in the newspapers reporting of the revival.

This can be concluded as when taking a broader view of the political context of the period, to the extent that the newspaper could be balanced in its coverage of colliers, particularly during the strike of 1898, where even though it was critical of the colliers it praised their overall conduct and drew links between this and non-conformist chapel culture, there was later concern at the moral effects of the strike in the community. It appears it was with the emergence of the Fed as a centralised trade union that these anxieties regarding moral degeneracy became manifest particularly with concerns of intimidation and coercion.

The anxieties regarding moral degeneracy and the Fed were very much situated in what could be described as the newspapers pro-capitalist industrial and economic concerns in south Wales during the period and much of the editorial criticism was based upon the impact of inhibition of trade and economic loss to south Wales. While in some instances the newspaper could be relatively even handed to perceived radicalism, often publishing responses written by Brace and stating the newspaper was not hostile to trade unionism as such, the newspaper was vociferous in its opposition to the tactics of the Fed. The newspaper drew attention to capitalist perspectives that conjectured that the moral degeneracy of men and consequent poverty were due to political agitators, and in the south Wales context, the inference being specifically leaders within the Fed.

It is therefore in this context that moral degeneracy can be interpreted in the *Western Mail* as a proxy for radicalism and agitation as expressed by the Fed and this does to a great extent situate the *Western Mail* praising of the moralising effects of the revival in the political domain where it is inferred that countering immorality benefits industrial relations and thus the prosperity of the community. The newspapers accounts of the spread of the revival to the collieries and the admiration of the improvement in the community are

revealing in this context even if more explicit links to the maintenance of a political status-quo are harder to decipher definitively.

Notwithstanding the complexity of the origins of the Welsh Revival, when considering the confluence of non-conformist revitalisation and anxieties of the growth of a more militant trade unionism and emergent socialism we should consider the shared radical threat to both non-conformists and conservatives in south Wales. In many respects the revival can be considered a struggle between a new radical socialism and an older non-conformist tradition, which adds an intriguing facet to the proclamation of 'remarkable conversions underground' given that both movements actively sought to convert colliers to the cause. There does appear to have been an awareness of this struggle, it was observed by non-conformists that gains made during the revival were immediately countered by the rapid arrival of many socialist organisations into south Wales preaching the 'socialist gospel' to colliers (Morgan, J.V., 1909, p.255).

To extend this further, and to situate the *Western Mail* support of the revival within this context, a conversion of the colliers to the older tradition infers an inhibition of the threat of conversion to militancy associated with the Fed and socialism. The answer to the question of the conservative *Western Mail's* enthusiastic reporting of the revival can thus be as well understood by consideration to this non-conformist appraisal of the relative legacy of the revival:

These working men have already reverted to the old belief that their salvation is not to come by the way of the pulpit or by the way of the churches, but by the way of the Labour Party and of Westminster.

(Morgan, J. V, 1909, p.255)

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