

Price—ONE PENNY.

THE
MINERS' NEXT STEP

BEING A SUGGESTED SCHEME FOR THE
Reorganisation of the Federation

Issued by the Unofficial Reform Committee

TONYPANDY :
ROBERT DAVIES AND CO., GENERAL PRINTERS, ETC.

1912.

Title page of *The Miners' Next Step*. (Source: *South Wales Miners' Library*.)

From Riots to Revolt: Tonypandy and The Miners' Next Step

David Smith

In recent years historians have drastically revised their interpretation of those pre-1914 industrial troubles which go under the name of The Great Labour Unrest. There were, it is true, serious disturbances and bitter strikes in 1910, in 1911 and 1913, in places as remote from each other as Tonypandy and Dublin, as near as Llanelli and Tredgar, as connected in trade as Liverpool and Cardiff. Two men were indeed shot down by troops in the rail strike at Llanelli in 1911 and troops had killed two others on the streets of Liverpool in that city's general transport strike in the same year. The strikes often spilled over into a more general attack on property and property owners who had no direct connection with the disputes. Social revolt seemed to go hand in hand with industrial militancy to such an extent that some feared, and others hoped for, revolutionary upsurge, based on direct action by trade unions and bypassing parliamentary socialism, that would actually confront the state itself in a General Strike for all workers. The subsequent victory, prepared for by successful strikes in particular industries, would usher in workers' control of the production and distribution of all goods, industry by industry, for the benefit of all rather than the profit of a few. This doctrine was widely proclaimed and its supporters known as 'syndicalists' (after the French 'Syndic' or union) or 'industrial unionists' (since they wanted all workers in any one type of industry to be organized in one big union).

On the other hand, the fury of the revolts, impelled by falling wages in a climate of relatively high employment, had died away by 1913. The more moderate, conciliatory union leaders had not been removed in influence nor, with some exceptions, in person. The leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party had always been firmly anti-syndicalist and argued for a long-term strategy of winning a parliamentary majority and then implementing policies of state nationalization of key industries. In 1912 this is precisely what the *MFGB* (Miners' Federation of Great Britain) put forward as its aim. When this was finally delivered in 1947 by the 1945 Labour government the debate seemed finally over: after all syndicalism had had nothing to show for its early optimism other than the great strikes of 1919 to 1921 and the failure of the 1926 General Strike. The number of workers organized in trade unions (rising dramatically from 1910 on) plummeted again after 1926, and only climbed slowly back towards the end of the 1930s.

In this broad context, then, the name 'Tonypandy' and the 1912 pamphlet published there (*The Miners' Next Step*) are little more than minor footnotes. The riots of 1910 and the local syndicalism of 1912 can both be explained, within a British pattern of social and economic change, as interesting aberrations of behaviour. Certainly it is true that there is no difficulty in describing accurately the events of 1910–11 in mid-Rhondda which are known as the Cambrian Combine Strike. The Combine had been welded together in 1908 from existing colliery companies by *D. A. Thomas*, coalowner

and Liberal MP. Under the general management of Leonard Llewellyn it produced 50 per cent of the Rhondda's coal output and maximised profits by advanced cost-efficiency methods. In its employ were over 12,000 men. Throughout 1909 negotiations were underway to settle a new cutting price for a seam in the Ely pit. When no agreement could be reached the management locked out all 800 Ely workmen on 1st September 1910. The Cambrian Combine employees in the other pits in the environs of the township of Tonypany saw this as the first move in a plan to undercut their piece-rate wages too (i.e. the amount they received per ton of coal cut) and, from 1st November, all the pits stopped work. Despite a lack of enthusiastic support by the official *SWMF* (South Wales Miners' Federation) leadership the men stayed out until the high summer of 1911 when they returned on the wages and conditions they were offered in October 1910. It was a bitter pill to swallow. Even so the issue of a minimum wage and the allied fair treatment for men working underground in 'abnormal places' (i.e. where water, or the height of the roof, or, as in the case of the Ely pit, the amount of stone in the coal made much work unproductive or 'dead') would not go away. In 1912 the British miners struck for, and won, at least some provision for a minimum wage.

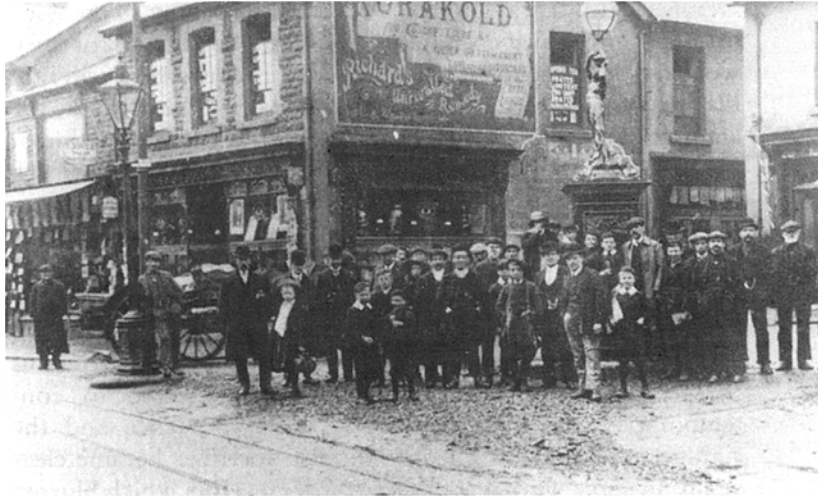
Historians who have puzzled over the persistence of 'Tonypany' as legend and myth in the history of the Labour movement have been driven to re-examine the story by discarding the hindsight which has shaped our sense of 'Tonypany' as part of an unfolding series of events. From this perspective the shock 'Tonypany' administered to contemporaries, the longevity of its wider influence and the significance of the attached syndicalist doctrines became clear again. In some ways it is the sources themselves which blurred our vision and it is only through re-interpretation and comparison of different types of source material that the focus can be sharpened.

At first sight the most difficult problem to resolve is the contentious issue that centres around *Winston Churchill* and the troop movements of 1910. To what extent was he responsible for the presence of the military in mid-Rhondda, and what effect did this have on events (D.1)? The clarity of the questions has not been generally reflected in the answers given. As late as 1978 there were scenes of uproar in the House of Commons when, in reply to a routine question on miners' pay by *Churchill's* grandson, another Winston Churchill MP, the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, accused the Churchill family of pursuing a vendetta against miners and threw in the name of 'Tonypany' for good measure. He refused to withdraw and claimed that, at the very least, *Churchill's* actions were a matter of historical dispute. That was true. But it scarcely needed to be since the evidence, though complex, is clear enough.

D.1

As early as 2 November 1910, authorities in south Wales were enquiring about the procedure for requesting military aid in the event of disturbances because of the strike (in addition to the Cambrian Combine dispute there was a month-old strike in the neighbouring Cynon Valley) and in the Rhondda the Chief Constable of Glamorgan had, by Sunday 6 November, concentrated over 200 imported police in the area. It was this force he judged inadequate after the attack on the Glamorgan colliery on 7 November. His request for

troops went straight to the War Office and, immediately, troops were entrained.



Tonypany, early twentieth century. (Sources: *Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum* and *Cyril Batstone*.)



Churchill, as Home Secretary, now learned of this movement (D.2) and, after a brief conference with the War Office halted it. He rightly surmised that the local authorities were over-reacting and certainly hoped that a Liberal government could calm matters down. However, he did accede to the extent of despatching *Metropolitan police* officers (foot and mounted) and some troops (the cavalry) did proceed to Cardiff that day (D.3). *Churchill's* personal message to the strikers was to the effect that 'We are holding back the soldiers for the present and sending only police'. This could be seen as a veiled threat more than a promise. In any case, after telephone conversations later that day and even before the *Stipendiary Magistrate's* 7.45 telegram (D.4), the Home Office did agree to authorize military support (D.5) This occurred *after* the further clashes outside the Glamorgan colliery but *before* Tonypany itself was, in the words of reporter David Evans, 'sacked'.

D.2

D.3

D.4
D.5

All of this, and the subsequent stationing of troops (D.6), is plainly recorded in the Home Office's published volume of 1911 entitled *Colliery Strike*

D.6

Disturbances in South Wales: Correspondence and Report 1910 from which Sources D.2–6, D.8 and D.19 are taken. Furthermore the troops were stationed in the area until the strike was virtually ended in 1911.

It could be argued that *Churchill* was, in the context of his times, doing no less than his duty as a Home Secretary. Indeed, his *Tory* opponents did suggest that he should have acted with greater vigour. There is no doubt, either, that the troops acted more circumspectly and were commanded with greater common sense than the police forces whose role under the peppery Lionel Lindsay was indeed that of an army of occupation. The troops were not regarded by the community with the same level of hostility as were the police.

So why did this incident continue to haunt *Churchill* throughout his political career? David Evans's 1911 account gives one reason why. The troops did *not* remain 'in the background', as *Churchill* claimed in 1950 (D.1), for their essential role was to allow the police to control all demonstrations against 'blackleg' (or strike-breaking) labour. On more than one occasion the troops went further and came into direct contact with the strikers (D.7). The troops ensured that trials of rioters, strikers and trade union leaders would take place and be successfully prosecuted in 1911 in Pontypridd. Straight-forwardly, their presence prevented the mass picketing that *might* have ended the strike early in the strikers' favour. In addition, *Churchill* had, in any case, added to the police brought in by Lindsay so that well over 1,000 were billeted in mid-Rhondda. The defeat of 1911 was, in the eyes of the local community, attached directly to state intervention without any negotiation.

D.1

D.7

This was not forgotten when *Churchill*, now a bellicose Conservative minister in *Stanley Baldwin's* 1926 cabinet, actively encouraged rapid troop movements during the General Strike. In 1940, as *Chamberlain's* war-time government faltered and *Churchill* was poised to be his successor, *Clement Attlee* (Leader of the Labour Party) secretly warned that the Labour Party might not follow *Churchill* into a coalition government because of the association of his name with that of Tonyandy. Thus his unexpected, and unprovoked, reference to Tonyandy in 1950 was not without point if he could persuade his listeners that his motives had been as liberal as they were sensible (D.8). Only it was not motives he chose to defend, but rather deeds which were recalled forty years on with more panache than accuracy.

D.8

If it is the connection of a great man with small, half-forgotten facts which has unnecessarily bedevilled the historiography of the Tonyandy riots, the events of the night of Tuesday 8 November after the clash with the police outside the Glamorgan colliery in Llwynypia were genuinely be-wildering. Undoubtedly, the commercial high street of nearby Tonyandy was wrecked. But why? What motives underlay this violent behaviour?

After it was over many observers, including leading socialists like Keir *Hardie*, MP for Merthyr since 1900, argued that it was the work of a small group of people, many of them drunk, and that it was inaugurated by police brutality. The level of violence was consistently played down or condemned outright by the local union leaders. And yet newspaper accounts, a list of the damage (60 shops seriously smashed) and eyewitnesses' recollections leave us in no doubt that thousands of men, women and children were involved in riotous

behaviour that lasted for hours. And the public houses had been closed early that day.

David Evans had more clear-cut answers. He wrote his lively, if lurid, account on behalf of his employers, the coalowners, to vindicate their case and to justify the activities of the police. In part his narrative is designed to refute the military commander's, General Macready's, cooler view of events by stressing the real danger to property and the necessary heroism of the police in its defence. According to Evans the 'mob', having prevented any working at the other Cambrian Combine collieries on 7 November, decided to storm the Glamorgan colliery where police and officials had been marshalled inside the Power House to keep pumps and fans going in the pit. Foiled in their endeavours by fierce police resistance they wreaked cowardly revenge on the shopkeepers (D.9). This is the motivation most people accepted. *Churchill* offered it to King George V as sole explanation. This was the 'anarchy' that incensed the outside world and over which local union leaders and socialists shook their heads gravely. But the fact of the matter is, as oral evidence and contemporary newspaper accounts make clear, that the crowd never intended to seize the Power House. Throughout the dispute they were determined to stop any working by officials, imported labour or any other '*blacklegs*' and to halt the collieries even at the risk of flooding. They stoned the Power house in a crowd of around 9,000 on 8 November but they did not take the Power House even though they beat back the police who had charged *them* in an effort to disperse the demonstration. General Macready dispassionately establishes the ease with which the crowd could have captured the colliery if that had been their aim (D.10). They were certainly bloodied and battered by police charges but, as PC Knipe remembered, scarcely beaten into submission (D. 11).

D.9

D.10

D.11

We require, then, another explanation for the riot against the town. Crowd actions in pre-industrial societies have been investigated with considerable sophistication in the last thirty years by historians determined to re-establish the human, concrete detail hidden by such value-loaded abstractions as 'the mob' or 'the masses'. Industrial crowd action, on the other hand, has more readily been linked to the strike activity that usually surrounds it in a cause-and-effect manner. This is perhaps, too convenient. Tonypany, along with much of south Wales in 1910, was a society-in-the-making. Often raw and raucous, basic in amenities, base in some of its pleasures, afflicted by appalling rates of infant and maternal mortality, occasionally shattered by the devastating effect of mass death in pit explosions and continually renewed by a spectacular rising population, the mid-Rhondda was a community in the process of defining its identity. The social elite of the township of Tonypany was, above all others, the shop-owning class. The angry, wealth-producing crowd turned against the symbol of social attainment, the conspicuous, wealth-making shops. And they did so in a manner that expressed contempt and resentment rather than greed and fear. The shops were smashed systematically but not indiscriminately (D. 12). The amount of looting was not so important as the display of bravado enacted on the streets. Goods were scattered about on the road. Clothes were worn in parade – top hats and overcoats in a festival atmosphere – and mufflers, braces and caps (more useful items to colliers) pinched and exchanged as trophies (D.13). Women

D.12

D.13

and children were involved in considerable numbers, as they had been outside the Glamorgan colliery. No police were seen until the *Metropolitans* arrived around 10.30pm (almost 3 hours after the riots began) and then the disturbance fell away of its own accord. Some shops were completely untouched – the most famous exception to the general damage done to chemists' establishments being that of Willie Llewellyn who had the good luck to be known as Wales's greatest wing-three quarter of the day!

The violence was, of course, unplanned and (sometimes) without a specific direction for its rage. Nonetheless the way in which the crowd acted in avoiding some targets and the obvious way in which it was more concerned with overt destruction and display than covert pillage and concealment is a real clue to the significance of the riot. This general move against the public side of a community proud of its progressive, dynamic society yet less concerned about the greater realities of lives that were nasty, brutish and short, is our indication of how sure the crowd was that the shopkeeping class *should* be formally, if rather unceremoniously, involved directly in an industrial dispute that was about the *whole* nature of this mining community.

Besides, historical enquiry that does not attempt to explain the riot in terms of the whole process of community development is like conducting a murder investigation according to the rules of *Cluedo*. If we look at either side of the events of 7–8 November we can discover the constant anxiety of shopkeepers about the loss of profits a prolonged strike would entail (D.14), their very close involvement and expressed admiration for the local coalowners and mine managers and their private, often secret, deliberations on credit facilities and police protection. Newspaper stories and Chamber of Trade minutes, as well as editorials and correspondence columns, fill out a picture of a community frequently shaped and cajoled by its shopkeeping elite. They were at the centre of the public stage (D.15). Advertisements remind us of their urgent appeals for colliers' wives' custom and photographs of the bustle and pretension of their public world. Even more to the point than any of this surmise (for historical reconstruction of crowd behaviour is, too, imaginative guess-work) is the clinching evidence we have of the crucial role played by shopkeepers in the domestic arrangements of their clients. Houses, to own and to rent, were in short supply. Speculative building was a profitable exercise. Shopkeepers possessed the capital and the local interest to become multi-house-owners (D.16). Undoubtedly, some of them took a further advantage of this state of affairs by charging exorbitant or unfairly assessed rents, by making tenants shop in their stores, by positively encouraging overcrowding in order to have large families dependent on them for foodstuffs or furniture and even renting rooms to the highest bidder. All of this was complained about in the Rhondda, especially by the Trades and Labour Council, for up to *five* years before the Tonypandy riots and it was officially confirmed in a sensational report by the Medical Officer of Health in 1911 (D.17). Anger may have sparked off the crowd's attack on 8 November 1910, but a deep, local knowledge directed their action.

D.14

D.15

D.16

D.17

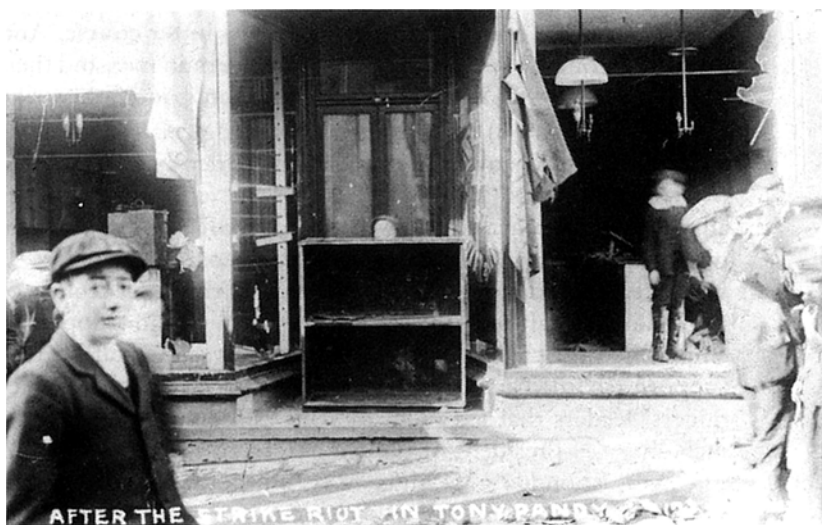


Tonypanydy after the riots. (Sources: Cyril Batstone; and Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum.)



However, the riot against commercial property, even more than the attacks on the collieries, was clearly outside any accepted sense of normality. If the action taken was not that of an incensed mob it must surely have been directed by leaders. This was the opinion of General Macready who came to know the articulate leaders of the strikers and rapidly decided some of them were determined to create a new, 'socialist' society (D. 18). There is little to be said for this argument insofar as it relates to the riots directly. To begin with, the local strike committee, and the leaders imprisoned for incitement to riot against *blacklegs* in 1911, were neither firebrands nor 'syndicalists'. They could excuse, but they did not condone, the attacks on shopkeepers. Those who were convinced of the necessity of socialist politics (and not all were) concluded that the social and industrial disruption was a sign of working-class disquiet that had political potential *if it was channelled away*

D.18



from momentary acts of violence. What was needed was not justification of the outburst but the direction of energies so expressed into effective industrial and political organizations. Now, since the mid-Rhondda did, in retrospect, contain such a 'small but energetic section' preaching 'the doctrine of extreme socialism' the ideological framework of syndicalism/socialism has become a surround for the causes of the strike and its bitter course. And yet, apart from the very real connection of certain men and their later careers with the immediate events in Tonypany, the strike and the riot stand in no need of any ideological root cause as their initiation. If anything the ideas, so ardently propounded by men who had received eagerly the current doctrines advocating direct action and workers' control of industry, were given life and root *in the wake* of these immense disturbances. It was defeat in mid-Rhondda that underlined the implacability of the coalowners. It was physical force by police and troops that emphasised the chosen role of the state. It was the half-hearted support accorded to their struggle by their own south Wales miners' leaders that led them to vote well-established figures, including the President of the SWMF from 1898–1912, *Willie Abraham*, Rhondda's MP since 1885, off the Executive Council of the *MFGB*. And it was the conviction of some that leaders should *never* be given power if democracy were to have

any true meaning that saw the Unofficial Reform Committee formed in 1911 and spread through the coalfield down to 1914.

The single, most important outcome of these particular eliberations was the production of *The Miners' Next Step* in 1912 (D.19). If it had not been published in Tonypanydy perhaps *The Times* would not have noticed it sufficiently to denounce in an editorial its allegedly pernicious message of revolt. On the other hand the vigour and power of the pamphlet's content and style would undoubtedly have won it a wide audience across Britain. Its arguments *against* nationalization, *against* trade union bureaucracy, *against* a passive parliamentarianism and *for* a locally rooted democratic structure with, as its objective, the end of all capitalist economies, had, and have, a universal resonance. Its *political* power, though, came precisely from its geographical and industrial context allied to its timing. The authors (six leading militants in Rhondda linked into a wider constituency in south Wales) show that the potential power of the SWMF was enormous. Direct action in a one-industry community like south Wales might indeed by-pass the formalized structures of Parliament. There were in 1912 almost 250,000 coalminers in south Wales alone. They had, it was argued, no reason to wait for conciliation between union and employers or to waste energy in sectional disputes they could not win. Centralized, united and with leaders as mere delegates rather than as professional representatives, they could call the tune that would lead on to total control of the industry and, thereby, step by step, bring about a new society.

D.19

Success of a kind did come. Leading syndicalists were elected to office. The 1912 minimum wage strike, though not a complete victory in the eyes of militants in south Wales and other coalfields, established the national relevance of the issues at stake in mid-Rhondda in 1910–11. Miners' conferences and miners' agents (white-collar professionalized representatives who often controlled mining districts absolutely) were rattled and almost routed in 1913. Paper resolutions 'to abolish capitalism' were soon enshrined in the SWMF Rule Book. Nevertheless, the doctrines of *The Miners' Next Step* were never carried through. It is true their plans for re-organising the SWMF on a rank-and-file basis did come about, in a fashion in 1933–4, but that was in a coalfield racked by heavy, long-term unemployment, depleted by mass out-migration and where *the FED* had been almost smashed by the defeats of the 1920s. *Noah Ablett*, the principal inspiration of that 'syndicalist' generation, died in 1936; his real influence had vanished by the early 1920s.

In November 1912, George Barker, then a miners' agent and later MP for Abertillery, had opposed *Ablett* in a sophisticated debate before a packed house in mid-Rhondda. Barker advocated the attainable objective of a nationalized mining industry (D.20). It was soon to be advocated directly by a Government Commission – in 1919. After the devastating run-down of the coal industry in the 1920s and 1930s it came to be seen, by all factions within the miners' union, as a panacea to be desired above all others. It was welcomed as such when it was finally delivered in 1947. The General Secretary of the newly formed National Union of Mineworkers (1944) was, in that year, *Arthur Lewis Horner*, ex-Baptist preacher and elected first Communist President of the SWMF in 1936. *Horner* was the greatest of all the Trade Unionists who emerged from this turbulent coalfield. He was brilliant

D.20

and committed, as full of integrity as he was skilled in making the best of an unavoidable situation. Nationalization had no greater supporter than *Arthur Horner*. His journey to 1947 is the solution to the equation Tonyandy posed (D.21). The riots did raise the spectre of uncontrolled social revolt. They also raised the hopes and fired the minds of those like *Ablett* who, as he said in 1912, saw no way of going forward if people were merely to be led, to be given things, to be servile before the bounty of the state (D.20). That revolt was, thereafter, patchy even in south Wales. Compromise, defeat, betrayal, even passivity *are* major elements in the story that unfolded down to 1947. But so is rebellion, heroism, intellectual courage and the resistance of communities to the degradation of a poverty and a way of life not of their making or their choice. It is such choice that is the mark of human liberty above all else. *The Miners' Next Step* concluded with a view of the world when 'mankind shall at last have leisure and inclination to really live as men, and not as the beasts which perish'. *Arthur Horner* lived in the real world in a way the visionary *Noah Ablett* did not but *Horner* 'never forgot that lesson'. Tonyandy, 1910, echoes in our history because, in so many ways, it presented men and women, there and elsewhere, with the nature of human choice. It still does.

Sources

D.1 When I was Home Secretary in 1910, I had a great horror and fear of having to become responsible for the military firing on a crowd of rioters or strikers. Also, I was always in sympathy with the miners and I think they are entitled to social dues because they work far from the light of the sun. The Chief Constable of Glamorgan sent a request for the assistance of the military and troops were put in motion in the usual way. But here I made an unprecedented intervention. I stopped the movement of the troops and I sent instead 850 *Metropolitan police* with the sole object of preventing loss of life. I was much criticized for this so-called weakness in the House of Commons, but I carried my point. The troops were kept in the background and all contact with the rioters was made by our trusted and unarmed London police who charged, not with rifles and bayonets but with their rolled-up mackintoshes. Thus all bloodshed, except perhaps some from the nose, was averted, and all loss of life prevented. That is the true story of Tonyandy and I hope it may replace in Welsh villages the cruel lie with which they have been fed all these long years.

(Winston Churchill, General Election campaign 1950, speech in Cardiff, *Western Mail*, 9 February 1950).

D.2 All the Cambrian collieries menaced last night. The Llwynypia Colliery savagely attacked by large crowd of strikers. Many casualties on both sides. Am expecting two companies of infantry and 200 cavalry today . . . Position grave.

(Telegram sent from Lionel Lindsay, Chief Constable of Glamorgan, to the Home Office. Received at 10am on Tuesday, 8 November).

D.3 Your request for military. Infantry should not be used till all other means have failed. Following arrangements have therefore been made. 10

mounted constables and 200 foot constables of *Metropolitan Police* will come to Pontypridd by special train . . . Expect these forces will be sufficient, but as further precautionary measure 200 cavalry will be moved into the district tonight and remain there pending cessation of trouble. Infantry meanwhile will be at Swindon. General Macready will command the military . . . (who) . . . will not however be available unless it is clear that the police reinforcements are unable to cope with the situation.

(Telegram from Churchill to Lindsay, sent at 1.30pm on 8 November).

- D.4** Police cannot cope with rioters at Llwynypia, Rhondda Valley. Troops at Cardiff absolutely necessary for further protection. Will you order them to proceed forthwith.

(Telegram from Lleufer Thomas, Stipendiary Magistrate, to the Home Office. Sent at 7.45pm and received at 9pm on 8 November).

- D.5** As the situation appears to have become more serious you should if the Chief Constable . . . desires it move all the cavalry into the disturbed district without delay.

(Telegram from Churchill to Macready sent at 8.10pm on 8 November after enquiries had been made by telephone. The magistrate was informed that by the time his telegram had arrived [see above] this request had been met).

- D.6** At 1.20am orders were sent to Colonel Currey at Cardiff to despatch the Squadron 18th Hussars at that place so as to reach Pontypridd at 8.15am. On arrival at Pontypridd one squadron patrolled through Aberaman and the other through Llwynypia where it remained during the day in a good position over-looking the Glamorgan colliery ... At about 5pm I received (further) instructions from the Home Secretary to go to Llwynypia and relieved the 18th Hussars who had been there during the day ... on their return to Pontypridd (they) arrived at Porth just as a disturbance was breaking out. They held the crowd until the arrival of 50 *Metropolitan foot police* who had been sent from Pontypridd. Major Corbett, 18th Hussars, reported that the crowd showed a rather hostile attitude towards the troops. 300 more *Metropolitan foot police* arrived tonight and will be despatched to Tonypany.

The troops in the district were billeted as follows during the night.

12 Squadrons 18th Hussars at Pontypridd
1 Company Royal North Lancashire Regiment at Pontypridd
1 Company Lancashire Fusiliers at Llwynypia
1 Company West Riding Regiment at Cardiff
1 Company Devonshire Regiment at Newport
1 Company Royal Munster Fusiliers at Newport.

No disturbance occurred during the night in the district.

(Report by General Macready to the Home Office for 9 November. Troops stationed outside the coalfield were subsequently brought in

and on 21 November assisted Metropolitan police in counteracting a violent demonstration by picketing strikers against 'blackleg' workers).

D.7 The last of the mid-Rhondda riots took place on July 25th (1911) at . . . Penygraig . . . The strikers had taken umbrage at the action of certain workmen in accepting employment at the pits of the Naval Company and marched in procession 3,000 strong, towards Penygraig . . . One of the leaders addressed the strikers. He complained that they had been refused permission to see the *blacklegs*, and had been advised to see Mr Llewellyn. But they had had enough of deputations, and were determined to remain there and have an understanding with the *blacklegs* when they came out. By this time, a large proportion of the strikers had got completely out of hand . . . stone throwing became general, and urgent messages were sent to the police headquarters at Tonypany for reinforcements . . . This force arrived at the Ely colliery soon after . . . and brought the total number of police ... to over 100. Against between 3,000 and 4,000 desperate rioters spread out along the mountainside, wellout of reach of the police and employed in rolling down huge boulders in the direction of the colliery, the police force was hopelessly inadequate, and it became necessary to call in the aid of the military. At 5 o'clock a company of the Somerset Light Infantry, under the command of Major Thickness, surprised the rioters by appearing in extended order on the mountain top armed with fixed bayonets and ball cartridge. They carried their rifles in their hands . . . The troops drove the rioters into the town, where they were charged and dispersed . . . The presence of the military in the district had a decisive influence on the general situation, and after their arrival the police experienced very little difficulty in clearing the streets.

(David Evans, *Labour Strife in the South Wales Coalfield 1910– 1911*, 1911, pp. 110–111).

D.8 I feel in duty bound to thank you for coming here to restore order ... on two occasions I have appealed for protection on behalf of those who feared their homes would be ruined by the men who had taken the law into their own hands ... I think we should be thankful we had special officers sent here to protect our lives and property.

(Statement by a member of mid-Rhondda Free Church Council).

D.9 Immediately after the repulse of the attack on the Glamorgan colliery (on 8th November 1910) came the sack of Tonypany ... In their flight from Llwynypia, and under the impression that the victorious police were still at their heels, the rioters, desperate at the defeat of their plans to take the colliery, gave vent to their rage by smashing the windows of every shop that came within reach.

(David Evans, *Labour Strife in the South Wales Coalfield 1910–11*, 1911, p.48).

D.10 Investigations on the spot convinced me that the original reports regarding the attacks on the mines on November 8th had been exaggerated (by the police). What were described as 'desperate attempts' to sack the power house at Llwynypia proved to have been

an attempt to force the gateway . . . and a good deal of stone throwing . . . and had the mob been as numerous or so determined as the reports implied, there was nothing to have prevented them from overrunning the whole premises. That they did not was due less to the action of the police than to the want of leading or inclination to proceed to extremities on the part of the strikers.

(General Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, 1924, pp. 144–5).

- D.11** ... it was really hell. We had a terrible job . . . driving them back to the Square. Well, we only could get them as far as the Square. On that night, then, that was the night they wrecked all the shops . . . And the whole of the time we could do nothing about it ... They drove us back every time . . .

(Oral testimony of PC W. Knipe. Transcript in South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea).

- D.12** They started smashing the windows . . . they smashed this shop here, J. O. Jones, a *millinery shop* . . . We saw that being smashed and then next door to the *millinery* . . . there was a shop and they smashed the window there ... on the other side . . . there was Richards the chemist . . . they smashed that. And they smashed the windows of these three small shops here; one was greengrocer, the other one was fancy goods and the other one was a barber's shop . . . and they stole the shoes out of the Boots, flannel out of Watkins and greengrocery, well they only picked up there. Well next to that there was a few steps up and there was a dentist and one or two private houses. Well, they didn't smash – we didn't see anything that happened below the bridge because . . . we were afraid to go down there in front of the crowd . . . oh, there was a huge crowd!

(Oral testimony of Bryn Lewis, an eyewitness of the 1910 riots as a boy. South Wales Miners' Library Transcript).

- D.13** People were seen inside the counter handing goods out. They were afterwards walking in the Square wearing various articles of clothing which had been stolen and asking each other how they looked. They were not a bit ashamed, and they actually had the audacity to see how things fitted them in the shop itself. They were in the shop somewhere about three hours and women were as bad as men. Everything was done openly and the din was something horrible.

(Mrs Phillips, Draper, reported in *Draper's Record*, 19th November 1910).



Troops assembled in Pontypridd in 1910. (Source: Cyril Batstone.)

D.14 We deplore the result (of the vote for strike action in later October 1910) because an industrial struggle of this magnitude brings in its train, not only complete disorganisation of the trade of the district . . . but also because of the suffering of those who are no part to the dispute ... a strike at this period of the year, when trade is looking up and tradesmen are laying in large stores in preparation for the brisk demand, means the withdrawal of a huge sum of money from active circulation in the district.

(*Rhondda Leader*, 29th October, 1910).

D.15 In the last decade of Victoria's reign my optimistic father had opened a grocery shop in the centre of (Clydach Vale's) long main road . . . with several other shops it stood opposite the Central, a massive pub of angry-red brick and dour stone . . . within sight of my father's shop were two Welsh Nonconformist chapels, Noddfa and Libanus (there were

five others up and down the Vale), also St Thomas's Church (English), a police station with cells for violent Saturday night men and rioters in strike time, and the Marxian Club ... A doctor's surgery sent a warning smell out to the pavement night and day.

We lived for years behind and above our busy shop; a living room, pantry and scullery behind, three bedrooms above. It was a 'credit' shop and a history of family fortunes. On a lectern desk panelled with a frosted glass screen lay an enormous black ledger, six inches thick, a double page for each customer. Its chronicle of strike-time debts was my mother's bible and bane . . .

(Rhys Davies's autobiography, *Print of a Hare's Foot*, 1969, pp.8–12).

- D.16** A gentleman who is in a big way of business and who owns a very large number of houses and shops estimated his loss well over 1,000. In normal times he received in rental 2,000 a year but his receipts had dropped to about 30 a fortnight.

(*Khondda Leader*, 24th June, 1911).

- D.17** There are . . . cases in respect of whom the inspectors are informed that houses are only obtainable on certain conditions, such as undertaking or promise on the part of the incoming tenant to purchase goods such as furniture or groceries from the owners. Some house-owners . . . object to tenants with many children, while some provision merchants are said to prefer tenants with large families, because every additional child helps to swell the bill for provisions.

(Report of Mr. J. D. Jenkins, Medical Officer of Health for Rhondda, July 1911, Rhondda Borough Council Offices).

- D.18** The impression conveyed to my mind in regard to the action of the strikers themselves throughout those disturbances, and the motives for rioting, is that the doctrine of extreme socialism preached by a small but energetic section is entirely responsible for the pre-meditated attempts to destroy property.

(General Macready, Memorandum to Home Office, January 1911).

- D.19** The year 1910 brought a seeming realisation of this antagonism (between leaders and the rank and file) by the men. Throughout the negotiations for the new agreement, the men continuously insisted more and more on having the controlling voice. Early on it was laid down that plenary powers should not be given to the leaders, but that the final acceptance of any agreement should depend upon the ballot vote of the men . . .

This half-hearted establishment of the principle of direct control by the men found expression again towards the end of the year by the outbreak of the Cambrian and Aberdare disputes. A careful and dispassionate survey of these historic struggles will show that at every stage the interference of leaders prejudiced the case for the men, and also helped to tie their hands in their endeavour to settle the dispute themselves.

To the leaders, everything seemed to be in the melting pot, because the men insisted on taking a hand in the conduct of affairs. There was much vain talk on the leaders' side about 'the growing spirit of anarchy', which was bringing 'chaos' into the coalfield. And on the men's side, a growing distrust of leadership, and a determination to gain more control ... if measures are not taken to crystallise the new spirit, to give it proper methods in which to function we shall drift back to the old methods of autocracy.

It becomes necessary then to devise means which will enable this new spirit of real democratic control to manifest itself. . .

PROGRAMME

That the organisation (a centralised British union of mine-workers) shall engage in political action, both local and national, on the basis of complete independence of, and hostility to, all capitalist parties, with an avowed policy of wresting whatever advantage it can for the working class . . .

Alliances to be formed, and trades organisation fostered, with a view to steps being taken, to amalgamate all workers into one national and international union, to work for the taking over of all industries, by the workmen themselves.

POLICY

The old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility installed.

OBJECTIVE

Every industry thoroughly organised ... to fight, to gain control of, and then to administer, that industry. The co-ordination of all industries on a Central Production Board (to oversee production and distribution according to need) . . . leaving the men themselves to determine under what conditions and how, the work should be done. This would mean real democracy in real life, making for real manhood and woman-hood. Any other form of democracy is a delusion and a snare.

(Extracts from *The Miners' Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation*, Tonyandy, 1912).

Noah Ablett:

D.20 . . . the future does not lie in the direction of bureaucracy. The roadway to emancipation lies in a different direction than the offices of a Minister of Mines (operating state nationalisation). It lies in the democratic organisation, and eventually control of the industries by the workers themselves in their organised capacity as trustees for a working-class world. No Minister of Mines will lead us to our emancipation. That must be the work of the workers themselves from the bottom upward, and not from the top downward, which latter means the servile state. (Applause).

George Barker:

... I claim we have put before you a feasible proposal for obtaining the mines of this country, based on a business proposition (nationalisation through compensation payments to owners). In opposition to that our friends have put some revolutionary proposal, which they call an industrial democracy based on confiscation. Is there any man with a knowledge of the democracy of this country who believes in the possibility of getting such a revolution to take place? I challenge our friends to produce that revolution (laughs). It is no good bringing German theories from books here. Is there any possibility of any man going out and persuading the people to take possession of the mines? No! He would be laughed at as a lunatic. We affirm again and again that the Nationalisation of Mines Bill is in the best interest of the workers, aye, and of the nation.

(A Debate on Nationalization v Workers' Control held in Tonypany, November, 1912, and (ed. K. O. Morgan) printed in the *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, No. 3, 1975, pp.22–37).

- D.21** It was during this period (1910-1911), when my religious hopes were steadily being replaced by ideas of political struggle, that I met *Noah Ablett*, who more than any other man brought me fully into the working-class struggle. From him I learned the wider background to the conditions against which I had instinctively revolted. He was one of the leaders of the Unofficial Reform Committee set up within the *South Wales Miners' Federation*, which in 1912 produced *The Miners' Next Step*, the first coherent programme for a fighting miners' trade union in Wales and a policy based on immediate improvements in the miners' conditions, leading ultimately to working-class control and ownership of the coalfield. That struggle of the miners for the merest minimum standard of living was the background to my early years.

I walked over the mountains (from Merthyr Tydfil) through the night to Tonypany in November 1910 when we heard that *Winston Churchill* had called out the troops against the miners. The Tonypany incident followed the strike of 15,000 men employed in the Cambrian group of pits against the scandalous *piece work* rates imposed on the men at the coal face. The rate varied from district to district and even from mine to mine, but the biggest grievance arose because a man would find himself unable to get enough coal even to produce the miserable subsistence wage. He might be assigned to a place where the seam wall was crushed into small coal, which in South Wales at that time was not paid for at all. He might have to put in exceptional timbering to prevent dangerous falls, and the management, knowing that he was not getting good coal, would not keep him supplied with enough trams to take away what he had hewed so that whatever skill or hard work the man put in, he could still find himself with practically no earnings at all. In some of the pits the men used to cast lots for place. The men at that time were demanding a prescribed minimum of daily earnings for all *piece workers*, and with the resistance of the coal owners these flared up into disputes all over the Aberdare and Rhondda valleys.

When I reached Tonypandy the rioting had been going on all through the night. All the shop fronts were smashed. It has begun after the owners had attempted, on 6th and 7th November, to bring *blackleg* labour to man the pumps and ventilators at Glamorgan colliery, Llwynypia. The strikers surrounded the colliery. The police were rushed to the pit and on the following day used truncheons to disperse demonstrators . . . During the clash, some shops were damaged, and there was some looting.

It was after this that *Winston Churchill*, who was Home Secretary at the time, ordered men of the Lancashire Fusiliers, the 18th Hussars and the West Riding Regiment to reinforce the thousands of police already in the area. I saw in action that day the vicious alliance of the Government and the coal owners, backed by police and armed troops, against miners who asked no more than a wage little over starvation level. I never forgot that lesson.

(Arthur Horner in his autobiography, *Incorrigible Rebel* 1960, pp.15–16).

Debating the Evidence

David Smith has provided a wide range of documents which bring out many of the strengths and weaknesses in written evidence. Essentially, the questions which historians need to ask of such documents are similar whatever they are. However, the strengths and weaknesses of the direct and indirect evidence yielded by autobiography, Home Office telegrams, newspapers and a coalfield manifesto of action are going to vary greatly. To take just one example, when Home Secretary *Winston Churchill* says, in an official Home Office telegram in 1910, ‘Ten mounted constables and 200 foot constables of *Metropolitan Police* will come to Pontypridd by special train . . .’ we can be sure that these arrangements have been made. However, *Churchill’s* statement, made in 1950, in public in an election address, that ‘All bloodshed, except perhaps some from the nose, was averted’, is evidence of a different kind and needs to be analysed differently even though it emanates from the same person as the telegram.

Source D.1

1. Is this a primary or a secondary source? You will need to refer to the Introduction before answering this question. And even then it is not easy to come to a conclusion. Argue the case for it being primary, then argue the case for it being secondary. Then turn to document D.21 and consider whether document D.21 is a primary or secondary source.
2. Why is the distinction between primary and secondary evidence an important one?
3. What motives might *Churchill* have had here in making the case that he acted with unprecedented moderation in Tonypandy?

Source D.3

How does the evidence in this document square with *Churchill's* statement in Source D.1?

Source D.4

What true statement about the Tonypandy riots could a historian make on the basis of this document, given the fact that it is a genuine document and not a forgery?

Source D.5

How does the evidence in this document square with *Churchill's* statement in Source D.1?

Source D.6

1. How much credence would you give to the information in this document? Why?
2. Would you expect Macready to give inaccurate information to the Home Office? Why?
3. Would you expect Macready to give biased information to the Home Office? Why?

Source D.7

Present-day historians generally accept that David Evans gave a one-sided account of the events in Tonypandy. Is there any evidence in this passage as to which side he favoured?

Source D.12

Bryn Lewis was recorded in the 1970s. He was a witness to the riots in 1910. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this source?

Source D.14

What information would you need to have about the ownership, management, production and circulation of the *Rhondda Leader* before making proper use of this source?

Source D.15

Explain the relevance of this source to the topic of the Tonypandy riots.

THE WAR OFFICE AND THE CAVALRY.

ORDERS FOR THE MEN TO BE
DETAINED AT CARDIFF.

TO BE READY IN CASE THEIR PRESENCE
SHOULD BE WANTED!!

ONE SQUADRON LEAVES FOR THE
RHONDDA.

METROPOLITAN POLICE SENT ON TO
PONTYPRIDD.

The following official statement was issued from the Home Office on Tuesday night—

A request was addressed last night by the chief-constable of Glamorgan to the local military authorities for the assistance of 200 cavalry and two companies of infantry in keeping order in the Cambrian Collieries.

The Home Secretary, in consultation with Mr. Haldane, decided to send instead a contingent of the Metropolitan police, numbering 75 mounted and 200 foot constables, to the district to carry out the instructions of the chief-constable, under their own officers. This force was sent by special trains, and will arrive in the early evening.

In the meanwhile, the cavalry and infantry which had been despatched in response to the chief-constable's request have with, his concurrence, been detained—the infantry at Swindon and the cavalry at Cardiff, where they will remain for a few days in case their presence should prove to be necessary.

CAVALRY AT CARDIFF.

ANIMATED SCENES AT THE RAILWAY STATION.

The Great Western Railway station at Cardiff on Tuesday evening presented the appearance of an Army headquarters on a miniature scale. From 6.30 on military officers were arriving by train from various parts of the country and at once proceeding to the stationmaster's office, where Brigadier-general C. F. N. Macready, C.B., was in constant telegraphic and telephonic communication with the War Office, and the chief-constable of Glamorgan (Captain Lindsay). The general came down from London in the afternoon, arriving at Cardiff by the 6.30 p.m. train. With him was Colonel M. C. Curry, D.S.O., and they were met by Lieutenant-colonel H. A. T. Phillips, R.G.A., commanding the troops in the Cardiff district, and Captain Bennett, A.S.C., Pembroke Dock.

A quarter of an hour prior to the general's arrival a squadron of the 15th Hussars, with their horses, arrived at the Great Western Railway station from Salisbury Plain, and those were at once despatched to the Canton sidings, where they remained in the train until 6.30, when they detrained and marched to the Cardiff Barracks, where they put up for the night. Their sudden appearance at Cardiff caused some excitement among the station officials, who understood the significance of the soldiers' arrival.

The general officer commanding seemed to be in some considerable doubt as to giving any definite orders for the sending of the troops up to the scene of operations, and it seemed evident that he was not in possession of the serious aspect affairs had assumed.

It was difficult to ascertain the identity of

the officers arriving by each train. They all immediately waited upon General Macready, and at one time eight were in the stationmaster's room, the conversation lasting until eight o'clock. A quartermaster-sergeant of the Welsh Regiment from Cardiff Barracks was in attendance the whole time, and there were also a number of orderlies.

The railway officials were also present in full force, among them being Mr. J. J. Leaning, divisional superintendent, Mr. J. Carter, assistant divisional superintendent, Mr. Hains, the stationmaster, &c., while an interested attendant was Mr. C. A. G. Pullin, Mr. D. A. Thomas's private secretary.

When the Hussars arrived the orders for the officer commanding were that he must not proceed further than Cardiff until he received a communication from the War Office. He was also informed by telegram that General Macready was on his way from London to command operations.

It was very evident that even General Macready was under orders not to proceed further than Cardiff until receiving instructions from the War Office.

By the 7.15 train another batch of officers arrived from Bristol, and after acquainting the general of the fact they left the station. At 8.15 the first contingent, consisting of 200 foot police arrived from London. These men were under the charge of Superintendent Powell, and an hour and a half later a special arrived with 100 men and their horses. These forces were immediately despatched to Pontypridd, where further orders awaited them.

CAVALRY LEAVE FOR THE RHONDDA.

ALL FURNISHED WITH BALL AMMUNITION.

A squadron of the 15th Hussars arrived at Cardiff at 11.15, they having left Tidworth at 6.45. On Major Barrett, who was in command, reporting himself to Colonel Curry, who was in charge—General Macready having left earlier for Pontypridd—he was ordered to leave at once for Pontypridd, where further orders awaited him. The train left at 11.30. The men were all furnished with ball ammunition, and are prepared for any eventuality.

MORE LONDON POLICE.

The situation during the evening assumed such an aspect that another contingent of police were telegraphed for from London, and they arrived at Cardiff Station at three o'clock this morning. An engine of the Taff Vale Company, with officials, was immediately attached to the train, and it proceeded up to the Rhondda.

Report in the *Western Mail*, 9 November 1910. (Source: National Library of Wales.)

Source D.18

1. What further information would you require before being able to evaluate the worth of this source?
2. What valid historical statement could you make without having any further information?

Source D.19

What briefly is the case being argued here?

Source D.21

1. On the evidence of this document, would you regard *Arthur Horner* as being in a good or bad position to write about the Tonypany riots? Why?

2. What evidence in the *Horner* extract is corroborated or contradicted by evidence in the other documents in this section?

Discussion

You have just completed a variety of exercises on written sources, exercises which varied between the straightforward and the complex. Source D.1 immediately highlights some of the problems which historians face. *Churchill* was in a unique position to inform posterity about central government's policy in Tonypandy. Yet the pressures on him, or any politician, to portray his actions in the most favourable light were immense, then and later. His own reputation was at stake. Every politician wishes it to be acknowledged that he did the right thing at a moment of crisis, and *Churchill* did not enjoy the highest of reputations for cool appraisal of events, especially before the Second World War. The pressures on *Churchill* by 1950 were far greater. First, despite being a national hero in 1945 he had been voted out of office at his moment of triumph. To say that he was anxious to be back in Downing Street is a major understatement. Second, by 1950, he knew full well that he was a prisoner of the myth of Tonypandy. It was no myth that he had authorised sending troops there. Document D.5 is unequivocal on this. However, the historian would argue that to pin the blame solely on *Churchill* would be to ignore both the pressures on him (Document 0.4) and his attempt to keep the military out (Document 0.3). *Churchill* actually seems to have been hurt by the reputation which he never failed to live down.

There are other difficulties with this document, because *Churchill* was recalling events of forty years before. He might have had 'total recall'; but his memory is more likely to have clouded over this timespan.

So, what is most striking about the document is the complexity of interpreting it. All such documents are biased, but the bias is not simple. It is by no means just a case of saying that *Churchill* was cynically determined, for electoral reasons, to provide an interpretation favourable to himself. In fact the document is particularly interesting for what it might be telling us about *Churchill* as well as the information it gives us about events in Tonypandy. Documents D.2 to D.5 reinforce the notion of *Churchill's* evidence being far from simple to interpret. At one level we are much nearer answering the equally valid historical question: does he deserve his enduring reputation as the man who sent troops to subdue Tonypandy?

It is beginning to look as if we cannot be sure of anything in historical documents. If this were the case there would be no point in having primary sources and there would be no worthwhile history. We know from Document D.4, for example, that Lleufer Thomas, the *stipendiary magistrate*, on 8 November 1910, requested the Home Office to order troops to be sent from Cardiff to control rioting at Llwynypia. There is some unintentional information here too – that there was a *stipendiary magistrate*, that the Home Office had to authorize the deployment of troops. But it is important to remember that virtually everything else here needs to be treated with caution. It is almost certain, from the document, that Lleufer Thomas thought that the police could not cope with the rioting. But he *could* have panicked and genuinely

exaggerated the danger. He *could* have had an ulterior motive for wanting the troops in the Rhondda Valley.

Then there is the problem of language. Historians rarely use a specialised vocabulary. The use of ordinary language, paradoxically, poses problems. It is not neutral. One observer's '*blackleg*' might be another's 'company employee'. In D.7 David Evans uses some evocative phrases. Strikers had 'taken umbrage'; strikers had 'got completely out of hand'; rioters were 'desperate'. How big were those 'huge boulders' being rolled down the mountainside? How many is 'between 3,000 and 4,000' – and how many police is 'over 100'? In Document D.9 we have 'the sack of Tonypandy'.

There are many events of the last two centuries for which the only evidence available is in newspapers. Because of their frequency of publication they are invaluable; but the use of the *Rhondda Leader* in connection with the Tonypandy riots is fraught with difficulty, whether we are using the reporting or the editorials. It would appear from the extracts included here that the interests which the paper represented were those of the Rhondda shopkeepers. We would do well, perhaps, to correlate our investigation of ownership and management with a close study of the advertisements which the paper carried. It was certainly a paper which supported the Liberal consensus view of politics rather than that epitomized in *The Miners' Next Step*.

The sources section ends, as it begins, with an eye-witness recalling many years later the experience of the time. This source, like the first, highlights the problems – and the fascination – of trying to evaluate primary sources of historical evidence.