



# Kent Academic Repository

**Kneif, Mary Ann (2005) *Directed to the mines: the Bevin Boys, 1943 to 1948.*  
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent.**

## Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/86527/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

## The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.86527>

## This document version

UNSPECIFIED

## DOI for this version

## Licence for this version

CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives)

## Additional information

This thesis has been digitised by EThOS, the British Library digitisation service, for purposes of preservation and dissemination. It was uploaded to KAR on 09 February 2021 in order to hold its content and record within University of Kent systems. It is available Open Access using a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-commercial, No Derivatives (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) licence so that the thesis and its author, can benefit from opportunities for increased readership and citation. This was done in line with University of Kent policies (<https://www.kent.ac.uk/is/strategy/docs/Kent%20Open%20Access%20policy.pdf>). If y...

## Versions of research works

### Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

### Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

## Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact [ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk). Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

**Directed to the Mines: The Bevin Boys, 1943 to 1948**

By

Mary Ann Kneif

University of Kent

Thesis submitted to the University of Kent for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2005



## **IMAGING SERVICES NORTH**

Boston Spa, Wetherby  
West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ  
[www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

# **THESIS CONTAINS**

**VIDEO**

**CD**

**DVD**

**TAPE CASSETTE**

## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the coal industry during and just after the Second World War, in particular with the role of young men directed to the mines. These recruits (conscripts, volunteers and optants) came to be known as Bevin Boys, named after Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour in the coalition Government. Nearly 50,000 men were directed to the mines under the terms of National Service. The thesis attempts to place the Bevin Boys within the history of labour supply by looking at manpower issues in the Second World War. It also examines the Bevin Boys' experiences of the life in mines and their contribution to the war effort. It aims to establish the Bevin Boys firmly in the history of coalmining and to show how far their experiences helped to influence the future of the coalmining industry after the war. It places them within the context and historiography concerning 'total war' and the 'war and society' debate.

The thesis relies mainly on primary sources: official reports, oral testimonies, Mass-Observation material and answers to questionnaires.

The thesis includes transcripts of interviews on a CD.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of the following institutions for their advice and assistance throughout the writing of this thesis:

BBC Written Archive, Caversham Park

Imperial War Museum, London

Mass-Observation Archive, Sussex University

National Archive, Kew

Templeman Library, University of Kent

I am also extremely grateful to my supervisor, Dr Mark Connelly and my husband for their help, advice and encouragement.

Special thanks go to all the Bevin Boys who agreed to be interviewed or replied to my questionnaire. Without their cooperation and help this thesis could not have been written.

## **Abbreviations**

- BBC-WAC: British Broadcasting Corporation Written Archive Centre
- CO: Conscientious Objector
- ENSA: Entertainments National Service Association
- HMSO: His Majesty's Stationery Office
- IWM: Imperial War Museum
- MFGB: Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain
- M-O A: Mass-Observation Archive (TC: Topic Collection)
- MOI: Ministry of Information
- MOLG: Ministry of Labour Gazette
- NSA: National Sound Archive
- NUM: National Union of Mineworkers
- PRO: National Archive (previously Public Record Office)
- ROFs: Royal Ordnance Factories
- UKC-CSCC: University of Kent at Canterbury - The Centre for the Study of  
Cartoons and Caricature
- WVS: Women's Voluntary Service

## Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abbreviations .....	iii
Contents .....	iv
Tables .....	viii
Figures .....	ix
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Evaluation of Sources .....	8
Books and articles .....	8
Hansard and documents from the National Archive .....	10
Newspapers .....	10
Broadcasts and newsreels .....	11
Mass-Observation .....	11
Interviews .....	13
Questionnaire .....	17
Imperial War Museum .....	18
Chapter 2 .....	19
Background to Direction .....	19
Mobilisation of Manpower .....	19
The Coalmining Industry .....	29
Chapter 3 .....	51
Call-up .....	51
Chapter 4 .....	67
The Training Period .....	67
The Government's View .....	67
Newspaper Coverage – The Press' View .....	72
Areas with training centres .....	74
Midlands, Nuneaton .....	74
North West, Clifton .....	75
North East, Askern Main .....	76
North East, Pontefract .....	77
North, South Moor .....	78
North, Horden .....	78
The Bevin Boys' View .....	80
First impressions .....	80
Training for work in the pit .....	84
Chapter 5 .....	95
Work in the Mines .....	95
Haulage .....	98
The coalface .....	101
Pit ponies .....	103
Conditions and Morale .....	106
Accidents .....	115
Demobilisation – A Case Study .....	119
Chapter 6 .....	123
Wages .....	123

Chapter 7 .....	134
Unions .....	134
Chapter 8 .....	153
Absenteeism .....	153
Absenteeism – A Case Study .....	176
Chapter 9 .....	185
Accommodation .....	185
Hostels .....	187
Billets .....	195
Conclusion .....	203
Chapter 10 .....	206
Recreation and Social Activities .....	206
Chapter 11 .....	219
Relationship with Regular Miners .....	219
Chapter 12 .....	231
In Retrospect .....	231
Chapter 13 .....	242
Conclusion .....	242
Appendices .....	256
Appendix INT-I .....	256
Questions to interviewees .....	256
Appendix INT-II .....	257
Questionnaire .....	257
Appendix MAN-I .....	261
Distribution of Labour Force .....	261
Appendix MAN-II .....	262
Map of the British Coalfields in the early 1940s .....	262
Appendix CU-I .....	263
Letter of direction to the coalmines .....	263
Appendix CU-II .....	264
Rejection of appeal .....	264
Appendix TR-I .....	265
Training for and employment in coalmining .....	265
Appendix TR-II .....	269
Training arrangements for one particular pit .....	269
Appendix NEW-I .....	271
Newspaper readership and political allegiance .....	271
Appendix NEW-II .....	272
Newspaper reports on the first day of training for Bevin Boys .....	272
1. Midlands, Tunnel Pit, Nuneaton .....	272
Daily Telegraph .....	272
Daily Express .....	274
News Chronicle .....	275
Star .....	275
Daily Worker .....	277
2. North West, Clifton, near Manchester .....	277
Liverpool Daily Post .....	277
Manchester Guardian .....	278
Daily Mirror .....	279
3. North East, Askern Main, Doncaster .....	281

Glasgow Herald .....	281
Evening News .....	282
Yorkshire Post.....	283
Daily Herald.....	283
4. North East, Pontefract.....	285
The Times .....	285
Daily Mail .....	286
Yorkshire Post.....	287
Daily Worker .....	288
5. North, Co. Durham, South Moor .....	290
Daily Sketch.....	290
6. Co. Durham, Horden.....	291
Appendix ACD-I.....	292
Coalmining: Persons killed and injured.....	292
Appendix ACD-II .....	293
Coalmining: Death and injury rates per 1000,000 manshifts .....	293
Appendix WAG-I.....	294
Contract form for a Kent colliery company.....	294
Appendix UNI-I.....	295
Bevin Boy Special Bulletin from R. Condon, General Secretary and Agent, NUM. (undated).....	295
Appendix ABS-I .....	296
Table showing statistics by year for absenteeism, output of coal, average number of mine workers and output per manshift of all employees.....	296
Appendix ABS-II .....	297
Record of Investigation. Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943 ...	297
Appendix ABS-III.....	298
Record of Investigation. Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943 ...	298
Appendix ABS-IV .....	299
Kent Coal Owners Association survey of the Kent coalfields.....	299
Appendix ABS-V .....	300
Court summons for absenteeism.....	300
Appendix ABS-VI .....	301
Comparison between absenteeism of Bevin Boys* and by other wage earners in England and Wales during the week ending 25 <sup>th</sup> November 1944.....	301
Appendix ABS-VII .....	302
Results from questionnaire: Where did you live?.....	302
Appendix ABS-VIII.....	303
Weekly average of absenteeism as percentage of possible shifts.....	303
Appendix ABS-IX .....	304
Percentage of shifts lost through absenteeism expressed as percentages of the total numbers of shifts that could have been worked.....	304
Appendix ACC-I.....	305
Daily Worker, Friday March 17, 1944.....	305
Appendix ACC-II.....	307
Memorandum on running industrial hostels.....	307
Appendix ACC-III .....	308
Letter from E. Bevin, Foreign Office to G.A. Isaacs, Ministry of Labour, (27.3.1946).....	308
Appendix SOC-I .....	309

Durham Coalfield Regional Survey Report (Northern 'B' Region) - Miners' Welfare Facilities .....	309
Appendix RET-I.....	310
Ministry of Labour letter addressed to Bevin Boys on their demobilisation.....	310
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	311
PRIMARY SOURCES .....	311
Unpublished Sources .....	311
Manuscripts.....	311
Correspondence from Bevin Boys etc. ....	315
Interviews (carried out by Ann Kneif unless otherwise stated).....	315
Published sources.....	316
Published books used as primary sources.....	316
Official published reports used as primary sources .....	316
Articles in journals used as primary sources.....	317
Newspaper articles .....	318
Journals .....	321
Newspaper cartoons .....	321
Acts of Parliament.....	321
Internet (articles by Bevin Boys) .....	321
Miscellaneous primary sources.....	321
SECONDARY SOURCES .....	322
Theses and other unpublished research papers .....	322
Published sources.....	322
Books .....	322
Articles in journals.....	325
Internet .....	328
Television broadcasts.....	328
Miscellaneous secondary sources .....	328

## Tables

Table 1.1 The areas to which questionnaire respondents were sent .....	18
Table 2.1 M-O questionnaire: Attitude to mines optant scheme .....	46
Table 3.1 Results from questionnaire: Did you appeal against going into the mines? .....	53
Table 3.2 Results from questionnaire: Reactions to number being drawn in the ballot .....	54
Table 3.3 Results from questionnaire: Thoughts on career .....	59
Table 3.4 Miners' questionnaire: What do you feel about conscription of men for the mines? .....	62
Table 3.5 The numbers directed to the mines in 1944-45.....	65
Table 3.6 Proportion of Bevin Boys compared to other entrants to the coal industry, 1944-5 .....	66
Table 4.1 List of collieries with training facilities .....	69
Table 4.2 Results from questionnaire: To which colliery were you sent for training? .....	70
Table 4.3 Results from questionnaire: What was the nature of training given? .....	86
Table 4.4 Coalmining Training: Position on 21 <sup>st</sup> March 1944 .....	91
Table 4.5 Coalmining Training: Number completing training by 22 <sup>nd</sup> January 1945 .....	91
Table 5.1 No. directed to the pits, employed at coal face and regulars upgraded .....	96
Table 5.2 Results from questionnaire: Colliery sent to after training by type of work .....	97
Table 6.1 Average rates of pay per shift in various districts in 1943 .....	124
Table 6.2 Average earnings of men employed in the mining industry .....	126
Table 7.1 Results from questionnaire: Did you join the Trade Union? .....	136
Table 7.2 Results from questionnaire: If Trade Union member: Was membership forced on you?.....	137
Table 7.3 Results of questionnaire: If Trade Union member the benefits of membership.....	138
Table 7.4 No. of stoppages, number of workers involved, days and output lost through stoppages.....	145
Table 8.1 Results from questionnaire: Awareness of absenteeism in the pit in which worked.....	164
Table 8.2 Results from questionnaire: Whether attempt made to leave the pit .....	164
Table 9.1 Results from questionnaire: Were you an optant or a ballottee by where did you live?.....	186
Table 10.1 Results of questionnaire: where lived in relation to social life.....	208
Table 11.1 Results of questionnaire: Relationship with the other miners by area.....	221
Table 11.2 Results of questionnaire: Where lived by relationship with miners and community .....	228
Table 12.1 Results of questionnaire: How do you feel now having been a Bevin Boy? .....	232
Table 12.2 Results from questionnaire: Did you feel your job was worthwhile?.....	240
Table 13.1 Do you approve or disapprove of industrial conscription?.....	255

## Figures

Figure 2.1 Illingworth cartoon, first published 19.4.1941 .....	20
Figure 2.2 Advertisement appearing in the Times.....	23
Figure 2.3 Cartoon appearing in the Evening News (18.9.1941) .....	27
Figure 2.4 Advertisement appearing in The Times (23.9.1943).....	43
Figure 3.1 Cartoon appearing in the Daily Mail (29.12.1943) .....	52
Figure 4.1 A page from a safety book issued to trainees .....	89
Figure 5.1 Gerald Smithson.....	122
Figure 6.2 Example of payslip for an individual worker .....	130
Figure 6.3 Example of a payslip for several workers .....	131
Figure 7.1 Cartoon appearing in Daily Mail, (2.1.1947) .....	149
Figure 8.1 Cartoon appearing in the Daily Herald (13.3.1942).....	154
Figure 8.3 Cartoon appearing in the Daily Mail (15.4.1946).....	173
Figure 9.1 Plan for hostel accommodation. ....	187
Figure 9.2 Hostel accommodation. ....	189
Figure 9.3 Hostel layout showing the different components of the hostel .....	190
Figure 10.1 'Alby', a regular miner, playing cards, photo by Bevin Boy Geoff B. ..	210



## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Bevin Boys were young men directed into the coalmines instead of the Forces during the Second World War. They were volunteers, optants (those choosing to go into the mines instead of the Forces) or conscripts.<sup>1</sup> Named after Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service in the coalition Government, nearly 50,000 men were directed into the mines by one of these methods. A chance meeting at a dinner party where one of the guests, a Bevin Boy, described his time in the coalmines during and just after the Second World War led to a short essay for the Open University oral history module. This thesis was conceived when further research showed that very little had been written about this relatively small group of men. The Bevin Boys' views have been sought using primary material and oral testimonies. Having known nothing previously of the Bevin Boys it was felt that the subject could be investigated with no preconceived ideas.

This thesis seeks to identify the Bevin Boys within the history of labour supply in the Second World War. It aims to establish the Bevin Boys firmly in the history of coalmining and to show how far their experiences helped to influence the future of the coalmining industry after the war. It places them within the context and historiography concerning 'total war' and the 'war and society' debate.

After the outbreak of war the mobilisation of industrial manpower was slow.<sup>2</sup> With the Blitz came the realisation that the 'phoney war' was over and people would be required on all fronts. There was a need to maintain a balance between conscription to the Forces and a supply of labour for industry.<sup>3</sup> In May 1940 the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act was passed. It made provision 'for requiring persons to place themselves, their services and their property at the disposal of His Majesty, as appear to him to be necessary or expedient for securing the public safety.'<sup>4</sup> It gave the

---

<sup>1</sup> The Bevin Boys Association makes no distinction between the different groups and maintains that there were nearly 50,000 Bevin Boys. Optants and ballotees were working in the pits in lieu of National Service. Both they and the volunteers were subjected to the same rules and regulations.

<sup>2</sup> W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy*, (London, 1949), p149

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p143

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, (23.5.1940)

Government the power of industrial conscription. The Essential Work Orders bound many workers to industries and they were often relocated to other areas of the country. Others were not accepted for the Services because of health or age but were expected to 'do their bit' for the war effort. Women, especially those who were young and unmarried, were seen as a source of mobile labour. Initially the direction of women had been voluntary but from the beginning of December 1941 women were conscripted. In 1941 the proportion of women employed rose from 9 percent to 34 percent.<sup>5</sup> There were exceptions but the majority of young single women were considered mobile and those not opting for the Forces were directed to work in industries, in particular to the Royal Ordnance Factories (ROFs). Mobilisation of manpower was only possible because of the extent to which the Government's power had increased. It led to 'total war' and full mobilisation by the end of 1943.

Many of the problems facing women sent away for war work were general to all those uprooted during the war: unaccustomed work and its conditions, accommodation in billets or hostels and a different social life. They were the same problems as those experienced by the Bevin Boys. These young men and women were often leaving home for the first time and found themselves with far more social and sexual freedom than ever before.<sup>6</sup>

One of the industries suffering most from manpower shortages was the coalmining industry. In an effort to boost the labour force, Bevin offered newly conscripted young men the chance of opting for the coalmines instead of the Forces. These young men became known as Bevin Boy optants. When this measure and the call for volunteers failed to produce the required labour input to the mines, he used the power of conscription. With full mobilisation and no prospect of finding labour from any other source, Bevin chose the only solution he considered tenable. Those being called up for the Forces were balloted and if the last digit of their National Service number was pulled from the hat they were sent to the pits. The Bevin Boys became a component part of the wartime labour force.

---

<sup>5</sup> A. Marwick, *The Home Front: The British and the Second World War*, (London, 1976), p134

<sup>6</sup> L. Noakes, *War and the British*, (London, 1998), p52

It is very difficult for people today, if they have not lived through the turmoil of war, to understand what life and working conditions were like in the coalmines, especially for young men who often had no previous knowledge of the industry. Who better to describe the conditions and their feelings than the Bevin Boys themselves? It was therefore decided at the outset to obtain as much information as possible from recorded interviews. The increasing use of oral testimony over the past two decades and an understanding of the pitfalls that can be presented to the historian by using this method have made it a valid medium (see 'evaluation of sources'). Official documents and other historical evidence could be used, where appropriate, as a check against personal narratives and to put the information in a historical and social context. Also, where appropriate, case studies could be used as an example.

In an attempt to see why the Government, and especially Bevin, found it necessary to direct young men into mining, one has to look into the past. The history of the coalmining industry throughout the early part of the twentieth century shows a constant battle between the owners and the miners. This, plus the Government's reaction to the labour situation in the mines at the beginning of the Second World War, led to a shortfall of miners and the subsequent coal crisis by the middle of 1943.

Bevin Boys volunteering or opting for the mines did so in the knowledge that they would be spending their National Service in the coalmining industry. Not so those who were conscripted. The first they knew that their number had been picked in the ballot was when a letter dropped through their door informing them to report for training. Many appealed on the grounds that they would rather be in the Forces fighting for their country but the majority of appeals were in vain. Before conscription miners learnt on the job, but the Government decided on a six-week training programme for all future Bevin Boys. They were sent to training centres in the mining areas. This thesis will discuss their first impressions, how they coped with the training, their subsequent work in the mines, together with the long-term significance of the Bevin Boy training programme. Conditions in the mines at that time were bad and the work relied heavily on manual labour. Accidents were frequent, sometimes leading to loss of life. Because of the unpleasant conditions and accidents, absenteeism, both voluntary and involuntary, was rife. The miners in the coalmining industry were generally left wing and the unions were very strong in the majority of

the pits. This led to wage demands once the miners realised that they were in a good bargaining position.

Outside of the pit the Bevin Boys had to cope with living away from home, many for the first time in their lives. Their accommodation, recreational and social life and their relationship with the community give an indication of the upheaval and their way of living during wartime.

How the Bevin Boys feel now, when looking back over 60 years to their wartime experiences, is a valuable insight into how oral history can be used by historians as one aspect of research. This will be used to build up a picture of life for the Bevin Boys, to establish their place in history and to analyse the impact of this scheme on the post-war coalmining industry.

The Bevin Boys' contribution to the war effort needs to be placed in the general historiography of the Second World War. 'Total war' was the consequence of increased Government powers. Through the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1940 and Essential Works Orders, the Government was, in theory, given complete power over the individual. Nothing on this scale had ever been attempted before. The question for the historian is whether this extension of power fundamentally altered the nature of British society and the British economy or whether it was just a short-term variation of the pre-war position.

The official view of the British war economy was that the Government walked a tightrope between restrictions on civilian demands whilst maintaining a minimum standard of living and adequate capital equipment. It needed to keep industrial output flowing and morale high.<sup>7</sup> There was a reduction in the standard of living. Consumer goods were often unavailable or low in quality and of limited choice. Hancock and Gowing claim: 'There was general recognition that the cost of the war, in terms of reduced civilian standards, was being spread justly.'<sup>8</sup> However, many historians allude to the black market and the various loopholes that allowed some to flaunt the

---

<sup>7</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p491

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

system.<sup>9</sup> For example, the wealthier could get around ration restrictions by eating in restaurants, where rationing did not apply.<sup>10</sup> Some were always more equal than others. As Summerfield notes, many historians believe that the war was 'a leveller of the classes' but she sees it more as economic levelling.<sup>11</sup> Various inequalities were reduced and therefore the quality of life for some improved. Everyone was guaranteed access to a minimum of specified foodstuffs at a cost they could afford.<sup>12</sup> Dewey sees economic levelling as a marked feature of social change.<sup>13</sup>

The Government coined the expression 'equality of sacrifice', which in turn was propagated by the media.<sup>14</sup> Rose sees the fact that it was necessary to use this phrase as the admittance that there was unequal advantage for some.<sup>15</sup> Social divide was evident from the start of the war when women and children from poor cities were evacuated to rural areas. Different social classes and people from different parts of the country mixed more than they would normally have done but they were often alienated from each other.<sup>16</sup> It made the problems associated with poverty clear to a much wider population. The lodging bureau in Coventry remarked on the lack of discipline by many of the women sent there to work.

'They are dirty, throw food away, pieces of bread in the lavatory. Many of them arrive pregnant, some have VD others scabies... It hardly seems fair. All billeting is voluntary and of course one tries to sort people out a bit but you can't always. Not when friends ring you up and want 20 people placed. You don't even see them. Some of the girls from the North arrive with just a paper parcel. They come from a long way off and from distressed areas. You can't blame the poor girls but it is hard on the hostesses.'<sup>17</sup>

Wartime propaganda showed the Blitz as the start of the 'people's war' and a time of national unity. Historians, who see class feelings as a threat to national unity, have since disputed this. 'If the Blitz created a spirit of comradeship, it was more within the

---

<sup>9</sup> See A. Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969), pp406-8 for an example of how the system could be misused.

<sup>10</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p492

<sup>11</sup> P. Summerfield, 'The Levelling of Class', in H. Smith (ed), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1986), p179

<sup>12</sup> N. Tiratsoo (ed), *From Blitz to Blair: A new history of Britain since 1939*, (London, 1997), p33

<sup>13</sup> P. Dewey, *War and Progress in Britain 1914 – 1945*, (London 1997), p321

<sup>14</sup> S.O. Rose, *Which People's War? National identity and citizenship in wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, 2003), p31

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p33

<sup>16</sup> J. Bourke, *The Second World War: A people's history*, (Oxford, 2001), pp201/2

<sup>17</sup> M-O A, TC 75/3/G, Coventry, billeting war workers, (21.11.1941)

working class communities, rather than between the classes.’<sup>18</sup> Bourke notes that those going into communal shelters in the Blitz were working-class and those with money used a private shelter. She claims that the British class system barely changed during the war.<sup>19</sup> The upper and lower classes might work together but there would still be upper and lower classes.<sup>20</sup> The Bevin Boys became part of this debate as they were from all classes.

The war economy was guided according to employment levels. After the First World War there was a slump leading to widespread unemployment. In the Second World War the Government saw the chance to rectify the situation and by July 1941 there was no significant unemployment.<sup>21</sup> Those who wanted work could have it as war industries expanded.<sup>22</sup> The war meant an escape from the chronic poverty brought on by unemployment in the inter-war years, when the long-term unemployed were subject to the means test. A miner who experienced this had the following to say:

‘Then I began to realise what a means test meant. When somebody could come to your house and tell your parents to sell anything of value for money to save them paying my father dole. They were even asked to sell their wedding rings.’<sup>23</sup>

Most historians fail to mention, that many workers, because they were directed, found themselves to be employed in jobs they neither wanted nor were suited for. Taylor, for example, writes of a contented labour force and general willingness to cooperate. ‘Workers wanted to be told what to do and welcomed their mobilisation for war production.’<sup>24</sup> This is a very broad statement. He is not looking at it from the point of view of the individual. It did not apply to all wartime workers and especially it did not apply to Bevin Boys, many of whom were keen to appeal against going in the mines on the grounds that they would be more use in the Forces. The war was perceived differently by individuals depending on where they lived and on their experiences.

---

<sup>18</sup> Tiratsoo, p36

<sup>19</sup> Bourke, p201

<sup>20</sup> Rose, p33

<sup>21</sup> R. MacLeod, ‘The Promise of Full Employment’ in H. Smith (ed), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1986), p79

<sup>22</sup> Calder, p322

<sup>23</sup> Interview with R. Thompson, (30.9.1986), interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

<sup>24</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914 – 1945*, (Oxford, 1965), p512

'The post-war economy of Britain differs fundamentally from that of pre-war years.'<sup>25</sup> Full employment continued after the war as many industries expanded due to wartime capital investment. State intervention during the war provided the blueprint for a more managed economy in the post-war peace. For example, Government management of some of the less productive coalmines, which would have otherwise closed, showed that investment was needed if the industry was to survive. The Government was ready to keep its promise of nationalisation of key industries: coal, railways and steel. They were nationalised for different reasons. In the case of the coal industry nationalisation was seen as a way to raise the morale of the labour force and to provide capital for modernisation.<sup>26</sup> Commitment by a new Labour Government to social reform immediately after the war gave Britain a national health service and a reformed education system. Full employment, coupled with welfare provision, prevented a return to pre-war levels of poverty.

Although the historiography tells us that unemployment was not an issue during the war, there are historians who would dispute this. Barnett, for example, claims that there was not really full employment as there was an artificial economy fed by American aid and Commonwealth credit.<sup>27</sup>

As we can see, there are many views on whether British society and economy changed because of the war. The current thought on the Second World War is that we are looking back to a past where fact is overwhelmed by myths but these myths are changing all the time and are usually seen from a narrow British perspective. Much is dependent on the way the historian interprets the past.<sup>28</sup> The nostalgic view is based on notions of community. A picture is painted of factory workers working day and night for the war effort, the plight of the evacuees and the community spirit of the Blitz.<sup>29</sup> There was a great sense of national identity. Robbins points out that it is difficult for historians who have no personal recollection of the Second World War to appreciate the spirit of the time. The idea of a national identity often meant that a

---

<sup>25</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p547

<sup>26</sup> S. Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914 - 1950*, (London, 1962), p390

<sup>27</sup> C. Barnett, *The Audit of War: the illusion and reality of Britain as a great nation*, (London, 1986), p261

<sup>28</sup> M. Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory*, (London, 2000), p2-8

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p93

historian felt a certain responsibility to present the history of his country in a favourable light. This attitude, according to Robbins, has now diminished.<sup>30</sup>

A.J.P. Taylor wryly notes 'But every historian is compelled to spend much time wandering down false trails which have been laid by others.'<sup>31</sup> It is wise to remember this when looking at sources.

## Evaluation of Sources

### Books and articles

A variety of secondary source material was used in order to obtain background material for the chapters. During the war the Government commissioned a series of books on the social, economic and administrative experiences of the war. The authors were given freedom of access to all relevant material.<sup>32</sup> The volumes on *Coal* (W.H.B. Court), *British War Economy* (W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing) and *Labour in the Munitions Industries* (P. Inman) have been especially useful to this thesis. Because they are Government publications they do tell the official side of the story and as such they help set the background to the manpower situation during the war. In addition *Coal* gives a detailed analysis of the coalmining industry. As Howlett points out: the official history volumes dominate the historiography of the Second World War.<sup>33</sup> Gowing gives a good account of the organisation of manpower.<sup>34</sup> She engages with the problems of labour relations and administration as well as the problems faced by particular industries, including coalmining. Mass-Observation publications, for example, *People in Production*, give the view of those working in wartime industries. Rose has written a useful book looking at gender and class issues during the war. More analytical accounts are given in a great number of books and articles (see 'bibliography'), and they open up the debate on the wider issues of 'total war'.

---

<sup>30</sup> K. Robbins, 'National Identity and History: Past, Present and Future' in *History*, Vol. 75, (1990), p373

<sup>31</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, 'War Origins Again' in *Past and Present*, No. 30, (April 1965), p110

<sup>32</sup> Hancock and Gowing, flyleaf

<sup>33</sup> P. Howlett, 'New light through old windows: A new perspective on the British economy in the Second World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 28, No. 2, (April, 1993), p361

<sup>34</sup> M. Gowing, 'The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2, (January – April, 1972)



Whereas literature does give a history of labour supply in the Second World War, what it does not do is give the Bevin Boys a place in this history. Very little secondary material exists on the topic of the Bevin Boys. Many authors make only brief reference in more general works; however, often they cannot agree on the definition of a Bevin Boy. Lewis maintains that Bevin Boys were one in ten of all conscripts.<sup>35</sup> If this were so, Bevin would have soon had his quota of 50,000 for the pits. In fact, the ballot was held on an irregular basis and more than one number could be drawn at any one time. Other authors, for example, Supple, Dewey and Pollard, define Bevin Boys as only those balloted (20,896) and omit the volunteers and optants (15,657). Supple gives the number of balloted Bevin Boys as 21,800, that is 1000 more than Government figures show.<sup>36</sup> This is a mistake that Dewey has perhaps copied when he mentions 21,800.<sup>37</sup> Pollard puts the figure at 22,000.<sup>38</sup> Court separates ballottees and optants in a table of all entrants to coalmining in 1944 and 1945 (see figure 3.5), but counts only ballottees as Bevin Boys.<sup>39</sup> Some authors do not mention Bevin Boys at all. For example, in *The Audit of War*, Barnett has a chapter: 'An industrial worse case: Coal', which looks in detail at the coalmining industry during the war but makes no mention of Bevin Boys.

David Day and Derek Agnew have both written books on their experiences as Bevin Boys. The latter is especially interesting as it was published whilst Agnew was still a Bevin Boy working in the Chislet Colliery, Kent. His work therefore is not influenced by the passage of time. Several other Bevin Boys have recently published small booklets of their experiences in the coalmines. They give a first hand account of life as a Bevin Boy. When using these it is necessary to be aware of the pitfalls when looking back over time (see also 'interviews').

Secondary sources were also used to gain insight into how the Bevin Boys fitted into the historiography of the 'people's war'. Those histories written during and just after the Second World War were regulated by wartime propaganda. By the late 1960s there was a more nostalgic attitude to the war. In the historiography of the Home

---

<sup>35</sup> P. Lewis, *A People's War*, (London, 1986), pp129/130

<sup>36</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913 – 1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p538

<sup>37</sup> Dewey, p282

<sup>38</sup> Pollard, p198

<sup>39</sup> W.H.B. Court, *Coal*, (London, 1951), pp304/5

Front a lot more has been written about land girls, evacuees (especially children), civil defence and the Home Guard. It is more appealing and romantic and popularised in part by cinema and television. Since the 1970s many historians of the Home Front, including Calder and Fielding, have relied heavily on material in the Mass-Observation Archive without acknowledging the pitfalls presented by this genre, (see 'analysis of sources – Mass-Observation'). Earlier historians have concentrated on the idea of a national identity. Since the 1980s there has been an increase in an analysis of the relationship between memory and history.<sup>40</sup>

### Hansard and documents from the National Archive

Repeated reference has been made to the *Hansard Parliamentary Debates* as a means of showing the official view of the situation in the coalmines and the reasons for some of the Government actions during and immediately after the Second World War. As Rose points out we do not always know the motives behind the policies.<sup>41</sup> There are problems when using Hansard because information deemed to be detrimental to national security was suppressed. 'The reports of parliamentary debates in Hansard were censored, and even, on one occasion, a Bill before parliament which gave away the location of an ROF.'<sup>42</sup> This is also true of documents held at the National Archive, some of which were only released at a much later date and others that are still awaiting release. Some documents relating to Bevin Boys, including most of the lists of names, were destroyed in the 1950s.

### Newspapers

Newspapers are not neutral. During the war newspapers were produced under censorship laws. This is reflected in what they did, and did not print. When reporting on the Government's attitude to the coalmining industry they would often merely reproduce tracts from Hansard. Where they did venture to make comments it was often for propaganda purposes. Thus, for example, an article in the *Daily Herald* (10.3.1943) carried the heading 'Mining optant at age of 37 thinks new life a holiday'. It then goes on to say how much he was enjoying life in the pits. In spite of the problems associated with this type of journalism, reports can be used in conjunction

---

<sup>40</sup> P. Hutton, 'Recent Scholarship on Memory and History', in *The History Teacher*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (August 2000), p534

<sup>41</sup> Rose, p26

<sup>42</sup> Calder, p507

with other sources. The Government invited the press to the opening of the first training centres for Bevin Boys in the hope that they would report favourably on what they saw.

In addition newspaper cartoons were used as a social statement and have also been included where appropriate.

### Broadcasts and newsreels

Broadcasts and newsreels were used extensively during the war for propaganda purposes. The BBC especially put out several broadcasts extolling the merits of life as a Bevin Boy. The BBC Written Archive was accessed for transcripts of various broadcasts, both by Bevin Boys and of a more official nature, for example, Bevin's talk to schoolboys asking them to join the mines. Newsreels were the main means of visual news and, in an era when the cinema was as popular as television is today, they were seen by the masses.

Since the war, television broadcasters have been looking for material that would make good viewing. Material that may be of interest to historians is often discarded in an attempt to make the programme more appealing to the masses. Smith claims that those responsible for these programmes do not share the methodology or aims of academic history. 'Most forms of popular culture, and in particular those visual forms which now dominate, cannot deal very effectively with the nuances, the debates, the uncertainties that pepper academic discourse.'<sup>43</sup>

### Mass-Observation

Although this thesis is intended mainly as an oral history project, one of the most important sources about Bevin Boys is the file on coalmining from the Mass-Observation Archive at Sussex University. Mass-Observation was started because its founders, Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, were convinced that people thought and felt differently from how they were portrayed in the media. In Harrisson's words they felt that there was a need for 'impartial, objective reporting.'<sup>44</sup> They set up a panel of people, mostly unpaid volunteers, who either kept diaries of what they did or kept a

---

<sup>43</sup> M. Smith, p3

<sup>44</sup> T. Harrisson, 'Galluping Consumption', in *Fabian Quarterly*, No. 53, (March 1947), p3

record of what they saw and heard, either as comments, overheard conversations or indirect interviews.<sup>45</sup> One of their investigators was Eric G., who went as an optant Bevin Boy to the coalmines. From May 1944 until his demobilisation at the end of 1946 he filed 'reports' and 'mine opinions'. These are very important, as he knew what it was like to work in the mines. They are records contemporary with the period when he was a Bevin Boy and are therefore not distorted by time. Some finer points that a Bevin Boy would find difficult to remember today, for example (unless he had kept a pay slip) the exact weekly wage after deductions and what it was spent on, can be found in the Mass-Observation records. The investigators were encouraged to write on news, gossip, home life, work, sex and politics<sup>46</sup> and Eric G. did just that, taking note not just of what the Bevin Boys said but also the comments of regular miners and the community at large. He gave reports on his daily life as a miner; for example, his first report was a detailed description of his first day at a training centre. However, all his written reports were aimed at a specific audience and with the knowledge that they were likely to be used in published reports. They were selective and not necessarily spontaneous.

Eric G. came from a middle-class background but his work brought him into contact with a working-class environment. Penny Summerfield notes that 'the direction of people ... into types of industrial work that were new to them, gave fresh scope for participant observation.'<sup>47</sup> However, on the down side, it is possible to detect some perspectives associated with his own views. Eric G. stood up for his rights (see the case study in chapter 8) and joined in Trade Union meetings. His own feelings become increasingly apparent as his reports progress. He spent time in a public library checking on various Acts of Parliament connected with mining and drawing any lapses to the attention of the management. It has to be asked to what extent were his investigations coloured by his own attitude. His views had been formed as a 5<sup>th</sup> form pupil at Penge County School in 1940.

'In the late Thirties three or four young graduates came down from Cambridge and Oxford to join the teaching staff and made a fiercely revolutionary impact on what was a very conventional grammar school.'<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> P. Summerfield, 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 20, Issue 3 (July 1985), p441

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p442

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p445

<sup>48</sup> M-O A, Nick Stanley, Interview with Eric G., former Mass-Observer, (8.9.1982)

Eric G. particularly remembered Harry Reé and Francis Cammearts, who were both pacifists and contemporaries of Tom Harrison at Cambridge. Harry Reé had introduced Eric G. to Mass-Observation.<sup>49</sup>

Mass-Observation published reports from other investigators and sources were also used. An example is the report on miners and munitions workers in Blaina, South Wales. The Mass-Observation material has its critics. Very few working-class people took an active part in collecting information. Thus the contributors were not statistically representative of the population.<sup>50</sup> There was a middle-class bias, the work appealing to 'students, librarians, clerical workers, teachers and journalists.' Mass-Observation was sometimes seen as rather patronising in that it was looking at working-class situations but recorded by middle-class investigators.

### Interviews

It should be noted that some historians do not consider oral history a useful medium. Rose purposely looks only at contemporary material because, as she claims, she wanted 'to get as close as possible to what the people living then might have read, heard or seen.'<sup>51</sup> She did not want her sources to be influenced by the knowledge or experience of the future.<sup>52</sup> However, Rose's work is conditioned by her own interpretation of her sources and influenced by her own experiences.

Oral history has some advantages over traditional document sources. It opens up topics for research that are otherwise closed. It allows researchers to question sources that they are not normally able to do and allows for the immediate formulation of new questions. However, there is a negative side to oral history. There is a reliance on a memory that can easily be embellished. 'We add imaginary details through wishful thinking or to make a more logical story.'<sup>53</sup> There are also problems associated with transcribing interviews. Pauses, laughs, or speech inflection can all have a meaning that is very difficult to convey in a transcript. 'The spoken word can very easily be

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> D. Sheridan, *Occasional Paper No. 7*, (University of Sussex Library, 1996), p9

<sup>51</sup> Rose, p25

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p26

<sup>53</sup> J. McCrone, 'Not so total recall', in *New Scientist*, (3.5.2003), p26

mutilated when it is taken down in writing and transferred to the printed page.<sup>54</sup> Punctuation is sometimes very difficult and the transcriber has to make an educated guess.

Altogether, 19 interviews were conducted between March 2000 and September 2003. With the exception of two (one a collier working with Bevin Boys and the other, whose father was a miner and whose mother took in Bevin Boy lodgers), they were all Bevin Boys. They all knew that the interviews given were to be used in a thesis. In addition, two interviews carried out by other parties and one tape supplied by a Bevin Boy have also been included.

It would have been advantageous to interview regular miners and landladies in order to give a more unbiased view of the life of a Bevin Boy. The Bevin Boys are now in their 80s and any regular miners they were working with would have been older. The whole point of the Bevin Boy system was to bring young men into the industry to replace the young miners, who had left at the beginning of the war in order to join the Forces. Therefore the majority of regular miners are now deceased. Only one regular miner, Hubert S., was interviewed. It became apparent that, unless they were working directly with Bevin Boys, regular miners knew what they were doing only through hearsay. The Bevin Boys were not working in large groups but were scattered among many hundreds of pits.

The landladies were almost always older women, who had a family or dependants, or who were too old to work. They too are now deceased. The mobile younger women had often been sent away to work in war industries. The children of landladies were sought but had very little recollection of the Bevin Boys billeted in their families (see transcription of interview with Edward W.).

Oral history is a relatively new method of analysing the past. Although regular miners and landladies were crucial figures in society, they were not a subject that people thought to investigate. The choices of earlier historians limit what could have been an

---

<sup>54</sup> R. Samuel, 'Perils of the Transcript' in *Oral History – an occasional news sheet*, No. 2 (University of Essex, December 1972), p19

interesting comparison. Instead, for contemporary material, it has been necessary to use the information gathered by the Mass-Observation investigator.

Great care was taken with the oral evidence, as it is vital in showing a piece of social history connected with the Second World War. Bevin Boys are now all in their 80s and time is running out if we are to gain first hand knowledge of their experiences in the coalmines. Although the views of those interviewed cannot be considered as statistically significant, the aim is to give some idea of the life of Bevin Boys during and immediately after the war in the context of the mining industry generally. Paraphrasing their words would distract from what they had to say and so it has therefore been considered prudent to let them, as far as possible, use their own words to tell their stories.

In general, the interviews followed the same pattern. A list of points to be covered was drawn up (Appendix INT-I) and the points were briefly discussed before the interview was recorded. In some cases there was no need for intervention and the interviewee covered all or most of the points without pause. In other cases more prompting was necessary. The points were ticked off a list by the interviewer as they were mentioned. In spite of this 'some interviewees will tell the stories they want to tell regardless of the interviewer.'<sup>55</sup>

Oral history gives us the chance to look at aspects of ordinary people's lives in a way that a written document cannot. This is certainly true of the Bevin Boys interviewed. All the interviewees spoke frankly and spontaneously. '(O)ral recollections and memoirs often fulfil a deep-felt need to make sense of a life as it passes. The stories which are told in an oral history interview may well be influenced by that need.'<sup>56</sup>

None of the Bevin Boys approached refused to give an interview, one even saying how pleased he was to have someone who was prepared to listen to what he had to say. Gender did not appear to play a role, although some of the language may have been a bit more colourful had a man interviewed them. As one Bevin Boy pointed out,

---

<sup>55</sup> A.S. Thomson, *Anzac Stories: Using Personal Testimony in Historical Research*, draft manuscript, (Sussex, 1997)

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

regardless of social background, no man would ever swear in front of a woman in those days. However, in the mine they were all men together and pit language could make the air blue.<sup>57</sup> All of them gave the impression that this was an important and memorable time in their lives. It was felt that many of the stories had been told many times before. Each time the story is told new elements can be brought in, which the teller then accepts in his long-term memory.<sup>58</sup> 'A story may be retold differently to various audiences in different situations'.<sup>59</sup> This may produce an element of myth but 'It is the symbolic truth they [the stories] convey and not the facts of the incident described, which matter most'.<sup>60</sup> As Smith points out, what matters is 'that these myths are implicitly believed and that they help people to make sense of their lives, that they offer a popular memory which explains the past and the present and moulds expectations of the future.'<sup>61</sup> There was a feeling that when they had been in contact with other Bevin Boys, for example through the Bevin Boys' Association, they may have been influenced by other people's views or even conditioned by what they had learnt later about events. Storm-Clark asks: 'To what extent does the evidence of a few reflect the evidence of the many?'<sup>62</sup> The answer to this question in the case of the Bevin Boys is that after 19 interviews stories were being repeated on such a regular basis that it was considered of little benefit to conduct further interviews.

The Bevin Boys interviewed were sought through acquaintances, a newspaper report and other Bevin Boys. They were all people who were very willing to be interviewed and therefore introduced a bias towards the educated and articulate.

The Imperial War Museum has expressed interest in this work and all the tapes and transcripts have been deposited at their sound archive. The Bevin Boys were not told of this until after they had completed the interview, when their permission was sought. They have all passed the copyright to the interviewer.

---

<sup>57</sup> *The Bevin Boys*, 50th Anniversary Reunion, Stoke-on-Trent, 5.11.1993, (Central Independent Television, 1994)

<sup>58</sup> McCrone, p27

<sup>59</sup> P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, (Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1988), p140

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> M. Smith, p2

<sup>62</sup> C. Storm-Clark, 'The Miners: the relevance of oral evidence' in *Oral History – an occasional news sheet*, no. 4, (1972), p78



## Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix INT-II) was worded in such a way as not to be misleading to the respondents. It has been designed in a structured manner in order to gain as much information as possible without making it tedious to fill in. All the answers can be presented as statistical tables. However, as some questions require more than a straight yes/no answer, they have been coded into pre-defined groups. Some of the text answers, where appropriate, have been used within the chapters in the same manner as the interviews.

The use of a questionnaire was seen as a way of getting the views of a larger group of people than would have been possible by interviews alone. Those answering came from three main sources: a direct approach at a Bevin Boy reunion in Bournemouth, an article in the *Kent Messenger* and a report in the local South-East BBC television *Today* programme. Letters to local northern newspapers failed to produce replies from the editorial staff. In all, 76 Bevin Boys replied between September and November 2002.

An effective questionnaire usually relies on a random sample. In this instance this was not possible and the method of contacting Bevin Boys does, of course, influence the sample. The majority live in the South East of England and, in spite of an often-interrupted schooling because of the war, can be described as having middle-class careers. The following table shows that a higher percentage of the sample went to the Kent coalfield than the official national figures show and Scotland was under-represented. Apart from questions of a local nature, for example, the relationship with the regular miners, it was felt that this did not make much difference to the final results.

The following table gives a percentage breakdown of the area to which those answering the questionnaire were sent compared to the total number of trainees directed to the pits in each area.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Figures for total number of trainees directed to the pits from CAB 102/399, p47

	Questionnaire respondents %	Total no. of trainees directed to pits %
Northumberland Cumberland	6.58	4.43
Durham	14.47	16.31
Lancs, Cheshire, North Wales	13.16	9.29
Yorkshire	18.42	24.03
Notts, Derby, Leicestershire	2.63	12.81
Staffs, Warwick, Cannock Chase, Shropshire	7.89	12.91
S. Wales, Forest of Dean, Bristol, Somerset	25.00	11.79
Scotland	1.32	7.39
Kent	9.21	1.04
No answer	1.32	

**Table 1.1 The areas to which questionnaire respondents were sent**

A spin-off from the questionnaire was that notes, unpublished manuscripts, original documents and photographs were sent by some of the respondents and these proved helpful.

### Imperial War Museum

The archive of the Imperial War Museum has a file on the Bevin Boys. This includes short reports by Bevin Boys on their time in the mines, letters, photographs and official documents. Many of the memories were specially written for the file and therefore must be regarded in the same way as the oral testimonies.

With all these sources it should be borne in mind that they have limitations. As long as this is acknowledged there is no reason why the data cannot be used. Where possible the information has been examined from as many sides as possible. For example, comparisons have been made between the official view found in documents at the National Archive and the report by Eric G. for Mass-Observation on his first day of training as well as those in the oral testimonies, notes and booklets from other Bevin Boys.

## Chapter 2

### Background to Direction

#### Mobilisation of Manpower

The Government had thought about mobilisation of manpower before the war. However, during the inter-war years the Ministry of Labour opposed industrial conscription because it believed it would not be acceptable to the population. Military conscription was introduced in the summer of 1939 and a schedule of reserved occupations compiled to stop enlistment by workers in essential industries. In addition there were 1¼ million insured unemployed, who could be called on.<sup>1</sup>

Once the war started the transfer of manpower to war industries was slow. The Government was keen not to make the same mistakes as they had in the First World War, when the response of volunteers to the Army far outstripped the speed at which arms could be provided by the munitions industry. The First World War created such a large demand for manpower that there was a shortage that lasted throughout the war.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the Second World War there was a scarcity of skilled labour and therefore there was a need for training. New factories were needed and there was a shortage of machine tools and materials.<sup>3</sup> With the end of the phoney war in mid 1940 it was realised that without additional manpower the war programme's needs would not be met. In May 1940 Ernest Bevin became Minister of Labour in the new coalition Government. One of the first acts rushed through Parliament was the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1940. This gave the Government the power of industrial conscription. Any person could be directed to perform any service, wherever they were sent. The Government could decide the hours of work, the conditions of employment and wages.<sup>4</sup> Those outside the age group for conscription and not working in scheduled occupations were expected to work in wartime industries when called for. This included older men, youths below military call-up age and men physically unfit for military service.<sup>5</sup> It soon became apparent that the number of men engaged in war work was not enough to keep both the services and the

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Gowing, 'The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2, (January – April 1972), p148

<sup>2</sup> S. Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914 – 1950*, (London, 1962), p76

<sup>3</sup> Gowing, p149

<sup>4</sup> W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy*, (London, 1949), p298

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p285

munitions industry manned at a reasonable level. There were very few men not already working. Women were seen as an alternative. The precedent was set in the First World War, when women took on the jobs of men who had left for the Services.

Figures produced by the British Institute of Public Opinion showed that 72 percent of the population approved of women being compelled to do war work, whilst only 23 percent disapproved.<sup>6</sup> The women could be used in industry in order to free men for the Forces or for heavy physical work that women were unable to do.<sup>7</sup> In March 1941 the Registration for Employment Order required women of 20 and 21 to register at Employment Exchanges. Other age groups followed during the year so that by October 1942 the order covered women from 18½ to 45½.<sup>8</sup> Registration was required to find out what people did, whether they could be better employed elsewhere and whether they were mobile. Bevin appealed especially for young mobile women to volunteer for war work, as can be seen in the following cartoon.



Figure 2.1 Illingworth cartoon, first published 19.4.1941<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 5, (London, Autumn 1941), figures for April 1941

<sup>7</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p457

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p307

<sup>9</sup> UKC-CSCC, ILW0229, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, (19.4.1941)

*The Times* ran a lead article in which it stated:

‘The details of the Government’s plans for making more use of the nation’s woman-power are a further recognition of the fact that victory in this war will not be achieved without the cooperation of the whole people – women as well as men.’<sup>10</sup>

The administration of wartime direction of manpower was a huge task. Men had to be found for the Forces, men and women moved to wartime industries, unoccupied men and women mobilised and an answer had to be found to the chronic shortage of skilled workers.<sup>11</sup> The Manpower Requirements Committee had to judge well in advance the demands of both services and industry.<sup>12</sup> It had to try and juggle manpower in an attempt to address the balance of requirements of both industry and the Forces.<sup>13</sup> One of the main difficulties in manpower mobilisation was the allocation of manpower to where it was needed.

A labour plan was formed by March 1941. Not only were women required to register but also the age group of men conscripted to the army was widened. A review was made of those in scheduled industries in order to release more men for the Forces.

‘(E)xemptions from military service will depend not only on industrial qualifications but on the employment of those qualifications in approved work.’<sup>14</sup>

Men and women were to be moved from the less important to the vital occupations. Many factories originally set up for production for a civilian market were switched to war production.<sup>15</sup> Those industries deemed to be critical to war production had an Essential Work Order imposed. In return for an assurance of good working conditions and a guaranteed weekly wage regardless of work or not, the workers were bound to their jobs and could only leave with the permission of a National Service officer. They could not be dismissed, except for serious misconduct.<sup>16</sup> An Essential Work Order was soon placed on munitions, shipbuilding and marine engineering. In May 1941 the coalmining industry also came under the Order, albeit only after an agreement was

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, (4.9.1941)

<sup>11</sup> Gowing, p153

<sup>12</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p291

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p440

<sup>14</sup> *The Times*, (14.3.1941)

<sup>15</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p309

<sup>16</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p306

reached with the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain for a guaranteed minimum wage. By the end of the war some 67,500 businesses and 8½ million workers were covered by the Order.<sup>17</sup>

Cooperation with trade unions played a vital part in wartime production. Joint worker-management committees were set up to negotiate in disputes and to try and prevent major strikes. Strikes during wartime were illegal but that did not stop them happening, especially in the coalmining and shipbuilding industries.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the war and calls for unity, there was no let up in the tensions between workers and employees.<sup>19</sup> Absenteeism was also a major problem in all industries, especially in the filling factories, where large numbers of 'new labour' were employed.<sup>20</sup> 'The resentment of the conscripts at being forced to work in a factory and to live in strange surroundings away from their homes and families and accustomed amusements often found expression in a day off from work.'<sup>21</sup> Absenteeism was twice as high among women as men, married women were more likely to take days off than single women and younger women were the chief offenders.<sup>22</sup>

However, it was no use having labour force if there were insufficient semi-skilled and skilled workers to fill the gap left by those conscripted to the Forces. The managements of wartime industries were made aware, by advertisements in the national press, of a four-point plan to increase war production. See the following advertisement (Figure 2.2) appearing in *The Times* in April 1941.

---

<sup>17</sup> Gowing, p161


<sup>18</sup> Gowing, p164

<sup>19</sup> S.O. Rose, *Which People's War? National identity and citizenship in wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, 2003), p41

<sup>20</sup> Hansard, Vol. 382, (5.8.1942), col. 1079

<sup>21</sup> P. Inman, *Labour in the Munitions Industries*, (London, 1957), p281

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p278



# A 4 POINT PLAN TO INCREASE WAR PRODUCTION

## A MESSAGE TO MANAGEMENT

- 1** **Skilled men are needed for the really skilled jobs.**  
*Be sure that each of your men is employed up to the very limit of his skill. Combat skilled labour shortage by breaking down processes wherever you can, and by training up your workpeople—men and women—to jobs of greater skill.*
- 2** **Training Schemes must be developed to the greatest possible extent.** *Take in more new workers for training on the job in your own works. Remember that the Government will help you with semi-skilled men and women trained under official schemes.*
- 3** **Prepare, now, to employ more and more women.** *Look constantly to women for your new recruits: they are excellently suited to many types of semi-skilled work. Hundreds of thousands must enter war production this year and every factory must play its part.*
- 4** **Efficient personnel management is essential.** *Remember that you must secure the whole-hearted co-operation of your workpeople. Look closely to their welfare. Many of them may be new to industry: be patient and help them all you can during the first difficult weeks. A little foresight will reduce your labour turnover.*

**MOBILISE  
FOR**



ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR & NATIONAL SERVICE

Figure 2.2 Advertisement appearing in the Times<sup>23</sup>

As can be seen from the advertisement, the Ministry of Labour, in a message to management, stressed the need for skilled labour and presented ways of producing an efficient business. Dilution was seen as part of the answer. Skilled work could be separated, giving part of it to less skilled workers. Semi-skilled workers could be upgraded.

The Government believed that training was necessary in order to upgrade workers, although in the short term it made the situation worse by using skilled workers as instructors. Official training was oriented to males and aimed at producing skilled and

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, (26.4.1941)

semi-skilled workers.<sup>24</sup> From 1940 the number of training centres for the engineering industry was increased so that by 1941 38 centres had been established offering a 16-week course for both men and women workers. Employers thought the course was too long, generalised and theoretical; also there was difficulty in obtaining enough instructors and machines.<sup>25</sup> By 1942 the number of training centres had been cut to 24 and the length of the course had been reduced to between four and eight weeks, with a preliminary grounding in simple repetitive work geared to local factory requirements.<sup>26</sup> Although the training centres were available, some factories chose to make their own arrangements and train on the shop floor. There was, however, a difference in training standards. 'Training when given in the shops is very casual and insufficient. After a period of from two to seven days the "trainee" is put on piece work, whether proficient or not.'<sup>27</sup> 'We didn't have any training. You were just shown, and you had to do it.'<sup>28</sup> Some workers learnt faster than others and would be operational after a day, others would require as long as a fortnight training.<sup>29</sup> There was a general reluctance to give much training to women as they were expected to leave after the war. 'Who knows when the war may be over, it might finish more quickly than we expect and then where would we be?'<sup>30</sup> Although many of the women were performing menial tasks where little training was necessary, they were doing varied jobs and they needed to be shown how to do them.

Bevin's entreaty did not produce the response that he had hoped for, in spite of propaganda and appealing to the patriotism of women. Conscription of women was announced in December 1941 due to the insufficient response for volunteers. In taking this step Bevin went further than any other government had ever done before. Amongst those questioned by Mass-Observation there was a feeling that compulsion was necessary for industrial efficiency. As one woman said: 'I think everybody should

---

<sup>24</sup> P Summerfield, 'The patriarchal discourse of human capital: training women for war work 1939 – 1945' in *Journal of Gender Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 2 (November 1993), p191

<sup>25</sup> C. Wightman, *More than Munitions – Women, Work and the Engineering Industries 1900 – 1950*, (London, 1999), p151

<sup>26</sup> Mass-Observation, (1942), pp97/8

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p120

<sup>28</sup> P. Schweitzer et al (eds.) *What did you do in the war, Mum?* (London, 1993 edition), p71

<sup>29</sup> Inman, p185

<sup>30</sup> Mass-Observation, (1942), p99



be made to do things, otherwise the job won't be done.'<sup>31</sup> Unmarried women between 20 and 30 were given the choice between auxiliary services and work in industry.<sup>32</sup>

Some women already had work but the registration order was mainly aimed at those who were unoccupied. Of these many were married and to go to work would have caused serious domestic problems. They may have had husbands working in reserved occupations and living at home, had small children or elderly relatives to care for or may have been looking after evacuees or working in Civil Defence, which included the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS).<sup>33</sup> In general these groups were exempt, as were women prepared to go into nursing.<sup>34</sup> However, there were accusations that 'women of the leisured classes' were using the WVS and other civil work as a loophole to avoid compulsory service.<sup>35</sup> Those deemed suitable for mobilisation were interviewed to see if their circumstances made it difficult to transfer them to war work.<sup>36</sup> Women were excused if they could prove domestic hardship.<sup>37</sup> Married women without children were directed to local industries and those with children were encouraged to take up part-time work.<sup>38</sup> The official in charge of the women's section of the Labour Exchange in Blaina, South Wales, gives one possible reason why this was not always acceptable: there was some local opposition by husbands, who saw their role as head of the family threatened.

'I'd have somebody coming round to volunteer and her husband after her saying no she's not going. "Let bloody Mrs Churchill go and make munitions."<sup>39</sup>

It was the young unmarried women who were more often classed as mobile and could be sent wherever they were needed.<sup>40</sup> This was usually to Royal Ordnance Factories (ROFs), especially the filling factories, i.e. those filling shells, bombs and cartridges,

---

<sup>31</sup> M-O A, Report No. 1255, 'Appeals to women', (12.5.1942)

<sup>32</sup> A. Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969), p269

<sup>33</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p286

<sup>34</sup> *The Times*, (24.7.1943)

<sup>35</sup> Rose, p36 See also J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class*, (Oxford, 2002) where he discusses the role of the WVS and its contribution to the continuities of upper- and middle-class power.

<sup>36</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p307

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p308

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p313

<sup>39</sup> M-O A, Report No. 1498, 'Blaina', (March/April 1942)

<sup>40</sup> Calder, (1969), p333

because they were given first claim on conscripted women.<sup>41</sup> By mid 1942 the ROFs employed 300,000 workers, 60 percent of them women.<sup>42</sup>

All those directed to war work had the right to appeal.<sup>43</sup> However, because they did have some choice in what they did, appeals were not wide spread. Gowing emphasises that 'it would be quite wrong to suggest that people moved to, or stayed in, war jobs only in response to compulsion or the threat of it.'<sup>44</sup> 'Bevin preferred to rely on voluntarism and free collective bargaining.'<sup>45</sup> Much of the movement to industry and the Forces was voluntary, induced by patriotism or through the incentive of higher wages. In spite of not earning as much as men, most women seemed to accept the situation. For them the most important consideration was that they had been given the chance to work and, in the case of those living at home, contribute to the family budget.<sup>46</sup> The majority of directed women were young girls who had no previous experience of factory work and had no economic responsibilities. They found the chief advantage of work was the money they earned and they were generally satisfied with it. Women were employed to do the more menial tasks and had been conscripted into work they would never have chosen themselves. Very few managed to get into the highly skilled grades of work, which was inevitably more lucrative.<sup>47</sup> Between 1939 and 1943 an extra 1.5 million women entered essential industries.<sup>48</sup>

The main problem for the Government was that the demand for labour was not spread evenly over the country. Those industries requiring the most workers were in the Midlands, North West, London and the South East. Other regions had an excess of labour so mobile workers were needed.<sup>49</sup> In the case of women, those with the potential of being mobile were often working locally already. They were freed for other work away from home by giving immobile women their jobs. Girls under 19 years old could not be transferred away from home. The attitude of parents to sons

---

<sup>41</sup> Inman, p186

<sup>42</sup> Hansard, Vol. 382, (5.8.1942), col. 1071

<sup>43</sup> Hansard, Vol. 376, (20.11.1941), col. 433

<sup>44</sup> Gowing, p165

<sup>45</sup> M. Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War*, (London, 1999), p46

<sup>46</sup> Summerfield, (1998), p128

<sup>47</sup> Wightman, p156

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p135

<sup>49</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p457

and daughters was different: they would encourage a son to move away, but they saw a daughter leaving as the 'wartime disintegration of the family.'<sup>50</sup> For women enforced mobility was seen as a very drastic measure.<sup>51</sup>

'Now one big factor against women going out to work, has been reluctance to leave the district. It's strong, even among young people. ... Mother doesn't want me to go so far away they said.'<sup>52</sup>

As the following cartoon implies those from middle and upper classes were thrown into a situation they could never have expected and were not always suitable. Factory work was considered a working class occupation.



Smiling Through: Mother's Girl / "I wouldn't be much use in a factory because I've always been at home with Mother, but perhaps I could dust the place down and arrange flowers."

Figure 2.3 Cartoon appearing in the Evening News (18.9.1941)<sup>53</sup>

Mobile labour meant finding accommodation for those working away from home. The policy of 'industrial conscription conditional on welfare' meant that, amongst other things, adequate accommodation had to be provided for workers.<sup>54</sup> In the majority of cases this meant women workers. When Bevin first called for women volunteers for war work, the priority was to provide houses in the isolated areas where factories had been built. Once conscription was introduced the priority changed to hostel building. It was expected that the majority of women would be accommodated in purpose-built

<sup>50</sup> P. Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, (Manchester, 1998), p45

<sup>51</sup> Mass-Observation, *People in Production*, (Middlesex, 1942), p135

<sup>52</sup> M-O A, Report No. 1498

<sup>53</sup> UKC-CSCC, JL1846, *Evening News*, (18.9.1941)

<sup>54</sup> Hancock, and Gowing, p312

hostels managed by the National Service Hostels Corporation for ROF workers, each housing 1,000. They were grouped together so that there could be accommodation for up to 7,000 women in one area.<sup>55</sup> Each hostel took nine months to build and consisted mainly of prefabricated buildings with sleeping accommodation in single or double cubicles. They had good common room accommodation and welfare facilities.<sup>56</sup> They were managed by societies such as the Co-operative Holidays Association and Worker's Travel Association, organisations that were used to dealing with the welfare of large numbers of people. They came under the jurisdiction of the ROF Hostels Council led by Billy Butlin.<sup>57</sup> They generally provided a high standard of comfort, food and care. 'Residents agree that the hostels are bright and pretty, that the chairs are comfortable and the little bedrooms for two beautifully planned.'<sup>58</sup> In spite of this they were unpopular because they were considered Government institutions and, for economic reasons, they were large. Long journeys to work or overcrowded billets were often deemed preferable to living in a hostel.<sup>59</sup>

By the end of 1943 the country was fully mobilised. Manpower distribution was changed according to the demands of war strategy.<sup>60</sup> For example, in 1943 the aircraft industry was lagging behind on demands and a temporary priority was given for the entire industry.<sup>61</sup> Plans made in 1943 for the following year were for further intakes into all three services and for the increase of labour in coalmining and inland transport.<sup>62</sup>

The table in Appendix MAN-I gives a general picture of the distribution of the labour force of working age throughout the war years. The largest movements were of men going into the Forces and women stepping in to take their place.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> A. Williams-Ellis, 'Hostels and Girls' in J. Hartley (ed), *Hearts Undefeated*, (London, 1994), p151

<sup>56</sup> PRO, LAB 22/57, Accommodation provided by National Service Hostels Corporation

<sup>57</sup> Inman, p253

<sup>58</sup> A. Williams-Ellis, p152

<sup>59</sup> Inman, p250

<sup>60</sup> Gowing, p155

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p162

<sup>62</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p450

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p296

## The Coalmining Industry

Of all the war industries, the one causing the largest headache to Bevin as Minister of Labour was the coalmining industry. It was one wartime industry where women could not work. Instead it required fit young men. Coal was vital to the war effort. Directly or indirectly it was the driving force behind the manufacturing industries, which were so essential at this time, especially once the 'phony war' came to an end in 1940. No industry could function without coal. However, the coalmining industry was beset by problems.

The ownership of coalmines was dispersed. By 1924 there were 2481 coalmines belonging to about 1400 undertakings. Many were small and the cost of output per ton varied.<sup>64</sup> Even during the war there were 950 separate companies. Many remained small and so could not afford the capital needed for modernisation.<sup>65</sup> An idea of the extent and size of the coalfields in the 1940s is given in the map in Appendix MAN-II. They were spread across the country and varied in size from the small fields of Kent, Somerset and the Forest of Dean to the larger areas of South Wales, the Midlands and North East.

During the 1930s Britain, unlike America, did not invest in mechanisation of the industry and 70 percent of the production costs were wages.<sup>66</sup> By 1941 the underlying problem was a shortage of manpower in the pits. The scheme of directing young men to the mining industry was designed to overcome these difficulties. Before turning to that subject in later chapters, it is important to give an appraisal of the coal mining industry before 1939 in order to understand the problems faced by the Government in that industry during the war.

The history of the industry in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of a long battle between the coalmine owners and the miners over wages and conditions. After the 1914-18 war British mines were failing to keep pace with new technology and were working much as they had in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Modernisation was a necessity if the

---

<sup>64</sup> W.H.B. Court, 'Problems of the British Coal Industry between the Wars', in *The Economic History Review*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2 (1945), p5

<sup>65</sup> P. Addison, *Now the War is Over: A social history of Britain 1945 – 1950*, (London, 1985), p180

<sup>66</sup> C. Barnett, *The Audit of War: the illusion and reality of Britain as a great nation*, (London, 1986), p75

industry were to keep its position in the world market.<sup>67</sup> This was achieved by Government subsidies which, when they were withdrawn, forced the owners to cut wages.<sup>68</sup> Although the Government had tried to introduce legislation for better working conditions, they were met by fierce opposition from the owners, who claimed it would be too costly and therefore detrimental to the industry. Between the wars the miners were not in a good bargaining position. In 1919 a demand by the mining unions for nationalization resulted in the Sankey Commission's recommendation that private ownership of unworked coal should cease and that private royalty rights should be transferred to the State.<sup>69</sup> These recommendations were not implemented because the mine owners were strongly opposed to the idea and the Government was concerned about strike action. It was one matter to strike against a private employer but quite another to strike against the Government.<sup>70</sup>

The miners were disillusioned and both the rejection of nationalisation and their bitterness towards the employers over wages increased their resentment and paved the way for the strikes of 1921 and 1926. In March 1921 the owners, faced with a slump in coal export prices, made drastic wage reductions. This led to strikes and a lockout. The miners returned to work in June after their funds were exhausted.<sup>71</sup> By 1924 coal prices had improved and coal owners granted increased wages for the duration of one year. However, by mid 1925 coal prices and sales had again taken a rapid downward turn. Because of depleted funds the miners were not in a position to strike but were offered the assurance of help by the Trades Union Congress (TUC). They pledged full support to the miners, including a general strike.<sup>72</sup> With this threat the Government gave a temporary subsidy, which lasted for nine months. In this period the Government was able to build up stocks of coal. The subsidy ended in April 1926 and a general strike was called in support of the miners for 3<sup>rd</sup> May.<sup>73</sup> This was called off nine days later, leaving the miners to battle it out alone. This they did for nearly eight months, when, faced with no money, they were forced back to work on the owners'

---

<sup>67</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, E.V. Newbegin, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 – 1945*, (October 1946), p1

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>69</sup> Court, (1945), p7

<sup>70</sup> Hansard, Vol. 119, (18.8.1919), col. 2003

<sup>71</sup> Pollard, p274

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p275

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p276

terms.<sup>74</sup> The strike of 1926 was especially harsh for the miners. To take one example, there was a lockout in the Kent collieries from May until November 1926. The miners suffered severe hardships and were often forced to seek parish relief. The guardians of the poor law set the miners to work on breaking stones for road building.<sup>75</sup> These episodes of national strikes were followed by a general depression in the 1930s.<sup>76</sup> The coalmining industry was heavily dependent on the export trade so trade slumps during the inter-war years increased the problem of unemployment.<sup>77</sup> The industry was localised in areas of general high unemployment and labour was abundant with no alternative work.<sup>78</sup>

'In order to keep their hands upon you because they had so many men who wanted the job they used to make you work for three days a week and make you go on the dole for the other three. Whilst you were working someone else would be on the dole, then he would come and do your job whilst you were on the dole. They found it paid better than having one man for the job. It kept you fighting for the crumbs of money that they threw at you. It kept control on you.'<sup>79</sup>

Industrial relations within the coalmining industry were always strained. On the one side were the colliery owners and on the other the unions. The Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) was founded in 1888. However, the district unions were always dominant and the miners were members of their own district organisations and not the MFGB.<sup>80</sup> The district unions sent delegates to the MFGB, which was the body representing the miners in the TUC and in the Labour Party. It was the MFGB that formulated policies within the industry and provided a platform for the individual districts. By the start of the Second World War there were 22 autonomous districts. They were responsible for collective bargaining on matters pertaining to wages and welfare. The individual districts developed their own traditions and set up their own benefit schemes. For this reason there were also area differences in membership contributions and levels of help in times of crises.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p277

<sup>75</sup> I.J. Harding, *The Kent Miner: 1915 – 1926. A Social History of the Kent Mining Community, Its Organisation, Leadership and Militancy*, (unpublished extended essay for UKC, March, 1971), p75

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p13

<sup>77</sup> M.W. Kirby, 'The Politics of State Coercion in Inter-War Britain: The Mines Department of the Board of Trade, 1920-1942', in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 22, Issue 2 (June 1979), p374

<sup>78</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p2

<sup>79</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines opinions, (24.9.1944)

<sup>80</sup> George B. Baldwin, 'Structure in the British Miners' Union' in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 67, Issue 4 (Nov. 1953), p578

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Not all unions insisted on membership as a prerequisite of becoming a miner. In some areas unions were more militant than in others. As early as 1910 South Wales was known as a militant stronghold and many miners became communists.<sup>82</sup> In the depression of the inter-war years some miners, including Welsh miners, had been forced to move. R. Thompson's father was one of them. He was from Ferndale, South Wales. 'Things were very bad in my area as there were thousands of people on the dole and pits were closing.'<sup>83</sup>

'A man who grew too conscious of his rights or tried to organise for better conditions was soon handed his cards and sent on his way. He failed to find work elsewhere simply because his reputation had gone ahead of him and he was placed on the list at many collieries.'<sup>84</sup>

The miners often went to new areas under assumed names, where they took their own brand of trade unionism with them.<sup>85</sup> Many moved south to the new coalfields in Kent, which soon gained a reputation as a militant area.

'The Kent coalfield had a reputation as a communist hot spot and admittedly most of the union officials were members of the local communist party, but they were the ones who got down to the job and knew what had to be done.'<sup>86</sup>

In the inter-war period there were Labour Members of Parliament in mining constituencies, including ex-miners, who supported the miners. For example, Mr Glanville, member for Cossett, had become a miner at the age of 12,<sup>87</sup> and George Spencer, an ex-miner, represented Houghton-le-Spring, Co. Durham.<sup>88</sup> However, there were more members who had interests in the collieries, for example, Mr Wragg, member for Belper, was a director of two collieries and chairman of another.<sup>89</sup>

It is not surprising that coalmining was an unpopular occupation. Mining communities were segregated. Everyone in a mining village depended on the colliery. Between the

---

<sup>82</sup> N. Fishman, 'Heroes and Anti-heroes: Communists in the Coalfield' in *Miners, Unions and Politics 1910 - 1947*, Eds. Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and David Howell, (Aldershot, 1996), p95

<sup>83</sup> Interview with R. Thompson (30.9.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

<sup>84</sup> D. Agnew, *Bevin Boy*, (London, 1947), p48

<sup>85</sup> Arthur Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel*, (London, 1960), p97

<sup>86</sup> Questionnaire, September - November 2002

<sup>87</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (29.6.1944), col. 932

<sup>88</sup> *The Times*, (17.3.1942)

<sup>89</sup> Hansard, Vol. 378, (17.3.1942), col. 1395



wars unemployment in the traditional mining areas was 50 percent or higher.<sup>90</sup> This led to acute poverty. Housing was usually bad. Coombes describes the house he lived in after marriage. It was owned, as was normal, by the local coal company. It was shared with another family, who had control of the kitchen and garden. Coombes and his wife had two small rooms and they had to go through the rooms of the other family for anything they wanted, including the toilet. Rent, electricity and coal were deducted from wages.<sup>91</sup>

The work was dirty, dangerous, monotonous, hard manual labour. Accidents and industrial disease were common. The miners worked in appalling conditions with no amenities once they were underground. Toilets and a place to take a break and snack, other than amongst the coal dust, were non-existent. Conditions in other industries were not ideal but coalmining had always been considered the worst job of all. Amongst the general public the miners were known as ‘the scum of the earth’, a phrase used often by Hubert S. when describing his time in the pits as a regular miner. He started to work in the mines in 1938, aged 14. ‘When I was a boy I’d be working in a 2 foot seam ... and it’s too small to use a shovel ... I used to get all scratches down me.’<sup>92</sup> As Lawther says: ‘No other industry has such a record of hardship, poverty, endurance, terrorism, disaster, unemployment and the constant menace of death.’<sup>93</sup> Heinemann described it as ‘the toughest job outside the front line. It was either wet and cold or very hot and there was always the threat of gas.’<sup>94</sup> Talking about the conditions in Kent a miner had this to say: ‘You never got any fresh air. It was a humid atmosphere. The sweat and steam off your own body, it couldn’t get away.’<sup>95</sup> This was why so many miners, when they had the chance, left the industry at the beginning of the war.<sup>96</sup> It is also why so many miners were against their sons following in their footsteps into the pits. ‘I did 25 years of mining but I swore that I’d never let my son go to mining all his life while I could stop it.’<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> G. Harkell, ‘The Migration of Mining Families to the Kent Coalfields between the Wars’, in *Oral History*, Volume 6, No. 1, (Spring 1978), p98

<sup>91</sup> B.L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, (London, 1939), pp92-3

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Hubert S. (26.9.2002)

<sup>93</sup> Lawther, President of the MFGB, in a forward to Heinemann, p5

<sup>94</sup> Heinemann, p67

<sup>95</sup> Harkell, p99

<sup>96</sup> For a more detailed report on conditions in the mines between the wars see: Coombes, (London, 1939)

<sup>97</sup> Interview with R. Thompson, (30.9.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

Amongst their own communities mining was a respected job.<sup>98</sup> However, the miners knew that the general public derided them. Joe E. was a Bevin Boy who later went on to become a regular miner. He spoke about the reputation of the miners:

‘People used to say oh don’t want to have to do with him, he’s a bloody miner and you know it was all wrong. And that was the attitude in the Kent area when I was a boy and it grew with these people, you know. Oh, he comes from Hersden. He’s a load of rubbish, you know. It was wrong, they was (sic) nice people.’<sup>99</sup>

He also spoke of the comradeship of the miners and the solidarity in the face of adversity:

‘And if somebody had a bad accident, which I did, your mates, after you’d been off work about 3 weeks or a month, your mates would be at the pay office. If there was 4 of you in a gang, those other 3 would be at the pay office with the cap and when the men drawed (sic) their money they spilt the money in the cap. ... It used to happen and it was the same for everybody. ... It was your mate’s job to see that you had got something coming in and that was their duty to make sure that they put delegates there to collect. And they might be collected for one this week, one next week, but there would always be a collection of some sort. And that’s how it was. That was life in the pit. You don’t get that in other walks of life, not at all.’<sup>100</sup>

Mining was a particular form of work associated with masculinity and ties of brotherhood.<sup>101</sup> ‘The classic view of mining society is of more rigidly segregated sex roles and workspaces and of more entrenched patriarchy than in any other industrial community.’<sup>102</sup> There is another aspect of masculinity associated with the war, which was recently discussed by Sonja Rose. In wartime this sense of masculinity changed. She claims: ‘Being visibly a member of the fighting services was necessary to the performance of wartime masculinity.’<sup>103</sup> The press reported heroic feats, where the military were shown as being ‘bold and adventurous, intelligent and efficient, courageous and patriotic.’<sup>104</sup> Masculinity equated to heroic conduct and was something the miners wanted to be part of.

---

<sup>98</sup> Harkell, p106

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Joe E. (5.3.2003)

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Rose, p178

<sup>102</sup> V.G. Hall, ‘Contrasting Female Identities: Women in Coal Mining Communities in Northumberland, England, 1900 – 1939, in *Journal of Women’s History*, Volume 13, No. 2, (Summer, 2001), p107

<sup>103</sup> Rose, p178

<sup>104</sup> Rose, p161

The need for more manpower had not been apparent until the war was well under way. At the beginning of the war Britain was producing coal for export to France and Italy. When France fell to Germany and Italy joined the Axis powers these markets were lost. By the middle of 1940, with a consequent large surplus stock of coal, there was unemployment and short-time working in the coalmining industry. The two hardest hit areas were South Wales with 51 percent exports and Durham with 33 percent.<sup>105</sup> Especially in these areas miners were actively encouraged to seek work in other war industries.<sup>106</sup> Initially Chamberlain did not want to disrupt the British economy and did nothing about unemployment in industries generally in the hope that the war would soon be over. However, it became politically impossible to allow such high levels of unemployment to continue.<sup>107</sup> As a result over 70,000 miners, especially the younger, fitter and more experienced coalface colliers, were allowed to leave the industry to enlist in the Forces or in other war related industries such as munitions and constructional work.<sup>108</sup>

Bevin was appointed Minister of Labour and National Service in the coalition Government, formed in May 1940. He realised that the exodus of miners from the pits could not continue if coal production for the war effort was to be maintained. Because he had been a powerful trade union leader, he was able to do things his predecessors had not. In the 1930s the Labour Party had drawn up a programme for the extension of Government control over the economy.<sup>109</sup> Bevin was able to implement Labour's pre-war plans, especially the direction of manpower. In June 1940 an 'Undertakings (Restriction on Engagement) Order' was applied to the coal industry after both sides, management and workers, had alerted the Government to the necessity of action if coal stocks were to be maintained.<sup>110</sup> Thereafter coalminers required the consent of the Ministry of Labour and National Service if they wanted to leave the industry.<sup>111</sup> This, however, had little effect on output since it kept in the mines those already there

---

<sup>105</sup> H. Wilson, *New Deal for Coal*, (London, 1945), p8

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p47

<sup>107</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4*, (Oxford, 1987), p508

<sup>108</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 'Mobilisation of Labour for Industry, report 1939 – 1946', (London), p73

<sup>109</sup> S. Brooke, 'Revisionists and Fundamentalists: The Labour Party and Economic Policy during the Second World War', in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 32, No. 1, ( March 1989), p162

<sup>110</sup> 'Report by The Select Committee on National Expenditure', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, March 1942), p59

<sup>111</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 'Mobilisation', p73

but did nothing to augment the number of miners employed. By the beginning of 1941 the Government realised that coal had become even more vital to the war effort and that increased production was required.<sup>112</sup> Coal was a necessity as it supplied directly or indirectly 94 percent of the country's energy requirements.<sup>113</sup> It took a long time for the Government to react to the situation. The Mines Department did not have either the power or the manpower to provide an effective solution to the problem.<sup>114</sup> Bevin, was anxious to avoid the situation that occurred at the end of the First World War, when there was an abundance of miners and many had to be made redundant. During the First World War, in spite of the industry having a bad reputation for poorly paid, physically hard and dirty work, it was still considered better than fighting in the trenches.<sup>115</sup>

Bevin was determined to take action to deal with the exodus from the pits. In May 1941 an Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order was applied to coal mining although by then many miners had left the industry.<sup>116</sup> It did, however, prevent any more leaving.<sup>117</sup> The Essential Work Order guaranteed a full week's wages for the men if they made themselves available for work.<sup>118</sup> An amendment in December 1941 gave Pit Production Committees the right to deal with all matters affecting coal production. This included absenteeism and industrial disputes.

'A joint responsibility rests upon the managers and the men to create at each pit a real-life, active, successful pit production committee. What should be their function? Every question affecting coal production. Every issue affecting complete pit organisation bound up with securing the maximum amount of coal being raised to the surface. This must be seriously considered. We want pit production committees in reality. With attention to safety, coal, more coal and yet more coal is the miner's contribution in this hour of the nation's crisis.'<sup>119</sup>

A worker's employment could not be terminated without permission from a National Service Officer. This would generally be granted only if a person wanted to go immediately into another scheduled undertaking or if gross misconduct could be

---

<sup>112</sup> 'National Expenditure', in *MOLG*, p59

<sup>113</sup> Heinemann, p20

<sup>114</sup> Kirby, 'The Politics of State Coercion', p393

<sup>115</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (17.12.1943), col. 1855

<sup>116</sup> 'National Expenditure', in *MOLG*, p59

<sup>117</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (13.7.1944), cols. 1995-6

<sup>118</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 'Mobilisation', p73

<sup>119</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, Broadcast by Mr Ebby Edwards M.P., A call to the mining industry on the urgent need for coal, (19.10.1941)

proven.<sup>120</sup> If a person was consistently absent without a reasonable excuse, failed to comply with orders or worked in such a way that production was endangered, the Pit Production Committee could give that person's particulars to a National Service Officer, who, in turn, would be expected to give the worker four days to give a reason for his conduct. If no satisfactory excuse was given at the end of that time the matter could be referred to a Local Appeal Board for a report and recommendation.<sup>121</sup> In June 1941 Ernest Bevin appealed to the miners' sense of patriotism in an effort to eliminate absenteeism. 'If any man stays away from his job, other than for genuine and unavoidable causes, he is acting criminally against his fellow men, the nation and the Forces. He is helping Hitler, and we cannot allow that to continue.'<sup>122</sup> Much absenteeism was involuntary as there were always those unable to work because of sickness and accidents, with one man in four being injured every year.<sup>123</sup>

'No time should be wasted on men who have been generally absent by reason of accident, sickness or family bereavement. They should be classified as unavailable for work. Cases of absence coming under other reasonable courses should be examined in conjunction with the man's attendance record at the pit. Here, personal contact with the man may clarify much.'<sup>124</sup>

Throughout the war absenteeism was a major problem in all industries especially in coalmining. The situation was worsening as time went on. 6.9 percent of shifts that could have been worked were lost in 1939. By 1942 this figure rose to 10.4 percent.<sup>125</sup> Morale was obviously low. The Minister of Fuel and Power gave the possible reasons as high age level in an industry requiring fit and healthy men, lack of enthusiasm on the part of the workers and the reluctance of the Ministry of Labour to prosecute where absenteeism was rife.<sup>126</sup>

The coalmining industry wanted experienced miners to be recalled from the Forces even if on a temporary basis.<sup>127</sup> Questions were asked in Parliament as to whether

---

<sup>120</sup> 'The Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1941', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, January 1942), p26

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p27

<sup>122</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, *The Coal Mining Industry*, broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., Home Service, (23.6.1941)

<sup>123</sup> Heinemann, p27

<sup>124</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, Broadcast by Mr Ebby Edwards M.P., A call to the mining industry on the urgent need for coal, (19.10.1941)

<sup>125</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p31

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p18

miners could be released for short periods in the same way as agricultural workers serving as home based soldiers were released to help on the farm at harvest time.<sup>128</sup>

The Government refused the release of men from the Forces as 'it might cause serious injustice to the serving soldier, who would be deprived of his leave.'<sup>129</sup> Instead an appeal was made to ex-miners to return voluntarily from other industries. Bevin appealed, in a broadcast to the nation, for 50,000 men to go back to the mines.<sup>130</sup> This met with very little response. Therefore in July 1941 compulsory registration of all miners who had left the industry since January 1<sup>st</sup> 1935 and had worked for a minimum of six months in the industry was initiated. As an incentive a guaranteed weekly minimum wage, an unconditional attendance bonus and a cost of living wage agreement had been worked out.<sup>131</sup> Many evaded registration, although over 105,000 men did register. However, many had left mining because of physical incapacity or they were now in occupations that were equally important to the war effort.<sup>132</sup>

The net result was about 17,000 men returning to coal mining by the end of 1941, nevertheless it was becoming a matter of some urgency to get younger people into the mines in order to keep an even balance of age in the industry. 'In view of the fact that so many thousands of young virile men have gone into the Army that unless younger men come back production will be affected.'<sup>133</sup> The Mines Department wrote to the Mining Association; 'I am directed ... to refer to letter to you of 14<sup>th</sup> October on the subject of the recruitment of boys to the coalmining industry, and to say that this problem is becoming a matter of urgent concern to the Minister of Labour and the Secretary for Mines.'<sup>134</sup>

In spite of the additional numbers in the workforce, by October 1941 there were no signs of increased production, which stood at 4,135,000 tons for that month. With the production of 3,851,000 tons the situation had worsened slightly in November 1941.

---

<sup>128</sup> Hansard, Vol. 372, (2.7.1941), col. 1356

<sup>129</sup> Hansard, Vol. 372, (2.7.1941), col. 1356

<sup>130</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, *The Coal Mining Industry*, broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., Home Service, (23.6.1941)

<sup>131</sup> 'National Expenditure', in *MOLG*, p59

<sup>132</sup> PRO LAB 37/16, 'Mobilisation', p73

<sup>133</sup> Hansard, Vol. 372, (19.6.1941), col. 794

<sup>134</sup> PRO LAB 8/462, Memorandum on setting out problems of future manpower for the coalmining industry, letter from W.G. Nott-Bower, Mines Dept. to the Mining Association of GB, (10.11.1941)

Stocks were also still decreasing.<sup>135</sup> Factors attributed to poor production levels included too many working hours spent by the Pit Production Committees on resolving matters connected with wages and working conditions, the effects of enemy action in some areas, the increased employment of older men, who were less able to keep pace in an industry relying on heavy manual labour and a reluctance by youths to work underground. There was also a lack of nourishing food, although plans were under way for the establishment of pithead canteens. Provision of a canteen was the responsibility of the colliery owner but the Miners' Welfare Commission was agreeable to make grants towards the cost. By January 1942 716 collieries had canteens and another 464 collieries were in the process of providing them.<sup>136</sup> Improvements were due in some part to the intervention of Bevin. He believed in the rights of workers to adequate welfare facilities. He felt that he could not expect men to give up the right to free choice of employment without guaranteeing them certain conditions of work.<sup>137</sup>

The level of income tax was high so that it was not always economic for the younger, unmarried miners to work all six shifts.<sup>138</sup> They would tend not to work all the shifts. This sort of absenteeism was having a detrimental effect on their colleagues. The miners also found it demoralising that their pay packets were often less than that of their wives or daughters.<sup>139</sup>

A Select Committee recommended a plan for the temporary release of men from the Forces to start in the spring of 1942 so that stocks of coal could be built up for the following winter when demand was expected to be high. A Government White Paper, published on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1942, took into account this recommendation and put forward proposals concerning production and consumption of coal as well as the organisation of the coalmining industry.<sup>140</sup> The Government pointed out that in spite of the Essential Work Order, which meant that miners had to stay in the industry, there was still a net wastage of about 25,000 men per year as a result of normal retirement or

---

<sup>135</sup> P. Howlett, *Fighting with Figures*, (London, 1995), Table 5.3, page 87

<sup>136</sup> Hansard, Vol. 377, (27.1.1942), cols. 537-8

<sup>137</sup> Inman, p103

<sup>138</sup> 'National Expenditure', in *MOLG*, p59

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p59

<sup>140</sup> 'Control and Organisation of the Coal Industry – Government proposals', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, June 1942), p122

injury. Although production in 1941 did not increase, 33,000 men returning to the coalmines from other industries prevented a decline in output. In 1942 it was proposed to return 6,500 men from the Army, 1,300 from the RAF and 3,500 from other industries and Civil Defence. This was a one off stopgap proposal and would not be possible in subsequent years.<sup>141</sup> Miners returning from other industries had fallen to 13,000 in 1943 and it was therefore proposed to offer men under 25 years of age, when called up for military service, the option of working in the mines, whether it was coal, tin, iron ore, oil shale or gypsum.<sup>142</sup> This brought a further 1,110 men, known as optants, into the coalmines.<sup>143</sup> It was also proposed, because of their reluctance to enter the coalmines, to look at how best the industry could be made attractive to juveniles.

‘The main causes of the unwillingness of boys to enter the mines may be summarised as follows:

- a) The long history of unemployment in the industry and the prevalence of especially high rates of unemployment in certain coalmining areas since 1926.
- b) The wage level in the industry, which compares unfavourably with that in many other industries, which are open to boys either near their homes or in other parts of the country if they are prepared to leave home.
- c) The prevalence in certain mining areas of blind-alley employment in the industry.
- d) The uncongeniality and danger of coalmining.
- e) Poor housing conditions in many mining districts and a lower standard of welfare provision, medical supervision, etc. than prevails in many other industries.
- f) The fact that miners normally live in somewhat remote towns or villages, with the result that their sons are subject to the lure of the city.
- g) The influence of many parents and school teachers against boys following the occupations of their fathers.’<sup>144</sup>

Necessary training facilities and improving conditions and career prospects for anyone entering the industry were seen as a matter of urgency.<sup>145</sup> An effort was made to interest boys from the mining areas in the opportunities in the coal industry. Pamphlets, lectures and films were organised in schools, as were visits to coal

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> ‘Underground Mining Work – Alternative to Military Service’, in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, November 1942), p191

<sup>143</sup> PRO LAB 37/16, ‘Mobilisation’, p75

<sup>144</sup> PRO LAB 8/462, Outline of basic principles of education and training schemes (Draft), Future manpower of the coalmining industry – long term problems, (4.3.1942)

<sup>145</sup> ‘Control and Organisation’, in *MOLG*, p122



mines.<sup>146</sup> Peter F., who had been evacuated to Kettering in Northamptonshire with his school at the outbreak of war, remembers a coalmine visit.

‘But nevertheless we did go down that pit and we were taken along the ... long wall faces. And here we were in our school raincoats and shorts and socks and bare knees and an oil lamp each. And we were crawling along in the coal dust.’<sup>147</sup>

Both before and during the war the coalmines were privately owned, each company having control of the operation of its mines. Some mines that were no longer profitable and would have been shut were taken over by the Government under emergency measures. An example is Clifton, an old mine that was nationalised in 1941 because the company owning it had been made bankrupt.<sup>148</sup> Those that were still owned privately were often in a deplorable condition. ‘The mine [Wardley, Newcastle] was run on a shoestring. There was no evidence of any investment even to provide reasonable working conditions.’<sup>149</sup> This was because it had already been accepted, even by the old regime, that the coal industry could not survive without nationalization and that this would be high on the agenda once the war was over. There was no incentive to modernise.<sup>150</sup>

In order to re-organise coalmining the Government needed full control of the industry. A White Paper was presented to Parliament in June 1942.<sup>151</sup> Under the new proposals a National Coal Board would be set up under a Government minister. Under him Labour Directors would be responsible for production planning, improvement in efficiency, provision of supplies and equipment and for the overall welfare, safety, health and working conditions within their own particular region. The remit also included the closing of unproductive pits and the mechanisation of mining as far as possible. Pit managers would still be responsible on questions of statutory safety. Pit Production Committees would work with the managers to ensure maximum output but they would no longer be responsible for looking into cases of absenteeism. This duty would be taken over by Investigation Officers, who would be appointed in each

---

<sup>146</sup> PRO LAB 8/462, Outline of basic principles of education and training schemes (Draft), Boys at School, (4.3.1942)

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Peter F. (6.6.2000)

<sup>148</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, undated letter from Eric Walker to Phil Pearson in reply to an article in the Bevin Boys’ Association Newsletter, (2001)

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Fred C. to Ann Kneif, (October, 2002)

<sup>150</sup> Peter Heap, ‘Coal Comes Full Circle’ in *Energy World*, no. 225, (February 1995), p14

<sup>151</sup> ‘Control and Organisation’, in *MOLG*, p122

region and who would recommend prosecution if they thought it necessary. This was the beginning of dual control in the industry, which was to last throughout the war.

Wages were always the principal bone of contention in the industry and were the main reason for both national and regional disputes.<sup>152</sup> The National Coal Board, so as not to prejudice its position as a body to promote increased production, would not be involved in wage agreements. After discussions with the industry a Board of Investigation was appointed on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1942 to look into miners' wages. The result was the Greene report, named after the chairman of the Board, Lord Greene, which established a national minimum wage of 83/- per week for adult underground workers and 78/- per week for surface workers.<sup>153</sup> A bonus scheme based on districts was also adopted.<sup>154</sup>

At the end of 1942 there were 705,000 miners employed in coalmining.<sup>155</sup> However, there was still insufficient manpower. In the Government's judgement a labour force of 720,000 wage earners would be required for the duration of the War.<sup>156</sup> Certain steps were taken to achieve this. In July 1943 the upper age limit of 25 was increased to 41 for optants or 50 if they had previous coalmining experience. However, this produced only an extra 3,000 men. This was followed in August 1943 by a publicity campaign.<sup>157</sup> Citing patriotism, advertisements placed in the national press called for 30,000 volunteers to the industry, as can be seen in the illustration below (Figure 2.4).

---

<sup>152</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p4

<sup>153</sup> 'Wages in the Coal Mining Industry', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, June 1942), p122

<sup>154</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p78

<sup>155</sup> Heinemann, p23

<sup>156</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 'Mobilisation', p75

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.



## “Together we’ll get the Coal!”

### A CALL FOR 30,000 VOLUNTEERS

As the tide of victory rises, we face a problem at home that can prolong the war. We need more coal.

For four years of war, the miner has borne the burden of hewing the raw material of victory.

But he needs help if the mounting needs of production and the new offensives are to be met. Can you help him?

*You would get a hearty welcome. You would be released from any job you are doing unless it is equally important. You would be trained*

*for the work. If your education were interrupted, you would be as eligible for post-war training as any man in the Fighting Services. This is a job on a par with any in the Armed Forces of the Crown.*

Will you volunteer?

If so, go to the nearest office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, where you will be given full information. If under 18, apply to the juvenile department of the Employment Exchange or to the Juvenile Employment Bureau.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL



SERVICE AND THE MINISTRY OF FUEL AND POWER

Figure 2.4 Advertisement appearing in *The Times* (23.9.1943)<sup>158</sup>

‘As the tide of victory rises, we face the problem at home that can prolong the war. We need more coal.’<sup>159</sup> However, this failed to have the desired effect. An internal memo shows that the Government was fully aware of the reluctance of young men to enter the industry on a voluntary basis.

‘The importance of coalmining has been recognised to the extent of placing it on a par with service in the Armed Forces, but this in itself would not justify the special treatment, which I understand to be intended. The special factor in the case of coalmining is the very arduous and unpopular nature of the work. Few men will be willing to volunteer for the work and account must be taken of this factor in deciding that as few as possible willing volunteers are rejected because of the importance of their work.’<sup>160</sup>

<sup>158</sup> *The Times*, (23.9.1943)

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> PRO LAB 8/763 Measures for increasing the number of workers in the coalmining industry, internal memo, (21.8.1943)

Every effort was made to find suitable recruits for the mines so that in September 1943 arrangements were made for all ex-miners, even if they were not fully fit, to return to less taxing work in the coalmines and thereby release the more able-bodied for more exacting work. Surface workers were also moved to underground work, often against their will, but this expedient did release another 4,000 men to direct coal production.<sup>161</sup> In addition, volunteers from Northern Ireland and Eire were accepted for employment.<sup>162</sup>

In July 1942 it was agreed between the Ministry of Fuel and Power and the Air Ministry that ex-miners released from RAF ground staff would be regarded as having been given leave until the end of June 1943.<sup>163</sup> However, when this date was approaching, it was decided that they should continue to remain in the pits. This caused some antagonism and the Air Ministry was keen to have their recruits replaced. '(T)he trained airmen whom we may find possible to allow to remain in the coalmining industry should be replaced by a corresponding increase in the current allotment of manpower to the RAF together with a percentage allowance for the additional training overheads which we should incur.'<sup>164</sup>

Bevin was already thinking of ways to get more youths into the mines. Addressing a conference of the Mineworkers' Federation at Blackpool in July 1943 he stated:

'At the end of this coal year there won't be enough men or boys in the industry to carry it on. It is the one great difficulty in this war effort ... At the same time we are carrying out this invasion and every bit of territory we take from the enemy we have got to find coal for ... It is quite obvious that I will have to resort to some desperate remedies during the coming year. I shall have to direct young men to you'.<sup>165</sup>

By the end of July 1943 Bevin conceded that a further intake from the Forces or other industries was unlikely to be possible in spite of the critical situation in the mines. An indication of conscription to the mines was made in the House of Commons in July

---

<sup>161</sup> Hansard, Volume 392, (23.9.1943), col. 471

<sup>162</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 'Mobilisation', p75

<sup>163</sup> PRO LAB 6/22, Proposal for the release from the Armed Forces of Volunteers for Coalmining, letter to Group Captain J.H. Green, Air Ministry from S.R. Todd, Ministry of Fuel and Power (undated)

<sup>164</sup> PRO LAB 6/22, Ibid., letter from Group Captain J.H. Green, Air Ministry to H.N. De Villiers, Ministry of Labour and National Service, (4.5.1943)

<sup>165</sup> A. Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin – Vol.II Labour 1940 – 1945*, (London, 1967), p256

1943. Bevin warned that if insufficient men opted for mining, in spite of the age limits having been removed, then he would have to start directing men between 18 and 25, who would otherwise have been called up for the Forces, into mining instead. If not enough volunteers were found then he would reduce the age to under 18. 'It might be necessary to put entry into the mines on the same footing as service in the Forces and that we might even have to go down as far as boys of 16 years of age.'<sup>166</sup> The mention of the possibility of boys as young as 16 called up to the mines caused uproar in the House and Members requested that nothing should be done until after the Parliamentary Recess, when the matter could be debated. Bevin seems later to have rejected this idea but he was adamant that if he were to conscript into the mines it would not just be from mining areas. 'I have to get these young men out of the whole community to see this particular job through, and I am not selecting miners' children only.'<sup>167</sup>

It was accepted by the Ministry of Labour that both mothers and teachers had influenced boys against coalmining.<sup>168</sup> In September Bevin made an appeal to the parents of juveniles: 'I do not see any reason at all why the mining industry should not be as good a career for mothers and fathers to put their boys to as any other.'<sup>169</sup> In spite of all his efforts Bevin expected that wastage through age, illness and death would bring the labour force down to 690,000 by the end of 1943. He again appealed for volunteers, especially from school leavers: 'It is honourable and vital work but above all you will be able to feel when it is all over that you have done your bit for the nation in this war on one of the key fronts.'<sup>170</sup> In October Bevin wrote to headmasters of public and secondary schools in the hope that they would use their influence on school leavers. He emphasised the fact that service in the mines would be treated in the same way as service in the Forces and that the boys would still be able to continue with their education after demobilisation: 'I write to ask for your co-operation in putting these facts and considerations before your boys as forcibly as you feel you

---

<sup>166</sup> Hansard, Vol. 391, (29.7.1943), col. 1799

<sup>167</sup> Hansard, Vol. 391, (29.7.1943), col. 1802

<sup>168</sup> PRO LAB 8/462 Memorandum setting out problems of future manpower for the coalmining industry, (6.2.1942)

<sup>169</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, Broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., Home Service Forces Programme, (5<sup>th</sup> September 1943)

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

can.<sup>171</sup> This was followed by a broadcast to schools in which Bevin again reiterated the advantages to school leavers of joining the mines and that it was just as patriotic as joining the Forces: 'I do not believe it will be said of any of you boys that you failed to respond to the call for coal upon which victory so much depends.'<sup>172</sup>

A survey carried out by Mass-Observation in September 1943, although on a small sample of 67 people, showed a great awareness of the optant scheme. 100 percent of men and 79 percent of women knew of the appeal so it was not a question of Bevin's message not getting across but more a reluctance on the part of the conscripts to go into the mining industry. When asked what they thought about the scheme the answers were as follows (Table 2.1):

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Hope response	9	6	8
Not a success	34	22	28
Don't know	9	19	14
Release soldiers	17	16	17
Nationalize	14	3	8
Misc.	17	34	25

**Table 2.1 M-O questionnaire: Attitude to mines optant scheme**

34 percent of men as opposed to 22 percent women thought that the scheme was not a success.

'The problem of the mines and the coal shortage were treated as very serious ones. [Those interviewed] realized the urgent necessity for tackling the problem, but were, however, very disappointed with the measures introduced by the government to deal with it.'<sup>173</sup> The types of comments made seem typical of how people felt and were reflected in the response to the Government's plea for more miners. 'The position is

<sup>171</sup> PRO LAB 19/53 Recruitment of public and secondary school boys for coalmining, letter to Headmasters of Public and Secondary Schools from Ernest Bevin (28<sup>th</sup> October 1943)

<sup>172</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, Broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., Home Service (Schools), (11<sup>th</sup> November 1943)

<sup>173</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/J, Miners questionnaire, (6.9.1943)

serious, but I fear the response for volunteers will not affect the position. The Government will have to make a more attractive appeal for volunteers by recognising the grievances of the miners.' 'They won't get many volunteers if they still refuse to give them better wages.' 'Not likely to be successful unless relations with the miners' leaders are adjusted.' There was hope for a response to the appeal but some of those interviewed were very critical, not only with the current coal problem but also of how things had been handled in the past. They questioned why the Government had called up the miners at the beginning of the war and thereby aggravated the situation. It was felt that the only way to alleviate the problem was to release miners from the Forces: 'Release skilled miners from the army by offering them a decent wage, that's the only way to get the coal which we need to carry on; we play about too much with the miners and they are just fed up.' Some thought that state ownership of the mines was a solution to the problems. A comment from a lower-middle class man: 'If they'd take the mines over and pay a proper wage, they would get less trouble and better results.' A working-class man had the following to say: 'The position in the mines won't improve until they are taken over from the capitalists.'<sup>174</sup> This shows that some people felt that the measures taken by the Government were not radical enough.

Given the fact that there was such a great need for miners it seems strange that one group of people, conscientious objectors, were not sent to the coalmines when they requested a transfer from other work.

'Please would you inform me of any opportunity for members of the Non-Combatant Corps to volunteer for work in coalmines? I notice that the tribunals have directed a number of conscientious objectors to the mines, and would like to point out that it would be more satisfactory to many members of the NCC [Non-Combatant Corps] and more advantageous to the Government if we were allowed to transfer to this work.'<sup>175</sup>

The reply was not helpful: 'I have been unable to find any authority under which this may be done.'<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> PRO LAB 6/22, letter from Pte John Fallaize to the Ministry of Labour and National Service, (29.9.1943)

<sup>176</sup> PRO LAB 6/22, letter from Ibbett, Ministry of Labour and National Service to Pte John Fallaize, (8.10.1943)

Questions were raised in the House of Commons as to whether it would be possible to send conscientious objectors into the coalmines but Bevin preferred to treat them as any other conscripts.<sup>177</sup> This meant that if they were awaiting allocation to non-combatant duties they were liable to be included in the ballot.<sup>178</sup> Many were already being sent to coalmining by the tribunals.<sup>179</sup> Tony P., a pacifist, when called before a tribunal was given the choice of civil defence, agriculture, fire service or coalmining. He decided on coalmining because he felt 'it would be such an unusual experience.'<sup>180</sup> It is also possible that some were opting for the mines in preference to a tribunal hearing.

Bevin was under immense pressure, both from industry and the public, to increase coal production. Industry could not operate without coal and it was the main form of energy for domestic heating. During the autumn of 1943 a detailed ballot scheme was worked out. This was put before the War Cabinet at the end of November 1943.<sup>181</sup> Bevin needed workers quickly since they would still have to be trained before they could be productive. When he realised that there would not be enough Bevin announced, on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1943, that men aged 18 to 25 available for call-up to the Forces would be selected by ballot for training followed by underground work in the coalmines.<sup>182</sup>

'I therefore propose to resort to the most impartial method of all, that of the ballot. A draw will be made from time to time of one or more of the figures from 0 to 9 and those men whose National Service Registration Certificate numbers happen to end with the figure or figures thus drawn by ballot will be transferred to coalmining.'<sup>183</sup>

The first men to report should be ready for training at the beginning of January 1944. The first ballot took place on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1943 and it was decided to draw two numbers, which would give an intake in January of about 3,000 men.<sup>184</sup> Those whose National Service Registration Number ended in the drawn digits were balloted into

---

<sup>177</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (9.12.1943), col. 1107

<sup>178</sup> PRO LAB 8/734, Letter to Fulton, Min. of Fuel and Power from Glen, Min. of Labour, (20.11.1943)

<sup>179</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (16.12.1943), col. 1658

<sup>180</sup> IWM 009233/5, Transcript of an interview with Tony P.

<sup>181</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p41

<sup>182</sup> PRO LAB 37/16, 'Mobilisation', p76

<sup>183</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (2.12.1943), col. 521

<sup>184</sup> PRO LAB 25/196, Estimated Results of Coalmining Ballot, signed S.B. Chrimes, (8.12.1943)



the mines. Together with the volunteers and optants, these were the men who became known as Bevin Boys.

The justification to include all three groups of men under the heading Bevin Boys in this thesis has been briefly pointed out in the introduction. Various historians have different thoughts on just who exactly was a Bevin Boy. Many include only those balloted to the mines. However, ballotees, optants and volunteers are usually presented alongside but under separate headings in Government statistical tables. They are all accepted as members in the Bevin Boys Association, which claims that there were nearly 50,000 Bevin Boys. They all came under the same rules and regulations during their time in the pits. They were the men who helped maintain coal production at levels enabling the industry to struggle through the war.

This chapter has shown that there was 'total war' and full mobilisation by the end of 1943. There was still need for more manpower in the mining industry. Bevin had nowhere to turn but to find it among the fit young men reaching their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays, and therefore due for conscription to the Forces. Bevin saw the ballot as the only fair way of recruiting the labour he so desperately needed. It was deemed to be impartial and it would affect all classes and all geographical areas. Whether justified or not, the mining industry and the miners had a bad reputation. It is not surprising that there was resistance to this method. The majority of those conscripted had expected to go into the Forces. Press reports and cinema films showed that to be masculine was to fight for Britain and to be heroic. Those conscripted had lived through the first part of the war with these images and wanted to be part of the fighting. Men out of uniform were often the subject of 'white feather campaigns', as it was assumed that they were cowards. As one conscripted Bevin Boy said: 'We were to experience a loss of self esteem, this not only in our own eyes but with certain sections of the community at this time and it has unfortunately to be said, to the present day.'<sup>185</sup>

At the beginning of the war the Government was carrying on with the old ways of relying on adequate wages and other economic incentives in the hope that this would

---

<sup>185</sup> P.E. Munday, *Them and us: Chronicles of the Conscripted Miner 1943 – 1948*, (typescript, undated)

bring about a satisfactory distribution of labour.<sup>186</sup> Once the phoney war was over, the Government embarked on a policy of effective manpower budgeting and a flexible redistribution of labour when and where it was necessary. During the war the Government's power increased to unprecedented levels. Nothing of this nature had ever been done on this scale before and certainly a ballot to conscript workers was completely new. However, it was something that could only be attempted in wartime. It represented a radical departure from late 1930s economic management. Bevin was determined to implement plans for economic improvements that were part of pre-war Labour policy. This included full employment and welfare reforms that Labour felt would abolish poverty and social inequality. It reflected a slow leftward movement in British politics and economic management and paved the way for nationalisation of certain industries, including coalmining, after the war.

---

<sup>186</sup> Hancock and Gowing, p61

## Chapter 3

### Call-up

*'Yes, yes my boy, by all means train for war  
Do knots and splices, Morse and semaphore,  
And learn to drill, and how to use a gun.  
To sail the ocean, and destroy the Hun.*

*Study the stars, the secrets of the sky,  
And fix your dreams upon the day you fly.  
And then, when you're proficient, keen and fit,  
We'll raffle you, and put you down a pit.*

*Science prevails. The more that we advance,  
The fewer things we like to leave to Chance.  
See how the racehorse, from the age of two,  
Is fashioned for the job he has to do.*

*We do not train the falcon or the hound  
And then decide to send them underground.  
But when we want our boys to give their best  
We use a hat – and Fortune does the rest.<sup>1</sup>*

This poem neatly sums up the way many saw the conscription of young men into the mines. In a speech to Parliament on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1943 Bevin outlined the circumstances under which men were to be conscripted into the coalmines. 'The selection will be made from men born on or after 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918, who would otherwise be called up for the Armed Forces and are placed in medical grade I or in grade II if their disability is foot defects only.'<sup>2</sup> However, there were to be certain exceptions as three classes of men were required for other duties. These were:

1. Men accepted for flying duties in the RAF or Fleet Air Arm.
2. Men accepted as artificers in submarines.
3. Men in a short list of highly skilled occupations, who are called up only for certain service trades and are not even accepted as volunteers for coalmining.'<sup>3</sup>

In addition those whose call up to the Forces would have normally been postponed because of exceptional hardship were not to be conscripted to the coalmines.<sup>4</sup> Men balloted to the mines were to have a further medical and if they were again grade I, or grade II only because of foot problems, they would be considered suitable for underground work. If someone claimed special circumstances, for example

---

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, Poem by Petty Officer Herbert, Vol. 401, (29.6.1944), col. 932

<sup>2</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (2.12.1943), col. 521

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (2.12.1943), col. 522

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

claustrophobia, they could be subjected to a further medical to decide their suitability for mining work.<sup>5</sup>

The first indication that the conscript was to become a Bevin Boy was when the letter arrived to say that his number had been picked (Appendix CU-I). The following cartoon shows a young man holding the post containing his call-up papers. Is he now going to collect coal for Bevin instead of for his mother?



Figure 3.1 Cartoon appearing in the Daily Mail (29.12.1943)<sup>6</sup>

Machinery was set up to deal with appeals but these were usually turned down (Appendix CU-II). 'You could appeal, of course, but any appeal just fell on deaf ears.'<sup>7</sup> Those with serious domestic difficulties could appeal on grounds of hardship and a Local Appeal Board would make a recommendation.<sup>8</sup> The first few weeks of balloting showed some wastage. Up until 19<sup>th</sup> February 1944 168 out of 721 ballotees were found to be unfit for coalmining on re-examination and 33 out of 660 had their appeal upheld. A further 6 percent failed to arrive at the training centre.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> PRO LAB 79/36 Coalmining ballot boys, Memorandum 1943-1944

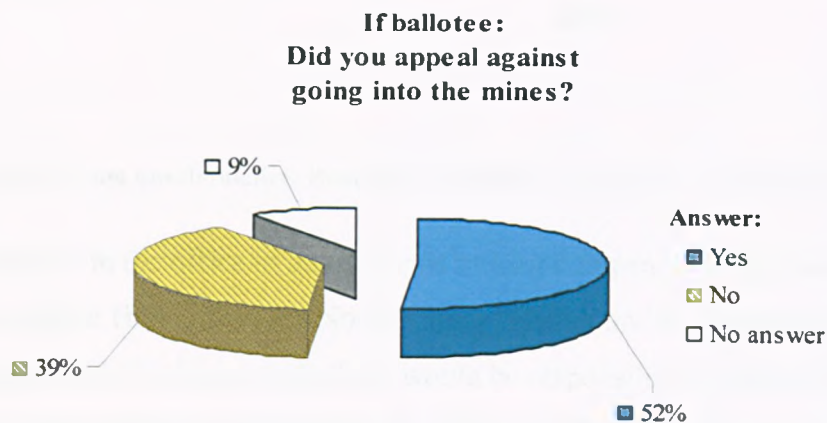
<sup>6</sup> UKC Cartoon Library, NEB 1669, *The Daily Mail*, (29.12.1943)

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>8</sup> PRO LAB 79/36

<sup>9</sup> PRO LAB 25/196 'Coalmining Labour Supply', 8.3.1944

Nationally about 40 percent appealed against the decision to go into coal mining but only very few petitions were accepted.<sup>10</sup> The questionnaire sent to Bevin Boys in September 2002 does not, of course, show those whose appeal was upheld. It does show, however, a higher percentage of appeals than the national figures (see Table 3.1).<sup>11</sup> The sample may have been biased towards the middle classes, who would be more likely to return the questionnaire because they would have more leisure time and an interest in the subject (see chapter 1, ‘evaluation of sources’).



**Table 3.1 Results from questionnaire: Did you appeal against going into the mines?**

‘The young conscript, with reason, dreaded the prospect of life underground: even the Army appeared free and glamorous by contrast.’<sup>12</sup> When the letter arrived directing the ballotees down the coalmines there were various reactions. Examples from those interviewed and answering the questionnaire give an idea of the general attitude of the conscripts (see Table 3.2).<sup>13</sup>

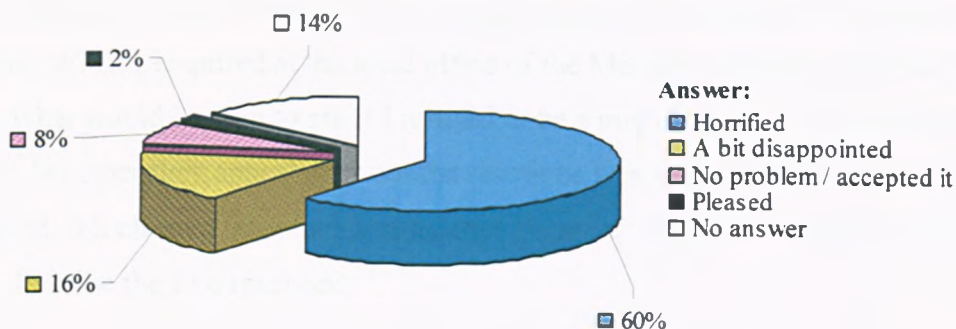
<sup>10</sup> A. Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-1945*, (London, 1969), p438

<sup>11</sup> Questionnaire, September – November 2002

<sup>12</sup> E.R. Chamberlin, *Life in Wartime Britain*, (London, 1972), p133

<sup>13</sup> Questionnaire

**If ballotee:  
What were your reactions when you heard that your number  
had been drawn in the ballot?**



**Table 3.2 Results from questionnaire: Reactions to number being drawn in the ballot**

Alan W. worked in the office of an open cast mining company. He had been an army cadet in the Green Howards in the North Riding Infantry and had expected to go there. He appealed ‘on the grounds that I would be responsible for more coal than I would if I were to attempt to get coal from underground ... Anyway, surprise, surprise my appeal failed.’<sup>14</sup> Peter F. was horrified to find he had been conscripted to the mines. ‘The work we had been doing at the studio [Carlton] also included work for the Ministry of Information and it had been tried by our management that P.F. could perhaps be in some way held back from this ghastly fate since he was so busy doing their work. But this didn’t work at all.’<sup>15</sup> The laundry where Ken P. was working pleaded that he was essential to the firm. When he did not report for training the police arrived. ‘They said if you’re not on the 10 o’clock train on Monday morning we’ll be round by 12 o’clock and by 1 o’clock you’ll be in a prison cell.’<sup>16</sup> ‘I was told if I refused to go it would be £100 fine or three months in prison or both.’<sup>17</sup> Heavy penalties and the threat of imprisonment meant ‘that you couldn’t just duck and run away.’<sup>18</sup>

Not everyone appealed. Some had already been turned down by their chosen Service. Tony C. volunteered for the Air Corps but was failed because he was colour-blind. ‘I

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>17</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

didn't see any point [in appealing]. I mean I had been turned down for the RAF, which I really wanted.'<sup>19</sup> Many did not realise that an appeal was possible. 'The reporting instructions said that I could not appeal against the decision.'<sup>20</sup> 'There was no appeal. When I enquired at the local office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service what would happen to me if I refused to be a miner, I was told I would be sent to jail.'<sup>21</sup> Whether they appealed or not the reactions were mainly of dismay. Devastated, felt cheated, absolute horror, utter disbelief, shock and anger were all used to describe the first reactions.<sup>22</sup>

Some accepted their call up to the mines. Peter H. had not been keen to go into the Forces 'because I'd seen a lot of other young men go in with high hopes and they'd had most of those hopes dashed by the drudgery of Forces life.'<sup>23</sup> Certainly many families were relieved that the conscript was not going into the firing line. Typical of the answers given were 'I think my mother was glad in a way, because she already had two sons in the Forces.' 'My family thought it was the better of two evils, but at least it would be safer.'

The response to Bevin's announcement in Parliament on the ballot was to ask if members of the various pre-Service Training Corps were to be excluded from the ballot but the answer was an emphatic no.<sup>24</sup> It was argued that those in such organisations had been trained to do a job in one of the Services. Those balloted, instead of using these skills, would be sent away to do a job for which they had no training.<sup>25</sup> 'They were not given the option of not being called into the Services. Large numbers were in different Air and Army training corps when they were forced against their will into this calling.'<sup>26</sup>

'Having been in the Army Cadet Corps I had expected to go into the Services. It was a smack in the face and very difficult to explain today. Then, having been at war for four years, with everything that Nazi Germany had thrown at

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>20</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>24</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (9.12.1943), col. 1108-9

<sup>25</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (29.6.1944), col. 930

<sup>26</sup> Hansard, Vol. 414, (23.10.1945), col. 1923

us and with the recent landings in Normandy, one wanted and expected to be part of the action.<sup>27</sup>

The press also took up the cause.

'To be an airman – that is why  
He joined the ATC  
But he's a pitman now because  
His number ends in 3.

His sense of humour is not dead  
He does not peak or pine:  
He merely says, "were mine the choice,  
The choice would not be mine"<sup>28</sup>

Bevin was of the opinion that 'the training for the Forces is of a character, physical and mental, that does not detract from their ability to work in the mines.'<sup>29</sup> He wanted to show that the ballot was fair. Those in pre-Service Training Corps were often from middle class backgrounds and it would not look impartial if they were excluded from the ballot. This caused an angry reaction from the various Services. The Head of Naval Branch claimed that there was a shortage of young men capable of becoming officers or skilled ratings. By conscripting suitable men for the Navy into the mines the progress of the war would be seriously prejudiced. It was a waste of time and labour training Sea Cadets. 'Waste of man-hours is waste of men, and that again is a thing the country cannot afford at the present crisis.'<sup>30</sup> The Admiralty and the Air Ministry both disagreed with the method of balloting into the coalmines. 'At the present acute crisis of our manpower, it is essential not only that every man should be employed, but that every man should be employed in that capacity in which he can render best service to the country.'<sup>31</sup> They proposed that anyone balloted into the mines, who had received at least a secondary or technical school education, should be allowed to enter one of the Fighting Services instead, if required by the Services, and that those volunteering for the Navy or RAF before the ballot had taken place should be able to join that Service.<sup>32</sup> This implied that the Services saw coalmining as a job

---

<sup>27</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>28</sup> *Punch*, (5.4.1944), p295

<sup>29</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (16.12.1943), col. 1661

<sup>30</sup> PRO ADM1/16619, letter George Dunn, Head of Naval Branch, 15.10.1943

<sup>31</sup> PRO ADM1/16619, Draft Paper for the Lord President's Committee, Compulsory drafting for coalmining, Joint Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for Air, (undated)

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



for the lower classes, who were without the benefit of a higher education. The miners' leaders agreed and also saw coalmining as a working class occupation.

'It is our working class duty to ensure that the armed forces of Britain will be supplied. ... Those who stand in the way of this being done are not loyal to the miners, to the British working class or to those fighting in occupied countries.'<sup>33</sup>

The matter of boys in training corps not being exempt from the ballot was also taken up in the House of Lords, where it was agreed that many of these boys would make good officer material. 'The country will be deprived of many potential young leaders who will be sorely needed in the great military campaigns that lie before us.'<sup>34</sup>

Bevin was asked many times if he would reconsider his decision not to exempt from the ballot members of pre-Service organisations.<sup>35</sup> It was one of the main reasons given in appeals against going into coalmining. Some, like John W., even enlisted the help of the local MP, who endeavoured to have his appeal upheld. The result was a letter from Bevin.

'I realise that members of the Air Training Corps ... may feel disappointed if they are chosen for employment in the mining industry instead of being called up for the service of their choice. I could not, however, make an unqualified exception in respect of the ATC without extending a corresponding concession to all the other pre-Service training organisations and this would seriously prejudice the success of the ballot scheme.'<sup>36</sup>

Notwithstanding there were ways to avoid conscription into the mines.

'It was easy to avoid being a coal miner by volunteering, which I did (for the Royal Engineers) on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1943, six months before I left school. I thus got into the regiment I wanted and stood no risk of being a Bevin Boy. Apparently many did not know that one could still volunteer at a time of universal conscription.'<sup>37</sup>

This was borne out by a letter from the War Office stating that since August 1942 it was possible for anyone to enlist when they were 17 and be relegated to Class W Reserve until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday when they would receive their call up papers. 'A youth who takes advantage of this becomes a member of the Armed Forces, he need

---

<sup>33</sup> A. Moffat, 'A Miner Looks at 1943', in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25 (January, 1943), p24

<sup>34</sup> Hansard [Lords], Vol. 130, (15.12.1943), col. 372

<sup>35</sup> Hansard, Vol. 400, (25.5.1944), col. 900, Vol. 401, (29.6.1944), col. 929

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Ernest Bevin to Mr Edwards re. John Wright's appeal, 19.5.1944

<sup>37</sup> *The Times*, letter from C.F. Hemming, (16.11.2001)

not register under the National Service Acts and will be exempted from the operation of the ballot.’<sup>38</sup>

This is something more likely to have been known by the more educated and may explain why it was often thought that the middle classes were less likely to be conscripted to the coalmines, although it should be noted that as they were in the majority the percentage of working class conscripted would be greater.

‘It would appear that there is an undercurrent of feeling amongst trainees, miners and civilians alike that this Bevin Boy scheme is being used partly as a class weapon. It has been noticed that generally speaking the actual “Bevin Boy Conscripts” who form about 50 percent of new entrants into the industry are recruited amongst the working classes. There is a noticeable feeling that the ballot is so fixed so that higher-class boys may be given a chance to go into the services if they so wish (this feeling has persisted in Lancashire and Nottingham). The other 50 percent are formed chiefly of volunteers and are much more representative of all classes (many of them are from the services, COs and the such like).’<sup>39</sup>

The class issue was used as propaganda in an attempt to show that conscription was not biased. For example, the media were invited to visit the training centres at the start of the scheme (see chapter 4, ‘newspaper coverage’), and many newspapers were eager to point out that the recruits included boys from all class groups. Pathé News interviewed one young man from a public school and one from a working class background, who sat together.<sup>40</sup>

Some antagonism could be caused by class differences. Ned S. mentioned the Shaffer twins, who later became famous as writers. They came from a privileged background but were conscripted to work in the mines. They would take snap (packed lunch) into the mine that included all sorts of generally unobtainable food. If they ate an orange the smell would be wafted over the whole mine by the air intake and annoy the miners, who during the war could only dream of such delicacies.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> PRO ADM 1/16619, Letter to Lord Bruntisfield from A. Henderson, War Office, 13.11.1943

<sup>39</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further general report, (7.7.1944)

<sup>40</sup> *The World at War*, Part 3 ‘Home Fires’, Thames Television, 1974

<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Ned S., Hersden, Kent, October 2003

However, when asked what they had done or had thought of doing before they were called up those answering the questionnaire covered all class groups (see Table 3.3).<sup>42</sup>

<b>What did you do or what had you thought about doing as a career?</b>	
<b>Career</b>	<b>%</b>
Manual – agriculture	5.26
Manual - labourer other than agriculture	18.42
Manual – craftsman	14.47
Office / shop	14.47
Public sector	2.63
Banking	6.58
Artistic - artist, journalist, etc.	3.95
Engineering, electronics, etc.	21.05
Professional	6.58
Other	2.63
None	3.95
No answer	0.00

**Table 3.3 Results from questionnaire: Thoughts on career**

The Director General of Man-Power, Sir Godfrey Ince, watched the first selection of men for coalmining at one of the 11 Regional Offices. 978 names were balloted for coalmining, among them some interesting cases. Two boys had already been accepted as being good officer material for the Navy but had no choice but to go into the mines. Twins had also been accepted for the Navy. One had been balloted to the mines and it was decided to offer the other the chance of joining his brother as a miner. Another case involved the Department of Naval Recruiting, where they had asked that a boy be sent to the Navy on the next intake. When it was discovered that his name had been balloted there was some consternation as he was related to an Admiral.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately there is no mention of the outcome and whether he was able to get out of going into the mines.

<sup>42</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>43</sup> PRO LAB 25/196, Letter from Ince, Director General of Man-Power to de Villiers, Ministry of Labour and National Service, (17.12.1943)

Once balloted the new recruit was sent to a training centre. Eric G. wrote about the people to be found on his intake at the training centre at Swinton. It illustrates the type of people entering the industry at that time. There were about 200 men in total.

‘As you notice we are a very mixed crowd here. Lads from all walks of life. Men with decent jobs like you and me – others who are good for nothing else. We have been sent here and we have got to make the best of it. But some of these younger lads don’t or won’t realize that. They think they can mess about just as much as they like. But they can’t. In my opinion they ought to be put in the army. I am sure they wouldn’t like that. I am sure that the first day those lads got there they would realize how comparatively well off they are here. It seems so unfair when many of the elder fellows with a wife and a family have had to go into the services.’<sup>44</sup>

Nearly half were Bevin Boy conscripts. Of the remainder the majority had recently become de-reserved and had chosen the mines rather than the armed forces. There were also optants, who were regarded as Bevin Boys, and a few from the services. ‘On the whole, the greater number of these people are lower C and D class types [working class], but 25 per cent are lower-middle-class particularly so of the older men, who are shopkeepers and the such like. And there are also about half-a-dozen university students, and three or four Austrian or German refugees.’<sup>45</sup>

The shopkeepers from the mining areas were often keen to work in the mines as they could still run their business with help from the family. An old miner told the story of a conscript who owned several butcher’s shops and had been able to secure himself a nice easy job by giving the mine manager some choice pieces of meat.<sup>46</sup>

Conscientious objectors (COs) were liable to be conscripted like anyone else who was called up and they often became coalmining optants.<sup>47</sup> ‘Pacifists who have volunteered for the mines in order to get out of the services before call up or after are quite common. Clifton has at least three, Gedling at least another half dozen.’<sup>48</sup> The lampman at Norton Colliery recalled that many of those directed to his pit were

---

<sup>44</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Swinton, Bevin Boys, (17.5.1944)

<sup>45</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>46</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines opinions Nottingham Thoresby Colliery, (3.11.1944)

<sup>47</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (9.12.1943), col. 1107

<sup>48</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on the conditions at Clifton Mine, (August 1944)

COs.<sup>49</sup> A CO sent to the Non-Combatant Corps of the army was pleased to have been transferred to mining. 'I am prepared to put up with the mines until the war is over. Somehow to me when we finish at 2.30 it seems as if we have only done half a day's work.'<sup>50</sup> Rose tells the story of a CO, Stanley Hilton, who was court martialled four times and spent nearly three years in custody before he was released from prison to work as a coalminer.<sup>51</sup> Official records show that only 41 COs were sent to the mines as Bevin Boys during 1944 and 1945.<sup>52</sup> However, it seems likely that the figure was much higher as those volunteering were also deemed Bevin Boys. Tribunals listening to the appeals of COs were also sending them into the pits.<sup>53</sup> As was pointed out in Parliament 'we neither know nor care whether they are COs or not. We want conscientious coal-getters to get coal.'<sup>54</sup> The Bevin Boys, because they had no uniform, were often assumed to be COs and were derided by the public. They felt they were tarred with the same brush. However, COs were down to 0.5 percent by 1940 so that their numbers were not really significant.<sup>55</sup>

Mass-Observation attempted to carry out a survey on public opinion towards conscription in December 1943. It is not known where the interviews were carried out or what the sample size was, although it was mentioned that it was small. Mass-Observation found the size of the sample to be a problem and it can be assumed that interviews of this nature were very difficult to carry out in time of war. In spite of the size and composition of the sample, Penny Summerfield found 'a strong consistency between Mass-Observation findings and those of sample based questionnaire research by, for example, the Wartime Social Survey.'<sup>56</sup> The following table (Table 3.4) was taken from the Mass-Observation questionnaire on miners completed at the end of 1943, shortly before the first Bevin Boys were to enter the mines.

---

<sup>49</sup> J. Hutchinson, 'The Unlikely Lads – the direction of men into the mines during World War 2' Chatterley Whitfield Mining Museum Trust, (1987)

<sup>50</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Clifton, volunteer from Services, a pacifist, (21.8.1944)

<sup>51</sup> S.O. Rose, *Which People's War? National identity and citizenship in wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, 2003), p172

<sup>52</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 – 1945*, E.V. Newbegin, (October 1946), p46

<sup>53</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (16.12.1943), col. 1657-8

<sup>54</sup> Hansard, Vol. 396, (1.2.1944), col. 1121

<sup>55</sup> M. Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War*, (London, 1999), p45

<sup>56</sup> P. Summerfield 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 20, Issue 3 (July 1985), p449

What do you feel about conscription of men for the mines?		
	Male %	Female %
Approve	32	48
Disapprove	40	14
*Necessary	15	4
Don't know and misc.	13	34

\*NB Necessary – unfortunate but necessary

**Table 3.4 Miners' questionnaire: What do you feel about conscription of men for the mines?** <sup>57</sup>

In addition to the question shown in the table above, the respondents were also asked if they thought the scheme would be successful or not and what they personally felt about what should be done with the mines. Notes on the survey show that more men than women were opposed to the idea of conscripting workers for the mines. Over 50 percent of the men who were opposed to this scheme were from the working classes whereas those in favour were mainly middle class. One of the objections raised by both men and women to the scheme was the suitability of conscripted men to mine work. 'There was a certain amount of agitation, that skilled miners, who had been drafted into the army, should first be released, before resort is made to this drastic step of sending conscripted men down the mines.'<sup>58</sup> The following comments reflect the general attitude of those questioned.

'Doesn't look fair, there are thousands of miners who were sent into the army without any thought of the importance of their work to the country.'

'Think it is a great shame that men should be forced into the mines who are not fitted for the job.'

'It's very bad, especially for those being called up who are not at all suitable for the mines.'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/J, questionnaire on miners, (28.12.1943)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

On the question of whether the respondents thought the ballot would be successful or not they seemed to agree that it was the only thing that could be done to get the necessary man-power to keep the mines running.<sup>60</sup>

Eric G. found some sympathy for the Bevin Boys among the townspeople of Swinton, near Manchester, where he was training and then later from those near Clifton Colliery, Nottingham, where he worked. He came from a middle class background and many of the locals expressed the opinion that people like him were not suited to mine work. 'The mines are not a job for the better type of man, who has got some keenness and intelligence in him. It is only suited to the rougher and coarser sort.'<sup>61</sup>

'My mother, who lives only two doors away was only telling me the other day that she did not think that this mining job was suitable for you cleaner and more intelligent types of lads. She was only saying that she thought that it was a pity that you ever had to go in at all. She said that it was a dirty rotten job, which was only suitable for the more common type of man.'<sup>62</sup>

There was also, of course, the belief that such conscripts would not be able to pull their weight. 'I have been down in these very mines now for over 20 years and I don't mind telling you as that I knows what sort of chap is suited to the job and what isn't. Lots of these trainees won't be an earthly bit of good. I have my own ideas as to whether the government is wasting the country's money on this business or not.'<sup>63</sup>

The women were always quick to point out that the Bevin Boys were better off working in the mines than fighting. Many had husbands or sons serving in the Forces.

'So you don't think that you mind going down the pit then. You find that it's not such a bad job once you get used to it eh. I have met a lot of fellows like you out of the services and they say that it is a much better life - that they would much rather be in the pit than back in the army. Of course it means a lot being able to visit home regularly, and be able to see your own folks.'<sup>64</sup>

'I saw a film the other day called 'Gung Ho' and it made me realize how fortunate you are not to be in the army or the RAF, where you might have to fight the Japs. After all the mines are not ideal, we know that, but they are a hundred times better than the jungle and the terrible fighting that is going on there.'<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>62</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mining types, (25.5.1944)

<sup>63</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>64</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, local householder, (29.6.1944)

<sup>65</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, a young woman's opinion, (23.5.1944)

Even after the ballot scheme was introduced, the optant scheme carried on and Bevin's drive to recruit the youth into coalmining had not diminished. In February 1944 *The Kentish Gazette* reported on a three-day mining exhibition. Opened by Major Lloyd George at Chislet Colliery in Kent, it was visited by the employees and also by local school children.<sup>66</sup>

During 1944 there were 23 ballots, resulting in 18,000 ballottees.<sup>67</sup> The ballot was not drawn on a regular basis but according to the number of trainees required in a given period. Three ballots were required in January 1944; the first two had one number drawn, the second two or 20 percent of the conscripts. By the beginning of February 1944 the ballot for the mines was causing a shortage of recruits for the Forces, therefore in March 1944 only one token ballot was drawn in order to enable more men to be called up into the Army.<sup>68</sup> This became a swings and roundabouts situation, as by May there were problems with the training centre intake.

'For the week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> May the number of men allocated is 170 short of the required number. For the week commencing 22<sup>nd</sup> May the required intake is 1136, the allocation 575 and the deficiency 561. Of these figures the deficiency is slightly less than half the intake, but allowing for a few who are sure not to turn up it will probably become slightly more than one half. For the week commencing 29<sup>th</sup> May it is estimated that we shall be about 700 short and there is no hope of improvement in subsequent weeks unless we get more than a token contribution from the ballot.'<sup>69</sup>

The situation did not improve until March 1945, when it was considered not expedient to ballot too many to coalmining. At the same time, with the end of the war in sight, the requirements of the Forces had abated.<sup>70</sup>

With a few exceptions, official records of those balloted have been destroyed thus the majority of names cannot be recorded. The ballot continued until the cessation of hostilities in Europe in May 1945, although those called up for the Services could still opt for the mines after that date, by when 20,896 ballottees and a further 15,657 optants had entered the mines.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> *Kentish Gazette*, (12.2.1944)

<sup>67</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 *Mobilisation of Labour for Industry, report 1939 – 1946*, (London, undated), p76

<sup>68</sup> PRO LAB 25/196, various interdepartmental notes

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> PRO LAB 25/196, Coalmining Labour Supply

<sup>71</sup> PRO LAB 37/16, p76



Year	Ballotees	Volunteers	Optants	Ex HMF	COs	Total
1944	15,362	3,139	8,668	4,745	3	31,917
1945	5,534	1,475	6,989	1,906	38	15,943
Totals	20,896	4,614	15,657	6,651	41	47,859

Men placed in employment

**Table 3.5 The numbers directed to the mines in 1944-45<sup>72</sup>**

Ballotees, optants and volunteers had to stay in the mines until they became eligible for release according to the age and length of service formula applicable to Class A release from the Army.<sup>73</sup>

The numbers balloted to the coalmines does have to be put in perspective. At the beginning of 1940 Britain had approximately nine million men in the age group 16 – 40. Of these just under four million were needed for the Forces. The rest were retained for industry under the Schedule of Reserved Occupations or excluded through age, health, hardship or conscientious objections.<sup>74</sup> Like many others, the Bevin Boys had to comply with the Emergency Powers Act of May 1940, which gave the Government unrestricted power ‘for requiring persons to place themselves, their services and their property at the disposal of His Majesty.’<sup>75</sup>

The coalmine ballot was to change the lives of thousands of young men who had expected to be called up to the Services. By the end of 1944 Bevin was claiming that the ballot system in general was working quite satisfactorily.<sup>76</sup> However, Bevin had hoped to conscript 50,000 Bevin Boys in 1944 but in reality the figure was only 15,000.<sup>77</sup> Finding enough men to work in the coalmines had been a difficult problem to solve and many had been found from other sources. Court shows in the table below (Table 3.6) the proportion of Bevin Boys compared with other entrants to the industry.

<sup>72</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p46, Figures are taken from ‘Training Dept. material for Ministry of Labour Annual Reports, 1939-45’

<sup>73</sup> PRO LAB 37/16 Mobilisation of Labour for Industry, report 1939 – 1946, (London), p196

<sup>74</sup> W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy*, (London, 1949), p138

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p150

<sup>76</sup> Hansard, Vol. 406, (14.12.1944), col. 1360

<sup>77</sup> W.H.B. Court, *Coal*, (London, 1951), p304

	1944	1945
Juveniles under eighteen . . . . .	10,400	9,400
Ex-miners returned from H.M. Forces . . . . .	6,400	11,500
Ex-miners recruited from other industries . . . . .	6,900	8,100
Ballotees . . . . .	15,000	5,900
Optants . . . . .	8,500	7,200
Men, other than ex-miners, from H.M. Forces . . . . .	4,700	2,000
Men, other than ex-miners, from other industries . . . . .	4,900	3,700
<b>TOTAL . . . . .</b>	<b>56,800</b>	<b>47,800</b>

**Table 3.6 Proportion of Bevin Boys compared to other entrants to the coal industry, 1944-5<sup>78</sup>**

Whether the system was successful or not is still a matter for debate today. It is hoped that this thesis will give a better idea of the part played by the Bevin Boys in the overall history of labour supply during the Second World War.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4

### The Training Period

#### The Government's View

Before the war there had been very little training in the pits. Young boys followed their relatives into the mine and acquired experience by listening to and watching a father or older brother. 'In the days before mechanisation, when a youth went into the pit he went straight to the coalface with his father ... who looked after him and trained him ... until he became a trained miner.'<sup>1</sup> Thus was instilled into them a certain pit sense. Early in 1942, due to a shortage of juvenile recruits, the Government was pressing for improvements to conditions and prospects, including facilities for training.<sup>2</sup> In some districts joint committees of owners and miners had set up individual schemes for training new recruits.<sup>3</sup> However, it was only the better run and more profitable collieries where this was feasible. For example, a training centre for mines mechanisation was opened in Sheffield in 1943.<sup>4</sup>

The Forster Report, published in 1942, had recommended that all juvenile entrants to the coalmining industry should be given paid training. This should be carried out with the approval of the Minister of Fuel and Power and supervised by adequately trained personnel. There should be close liaison between the Ministry of Fuel and Power and the Board of Education and local Education Authorities concerning theoretical instruction. The report suggested an initial training period of not less than 16 weeks with the first eight weeks devoted to general instruction and practical demonstrations at a pit set aside for that purpose. The second eight weeks should include practical work in a production pit. At 18 or older, an age when they could work on the coalface, they should undergo further training of not less than six months, when they would be taught all the coalface operations.<sup>5</sup> Very few mines were able to set up these facilities

---

<sup>1</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (17.12.1943), col. 1845

<sup>2</sup> 'Control and Organisation of the Coal Industry', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, June 1942) p122

<sup>3</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry, Volume 4 1913-1946: The Political Economy of Decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p580

<sup>4</sup> W.H.B. Court, *History of the Second World War: Coal*, (London, 1951), p280

<sup>5</sup> 'Recruitment of Juveniles in the Coalmining Industry', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, September 1942), p161

because of the huge costs involved. However, with the implementation of the ballot scheme the Government decided that some sort of training would be appropriate.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1944, and in time for the first balloted recruits, an Order by the Minister of Fuel and Power made provision for training, supervision and medical examination of all new entrants to the coalmining industry. The Order was in answer to the by then two year old Forster Report but did not allow for the recommended training period. The Government was keen to get any new recruits into the mines as quickly as possible.<sup>6</sup> 'The use of ... the new recruits, whether by volunteering or direction, will be aimed at securing the maximum amount of up-grading in the shortest possible time.'<sup>7</sup> The new recruits were expected to replace the miners working on haulage so that those then could be transferred to the coalface.

In spite of the short training period it did show that the Government realised the need to train men who had no previous experience of mining and in many cases had no idea of the work involved. 'An untrained boy in a pit would certainly have been useless and might have been dangerous.'<sup>8</sup> The Order prohibited the employment of anyone except under competent instruction and supervision. No one should work underground before completing a four-week period at a coalmining training centre (stage A) and at least two weeks working at the pit to which they were allocated (stage B). Stage A training centres were to be set up and run by the Ministry of Labour and National Service. The supervision of stage B training was to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Fuel and Power. It was also required to advise the Ministry of Labour on technical matters concerned with stage A training and to select suitable training pits.<sup>9</sup> Stage A training was not just to be in the theory of mining but also involved physical training to get the recruits fit enough for what was a very demanding manual labour. Stage B training was to be underground with an experienced miner in the job to which they were assigned in order to acclimatise them to the work. Where it was not possible to send a recruit to a training centre, the training was to be six weeks underground under competent supervision with additional instruction in safety, an

---

<sup>6</sup> 'Coal Mines Training and Medical Examination, 1944', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, February 1944), p22

<sup>7</sup> Hansard, Vol. 392, (12.10.1943), col. 765

<sup>8</sup> Court, p305

<sup>9</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 - 1945*, E.V. Newbegin, (October 1946), p43

introduction to the tools used in mining and efficient methods of work. Work on the coalface would only be allowed after at least 16 weeks experience of underground work.<sup>10</sup> The only exception was in South Wales, where arrangements provided that trainees could take up work immediately on the coalface.<sup>11</sup> It was not possible to put boys onto haulage in South Wales because of the large and heavy trams used there.<sup>12</sup> The training was aimed at ensuring the recruit's safety and there was a hope that they would contribute to the pit output.

Centres were established at all the main coalfields where there was a labour shortage and were sited either at disused pits adaptable for training or at production pits where training areas could be segregated.<sup>13</sup> Newbegin mentions 11 pits that were selected to include training centres but a twelfth, Chislet in Kent, by a special arrangement with the colliery, was open by the end of January 1944<sup>14</sup> and has been included in the following list (Table 4.1).

Midlands	Haunchwood Colliery, Nuneaton, Warwick*
North Midlands	Creswell Colliery, Derbyshire
North Eastern	Askern Main Colliery, Doncaster, Yorks Prince of Wales Colliery, Pontefract, Yorks Birley Colliery (east pit), Woodhouse, Yorks*
North Western	Newtown Colliery, Clifton, Lancs*
Northern	Morrison Colliery, Southmoor, Durham Horden Colliery, Durham* Cromlington Lamb Colliery, Northumberland
Scotland	Newcockhall Colliery, Fife
Wales	Oakdale, Monmouthshire
London & S. Eastern	Chislet Colliery, Kent

\*Opened by the end of 1943

**Table 4.1 List of collieries with training facilities<sup>15</sup>**

<sup>10</sup> 'Coal Mines Training and Medical Examination, 1944', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, February 1944), p22

<sup>11</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p48

<sup>12</sup> M. Heinemann, *Britain's Coal - a study of the mining crisis*, prepared for the Labour Research Department, (London, 1944)

<sup>13</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p43

<sup>14</sup> *Kentish Gazette*, (29.1.1944)

<sup>15</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p43

Each training centre was run by a Manager. He was assisted by a Technical Manager, who was responsible for technical matters and for the safety of the trainees while they were underground.<sup>16</sup> The centres were each able to take from 280 to 520 trainees. In addition to the Government controlled centres it was arranged to use the facilities of an already existing scheme operated for the North Staffordshire colliery owners by the Education Authority at the North Staffordshire Technical College, a pioneer college for training miners.<sup>17</sup> There, practical work was catered for at the Kemble pit. The following comment is from H.W. Webb, who was the principal of the mining department at the college.

‘All the North Staffordshire colliery owners combined to provide it with haulage, coal cutters, underground workshops and complete working equipment, and a coal face was opened up. Lamp rooms, pithead baths and canteen were provided, and the young miner goes through all the usual operations of his mining life. The routine of lamp and pit cage is mastered, as well as the actual job underground. The lads learn how to handle tubs, clips, scotches, coal cutters and so on. The work is exactly the same as under the actual conditions of production except that the lads are treated as learners instead of earners. This means, of course, that production is nominal, and the boys work in small parties in charge of experienced miners.’<sup>18</sup>

The following (Table 4.2) shows the regions to which those answering the questionnaire were sent for training.

<b>To which colliery were you sent for training?</b>	
<b>Region</b>	<b>%</b>
Midlands	7.89
North Midlands	14.47
North Eastern	18.42
North Westerns	2.63
Northern	19.74
Scotland	1.32
Wales	25.00
London & SE	9.21
No answer	1.32

**Table 4.2 Results from questionnaire: To which colliery were you sent for training?**<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p48

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p43

<sup>18</sup> BBC-WAC, H.W. Webb, ‘Training the young miner’, Home Service, (14.3.1944)

<sup>19</sup> Questionnaire, September – November 2002

Over 55 percent of those answering the questionnaire were born in the South East, accounting for the relative high percentage shown as attending Chislet Colliery Training Centre. Others from the South East were sent to the training centre at Nuneaton.

In theory those directed were to be given a choice of the mine they wished to work at, especially if they lived near a coalmining area, however, in practice this was not always possible.

'I did phone up about Kent and they said there are no vacancies in Kent. Well I don't think they wanted men in Kent. They weren't perhaps short of colliers or miners in Kent so this is why I didn't.'<sup>20</sup>

Until the intake of conscripted Bevin Boys there had been no training facilities for optants and volunteers. Ivor H. had opted for the coalmines in 1942, before the start of the Bevin Boy scheme.

'Unlike the Bevin Boys there was nothing prepared for us in the way of clothing or training at all and when we reported at the pit head, ... we were sent down and my first day or two – these days were spent with a fitter and I just accompanied him as he went round the pit down below. ... And after a time we got the clothing we needed, boots and all the rest of it and the hard hat, although again that was missing for the first month or two and we had to just watch where we went. And eventually after about - oh I suppose a month of this I was sent to work on a parting, which is what we called the roadway, in the south east district, which extended down under the Wingham Preston marshes and there I worked on haulage.'<sup>21</sup>

Although the system had been primarily set up to accommodate ballottees, once training facilities were in place all new recruits (optants, volunteers, conscripts and conscientious objectors) were expected to attend the training centre.

Appendix TR-I shows the conditions of training as laid down by the Ministry of Labour and National Service and Appendix TR-II the training arrangements for one particular colliery. Press facilities were given at various pits on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1944 as a propaganda exercise.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Alan H., (17.7.2000)

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Ivor H., (2.10.2002)

<sup>22</sup> PRO LAB 79/36 Coalmining ballot boys: Memorandum 1943-1944

## Newspaper Coverage – The Press' View

During the Second World War newspapers were the most common way of keeping in touch with the news. A Mass-Observation survey in 1946 showed that daily newspapers were read by 87 percent and Sunday papers by 92 percent of the adult population.<sup>23</sup> Circulation figures were high (Appendix NEW-I). Readership figures include readers in libraries and those at work sharing a paper.

The Ministry of Information (MOI) had been formed at the beginning of the war in order to regulate all forms of information, including that published by the press. The press had been assured by the MOI that there would be no interference in the expression of opinion and that they would only censor material that could be shown to be of value to the enemy.<sup>24</sup> In 1940 regulations were brought in that gave sweeping powers to the Government for the control of information. Regulation 2D gave the Home Secretary the power to ban any newspaper that published material 'calculated to foment opposition to the prosecution to a successful issue of any war in which His Majesty is engaged.'<sup>25</sup> One newspaper was to fall foul of the regulation 2D. In January 1941 the *Daily Worker* was served with a ban, which was not lifted until September 1942. It was hardly surprising, as a newspaper committed to the communist cause and therefore fostering opposition to the war at a time when the Soviet Union was on Hitler's side, was not going to endear itself to the British Government. It was only when the Soviet Union was attacked by the Germans and Churchill declared his support of Stalin that the *Daily Worker* changed its agenda and was able to resume publication. However, in spite of this ban the Government was still against too much interference with the liberty of the press.<sup>26</sup> Although the *Daily Mirror* came very close to suppression, receiving an official warning, it was something that both the newspaper and the Government were keen to avoid. However, it did have the effect of putting the press on its guard for the rest of the war.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Mass-Observation, *The Press and Its Readers*, (London, 1949), p12

<sup>24</sup> I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, (London, 1979), p36

<sup>25</sup> J. Curran & J. Seaton, *Power without responsibility: the press and broadcasting in Britain*, (London, 1989 edition), p66

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p69

<sup>27</sup> P.M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind – a history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present day*, (Manchester, revised 1995), p215



During the war the press was beset by other problems too. Scandinavian countries that had previously provided the raw materials for newsprint were cut off, thus there was a supply shortage to the English papermaking mills. However, some provincial newspapers had contracts with Canadian mills to supply pulp. By 1940 it had been decided to pool all paper under an official paper control, which meant that paper was rationed. This seriously curtailed the size of the newspapers, and the editors had to give serious thought to the stories published.<sup>28</sup>

The Government saw the press as being both a morale booster to the public and as a tool for propaganda. '(T)he role of propaganda more properly being that of explaining to the public the reason for the legislation and their part in the altered situation.'<sup>29</sup> With this in mind facilities were given for the press to visit the training centres on the 17<sup>th</sup> January 1944, when the first conscripted Bevin Boys were to start their training. It was undoubtedly seen as a propaganda exercise. The media were given access to the six different training centres open by that time. In addition, some newspapers and press agencies were allowed to take photographs. It gives an ideal opportunity to compare how the various newspapers tackled the same story in wartime.

Press facilities were given for 17.1.1944. as follows:

**Midlands, Nuneaton:** *Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, News Chronicle, Star, News of the World.*

**North West, Clifton:** *Liverpool Post, Manchester Guardian, Press Associates, Exchange Telegraph, Daily Mirror.* Photos *Daily Mirror. London Calling*, a BBC publication, was also invited to report.

**North East, Doncaster:** *Daily Worker, Glasgow Herald, Evening News, Yorkshire Post, Daily Herald.* Photos *Evening News*

**North East, Pontefract:** *Times, Daily Mail, Yorkshire Post, Daily Worker.*

**North, Co. Durham, South Moor:** *Daily Sketch, Economist, British Colonial.*

**North, Co. Durham, Horden:** *Economist, Life, Associated Press,* Photos *Associated Press.*<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and their Controllers*, (London, 1947), pp153-5

<sup>29</sup> I. McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, (London, 1979), p253

<sup>30</sup> PRO LAB 79/36, Coalmining ballot boys: memoranda

Appendix NEW-II gives a summary of the articles published. The thesis looks only at the daily newspapers. *The Economist* and *News of the World* were given access but as they were only published once a week the reporting was, by its nature, different.

When reading the articles the overriding feeling was that the MOI were keen not to have any negative reports on the training centres. In general the press reported on the warm welcome to the conscripts by the officials and the landladies and the good food they were getting both at their billets and in the canteen. The Bevin Boys, although unhappy at not going into the Forces, were resigned to work in the pits and they were intent on doing a good job and making the most of it. 'Reasons had to be given for all Government actions, so the public could judge for themselves the merit of the action and their *fairness*.'<sup>31</sup>

All newspapers did have some political allegiance (see Appendix NEW-I). Many made a move to the left during the war.<sup>32</sup> For example, the *Daily Mirror* moved sharply to the left. The *Daily Herald*, a Labour paper, was critical of the Government early in the war but moderated its tone when the Labour Party joined the coalition Government.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting that the MOI allocated the press in such a way that a broad range of political persuasions should be represented at each training centre. In the following analysis it is intended to show not only how the different training centres were presented but also how different newspapers reported on the same training centre.

### Areas with training centres

#### Midlands, Nuneaton

The *Daily Telegraph* put one of their own junior reporters into the training centre to work with the Bevin Boys and see how they fared in their first week as trainees. He even travelled on the train from London with 30 conscripts from the South East to find out their views on what they expected to find on arrival. He was keen to point out that the boys came from a cross-section of society. They were met by a welfare officer, who showed them to the hostel in Coventry that was to be their home for the duration of their training. There was also mention that some of the conscripts had failed to arrive for training and would be treated as deserters if they were not to arrive

---

<sup>31</sup> McLaine, quote by Lord Taylor to author, (2.3.1976), p240

<sup>32</sup> Curran & Seaton, p75

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p68

soon. The *Daily Express*, not to be outdone by the *Daily Telegraph*, started their report one day earlier and followed one Bevin Boy as he packed before leaving home. This gave them a more personal story, especially as the reporter also travelled on the train with the conscripts but went into more detail on their conversation and banter during the journey. The report from the *News Chronicle* was far less detailed. More emphasis was placed on the inequality of wages compared with the local engineering factory girls. The *Star*, a London evening paper, had several reports filed from different journalists. The first was more concerned with the boys from the South East, who would be going to work in the Kent coalfield once they had finished their training. The boys the journalist spoke to would have preferred the Forces. The *Daily Worker* was not originally allocated to report on Nuneaton but on Doncaster and it is not known why there had been a change. The journalist interviewed several Bevin Boys. The general attitude was that they would have preferred the Forces but realised that the country needed the coal. The only grumble was about wages.

All the newspapers reporting on the Nuneaton Training Centre were London based and therefore had an interest in Bevin Boys from the South East. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Express* both used the opportunity to travel on the train from London to the Midlands with a group of conscripts, interviewing them on the way. The *Star* also specifically mentioned the Bevin Boys from the South East. Both the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Worker* noted that there was some concern by the Bevin Boys over the low wages that they were to be paid. It should be noted that in choosing the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Worker* to cover the same training centre the MOI were giving the opportunity of reporting the same material to the two extremes in the political scale.

#### North West, Clifton

The *Liverpool Daily Post* was a local newspaper and was, therefore, interested in the local boys who had been conscripted. The reporter mentioned the welcome they received at their billets from the local landladies. There was also considerable space devoted to the class issue: the type of work they had been in before conscription and in particular the fact that one Bevin Boy, John Hewetson, had been a public schoolboy. This was meant to convey to the reader that no class distinction was being made when calling up the conscripts. The report ends with details on the training. In

similar vein the *Manchester Guardian* also addressed the class issue as well as mentioning John Hewetson by name. The third newspaper to cover Clifton, the *Daily Mirror*, again mentioned John Hewetson. However the *Daily Mirror's* report is confusing, as much of the remainder of the article seems to relate to other training centres.

Two of the newspapers covering Clifton Training Centre, the *Liverpool Daily Post* and the *Manchester Guardian*, were local. The *Liverpool Daily Post* reported on the welcome given by the local landladies to the Bevin Boys. The *Manchester Guardian* chose the more negative approach of reporting on the training centres in Co. Durham and the difficulties of finding billets. All three newspapers reporting on the Clifton Training Centre wrote about the class issue. They all mentioned by name John Hewetson, a public schoolboy as did an article in *London Calling*.<sup>34</sup> It is also interesting to note that in the newsreel shown in *The World at War* John Hewetson is seen being interviewed sitting next to another boy from a working class background.<sup>35</sup> This appears to be a clear case of the MOI briefing the journalists on what they should write. It was blatant propaganda to show that, regardless of class, the Bevin Boys had been fairly balloted.

#### North East, Askern Main

The article in the *Glasgow Herald* was very factual and may have been copied to some extent from the *Yorkshire Post*. The training centres in Scotland had still not been completed and therefore the news was possibly of less interest to the readers in Glasgow. The *Evening News*, like the *Star*, was a London evening paper and was more interested in how the boys from the South East were faring. It reported that on arrival in Doncaster they had been shown to their billets, where they had been made welcome and they had spoken with praise of the food they had been given. The *Yorkshire Post*, although being given access to both North East training centres, appears to have concentrated its report on the one at Pontefract. The *Daily Herald* started its report with the human touch by telling of a Yorkshire landlady, a retired miner's wife, welcoming two Bevin Boys from London. The good food was mentioned and that the miner gave them advice about the pit. Officials and the WVS

---

<sup>34</sup> R.W. Reid, 'Bevin Boys' in *London Calling*, No. 231, (BBC, 12 – 14 March 1944), p10

<sup>35</sup> *The World at War*, Part 3 'Home Fires', Thames Television, 1974

were on hand the next day to help to kit the boys out with their equipment. The reporter interviewed the instructor at the training centre and the first lesson was mentioned. There were grumbles about pay from the boys and also a list of what they had eaten in the canteen.

Again the reports had a local flavour with the *Evening News* and the *Daily Herald*, two London based newspapers, reporting on how the Bevin Boys from the South East were faring. In both newspapers there was discussion on food, a popular topic of conversation in time of rationing.

### North East, Pontefract

The report from *The Times* was, as can be expected, very factual. The actual number of boys arriving at the training centre was mentioned as was the fact that some of them would be able to continue living at home. All the boys interviewed would have preferred the Forces but they all wanted to help with the war effort and they would do their best. The *Daily Mail* reported that ten conscripted boys had not arrived at the training centre. Regular miners had been explaining mine procedure to the conscripts. There was a report on the billets. One landlady had agreed to take in eight boys and they were from different backgrounds. The *Yorkshire Post* had something to say on how the Bevin Boys were determined to make the best of things. Again there was mention that some of the local boys would be able to live at home. Billets had been easy to find and especially those who had relatives in the Forces were quick to offer accommodation. The *Daily Worker* had sent a reporter to Nuneaton but it gave a far more detailed report from Pontefract, where, like the *Daily Express*, it had sent one of its junior reporters on the training programme to experience first hand how the Bevin Boys were coping. For this reason the report is much more detailed about the training underground and was not based only on hearsay.

*The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, appealing to the more serious public, gave a factual report. Both *The Times* and the *Yorkshire Post* reported that some of the boys would be able to continue living at home. Both also remarked on the Bevin Boys wanting to do their best. The *Yorkshire Post* and the *Daily Mail* wrote about the billets. The *Daily Worker* was the only newspaper to go into details on the actual

training procedure because they were in a position to know what was happening, having their own reporter on site.

### North, South Moor

The *Daily Sketch* was the only daily newspaper allocated to this training centre so it is not possible to make comparisons on content. The *Daily Sketch* was particularly interested in telling of the good-hearted landladies of Co. Durham, who were more like mothers to the Bevin Boys.

### North, Horden

No daily newspapers were allocated to this area.

The one thing that is apparent is the similarity of all the reports at the individual training centres. As has been mentioned before, this was particularly noticeable in the case of the public schoolboy at Clifton Training Centre. The newspapers were certainly briefed beforehand and if not exactly told what to write, suggestions were surely made. Each newspaper obviously had its own style of presenting the news but its hands were tied to some extent by the MOI. 'Once the censored news left the MOI, editors and journalists were allowed to do with it what they liked in accordance with their own house style. Their *opinions* were not censored, which gave the impression that little censorship was being imposed.'<sup>36</sup>

Both *The Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* took a very formal approach to reporting. It was their normal style to carry more news and fewer features than other daily newspapers.<sup>37</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, although appealing to the same class of readership, carried more features and photographs than *The Times*. They both had 'a reputation for unbiased reportage and solid, factual presentation of serious news ... and little direct appeal to the working class.'<sup>38</sup> The *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* had a more popular appeal. The front page of the *Daily Express* was devoted to news and there was also a 'humanity news' section,<sup>39</sup> as was the case in their coverage of the

---

<sup>36</sup> M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind – a history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present day*, (Manchester, revised 1995), p213

<sup>37</sup> PEP (Political and Economic Planning) *Report on the British Press*, (London, 1946), pp67-74

<sup>38</sup> Mass-Observation, *The Press and Its Readers*, (London, 1949), p42

<sup>39</sup> PEP

Bevin Boys. The *Daily Herald* was the voice of the Labour Party and paid special attention to political and industrial news, hence their report on the concern over pay and the interview with the training centre manager. The report from the *News Chronicle* was far less detailed than many of the others, in keeping with its radical liberal stance of giving prominence to international questions. The *Daily Mirror* was a popular pictorial tabloid that put great stress on features, sex and crime and was popular with the working class because of the regular comic strips.<sup>40</sup> The emphasis was on home rather than international and foreign news.<sup>41</sup> The *Daily Mirror* was one of only two newspapers (the other was the *Evening News*) given permission to take photographs. Associated Press had probably supplied the photographs to other newspapers. The *Daily Sketch* was also a popular pictorial that gave little space to politics. It set out to be a family newspaper.<sup>42</sup> The *Daily Worker* was communist oriented and was described by Camrose as ‘an organ of propaganda rather than news.’<sup>43</sup> Its reporting was biased to the working class but it had given interesting details of the training procedure. However, as its readership was the lowest of all the national dailies its reports were really of little significance.

The reports on the Bevin Boys’ introduction to the training centres were in part a morale boosting exercise. However, ‘one of the chief disintegrators of morale as perceived by the Home Emergency Committee was “class feeling”.’<sup>44</sup> Those newspapers that appealed to the working class were keen to show the working class doing their bit. They were also more likely to mention that the Bevin Boys were made to feel at home in their billets. On the other hand the more right wing newspapers could also show that the middle and upper classes were also affected. The ballot did not differentiate between classes.

As a postscript, during the days following the 17<sup>th</sup> January 1944 and the first articles on the training centres, there were many reports in the press on the Bevin Boys’ dissatisfaction with their wages and their threats to stop work (see Appendix NEW-II). These reports were interwoven with other information about problems that Bevin

---

<sup>40</sup> PEP

<sup>41</sup> Mass-Observation, *The Press and Its Readers*, (London, 1949), p42

<sup>42</sup> PEP

<sup>43</sup> Camrose, p76

<sup>44</sup> McLaine, p93

was trying to resolve as quickly as possible. He had managed to find a solution that was acceptable to the Bevin Boys within the week. But the whole uproar caused by the Bevin Boys must have been a grave embarrassment to the Government. It had viewed the story of the Bevin Boys starting their training as a public relations exercise.

### **The Bevin Boys' View**

#### **First impressions**

Although the press had made much of class differences between the Bevin Boys, this did not seem to be a problem for them. Life had taken a turn they had not expected and they knew they had to get on with it. The first impressions on entering a coalmine were the ones that the Bevin Boys could often recall most clearly. Bevin was keen to persuade school leavers of the merits of working in coalmining. He offered it as an alternative to going into the Forces.

In order to interest boys in mining areas in the coal industry and to bring before them the importance of the coalmining industry to the economic life of the country, arrangements should be made for lectures to be given to them at school by responsible representatives of the industry, illustrated by films so far as possible, and opportunities should be provided for them to visit at any rate the surface installations of mines in the neighbourhood of the school during their last year at school.<sup>45</sup>

Peter F. was one of the few interviewees whose school had taken advantage of the offer of a visit to a mine and who had seen first hand the workings of a pit before becoming a Bevin Boy. He visited a coalmine on a school journey. 'I can remember it as an awful experience. Terribly interesting and that you could brag about it afterwards. But at the time I didn't enjoy the fact we were crawling in all this coal, which was just like crawling about in broken glass.'<sup>46</sup>

However, for many the first experience of a mine was when they arrived at the training centre as a Bevin Boy. They have been allowed to tell their own story in the following quotes. Peter H. was apprehensive.

'I didn't know how I'd react to actually physically going down a shaft and working in mining conditions underground. And like anybody else who had

---

<sup>45</sup>PRO LAB 8/462, 'Outline of basic principles of education and training schemes' (4.3.1942)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)



never been down a pit you thought you just went down in a cage, got off at the pit bottom, walked across to a pile of coal and started shovelling ... and of course it's nothing like that at all.'<sup>47</sup>

Eric G. described his first descent into the pit.

'As the trainees filed into the cage, the service operator quickly touched up and down each individual to see if they had any matches or cigarettes on their person. Satisfied, he pulled the handle, a green light appeared, and the cage started to increase its velocity as it went down, since there was a slight swaying from side to side, but I noticed on looking at the shaft sides, that the cage was not moving much faster than an ordinary lift. Nearly everyone however reported on an unpleasant sensation of the eardrums as if they were going to bust, but this was got over by gulping. As the cage slowed up after its hundred yard decent, a sensation as if the cage was actually rising was reported on.'<sup>48</sup>

This sensation of rising was also noted by many of the Bevin Boys.

'Now the first time we went underground well, about a dozen of us were taken to the pit head and herded into the metal cage .... and we'd already been told that the shaft was 1200 feet deep and we knew that the journey from top to bottom was going to take us less than a minute. ... I was extremely apprehensive. It wasn't too bad for the first few feet, the cage gradually dropped very slowly until it got clear of the actual pithead and then whoosh! ... until about half way down the engine driver on the surface started to apply the brakes, then it was as if the ground was coming up and taking you upwards.'<sup>49</sup>

For some the worst experience was this first descent in the pit cage.

'Going down feels like being dropped and coming back up starts with a bone-jarring snatch. It is quite possible to experience a life-time of that and not get used to it.'<sup>50</sup>

'It starts slow, and then it seems to drop hard, and then it slows up again, and your feet feel as if they were coming up into your tummy, and your tummy feels as if it was coming out at the top of your head! And then you stagger out at the bottom – and it's like nothing you've ever seen before in your life.'<sup>51</sup>

'The first descent in the pit cage is one never-to-be-forgotten, for the daylight suddenly becomes darkness broken by the light of the safety lamps and there is a "bang" as the safety gate drops at the surface. Then comes the sensation that your stomach is going down slower than the rest of your body and is being left

---

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>48</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>49</sup> Peter M., (17.8.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

<sup>50</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, John Whisson, (undated manuscript)

<sup>51</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, 'Previous Experience Unnecessary: Forces Educational Broadcast, (24,1,1944)

behind, followed by the jolt as the haulier applies the brakes and the cage becomes lit with the lighting at the pit bottom as the cage comes to a stop.<sup>52</sup>

'In a trice we were gone. Into a vacuum of cold air, with a deafening rattle, at a speed which appeared uncontrollable. ... The lights at pit bottom and the sight of human faces again welcomed and reassured me that I was still of this world. With measured gulps of stale air I waited for my stomach to return to my body. At that moment I would have agreed to spend the rest of my life down there, rather than ascend and go through it all again tomorrow.'<sup>53</sup>

Into the cage and this is it. They called it the initiation drop. First trip underground for Bevin Boys. The regulation speed for lowering men in a cage is 30 feet per second – they let us drop at 70 feet per second. You just go plummeting straight down. The miner that was with us, he did warn us this is what they do and he said don't worry about it, just bend your legs and it won't feel so bad. But of course it's the pressure on the eardrums as you're going down. It's tremendous and the pit down at Oakdale in South Wales was very deep. It's almost 3000 feet down and this can cause nosebleeds as it did with one or two.<sup>54</sup>

Others were more blasé about the experience. 'Some of them hadn't even ridden in the lift in Selfridges, never alone get in this cage ... and it did appear to drop as if they'd just cut the rope... I was fortunate – I had ridden in the lift at Selfridges.'<sup>55</sup>

'Once you got used to that cage it was no problem.'<sup>56</sup> This was also the feeling of John W.

'It took only a very short while to lose the fears of 'going down'. In fact one, perhaps as one met and joined 'friends', began to enjoy the daily experience. There was one hair-raising (and feet rising) experience that befell a few of us lads. Passengers were lowered in the cage at a lowly sedate pace – around a half to a third of that for empty tubs, but, if one was late on arrival the journey down into the depths was at tub speed when one had to cling tightly to the side rails as the feet left the floor and heads played the Morse code on the roof. Of course, arrivals were adhered to on time afterwards.'<sup>57</sup>

Barry G.'s first impression was the smell.

'One of the sensations I didn't expect was the smell of a coalmine. It's a mixture of coal, which in bulk really has a strong smell, and horses urine, because the pit ponies were kept underground in stables near the bottom of the pit shaft.'<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Alan Ward. (undated)

<sup>53</sup> Geoff B., typewritten notes (undated)

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>57</sup> Letter from John W. (6.8.2002)

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Gerry G. (26.3.2002)

Some described the bottom of the pit shaft as being like the London Underground.

‘Getting out at the bottom there were lights and there was brickwork and roof. It was a little bit like the tube in London – the Underground. It also smelt a bit like the tube. It was sort of slightly stale air.’<sup>59</sup>

‘The large tunnel which faced me looked very much like a section of the London Underground still in the none finished off state.’<sup>60</sup>

Douglas C. had been a divinity student when he became a Bevin Boy optant in 1943. At this time training centres had not been opened by the Government and training was usually on the job.’

I’ll always remember my first day on the job – the towering pithead with the turning wheels, the cables, the lorries of coal and the railway wagons shunting to and fro, the rushing past of scores of men with those unusual tin plates on their caps. I found out later that the plates were to hold the lamp in position.’<sup>61</sup>

‘I was going down a coalmine for the first time in my life. I was a Bevin Boy. For the memory of that first time down will remain with me all my life. It was so different, so vastly different, to anything I have ever known before. Feeling very clumsy in my heavy pit boots - - - I had never worn boots of any description before - - - I followed my official guide into the cage. We stood for a few moments in the cage gazing at the hills in the distance, when suddenly the hills weren’t there any more. We were dropping down the shaft and all I could see by the feeble rays of my lamp were the walls of the pit shaft, dirty slimy walls, rushing past at terrific speed. My stomach was making attempts to get back to the surface, and caused me considerable discomfort in the process. Gradually however our speed began to slacken and with a gentle bump the cage came to a halt in the pit bottom. Then began a long steady walk along the narrow roadways in the backs. That is, to the back area of the pit. It was a funny sensation that first walk-in. My guide’s cap lamp - - - and how I envied him that cap lamp - - - kept bobbing in front of me like a glow-worm out for a stroll. It threw a shadow in a long patch of black mist up the whitewashed walls of the roadway. Every now and again we passed a little alcove let into the wall; these, I was told, were manholes, into which one could jump for shelter if a journey of tubs was coming along.’<sup>62</sup>

Whatever their first impressions the general attitude to work can be summed up in the words of one Bevin Boy, who made the comment to a Mass-Observation investigator.

‘I have no interests in this mining business. I shall just do it because it is a job to be done, and I have got to do it, and I can’t get out of it. I have not been used to such heavy work before, and I don’t intend to work too much now. I

---

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>60</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>61</sup> BBC-WAC, Douglas C., ‘Divinity Student Turns Miner’, Home Service, (30.8.1943)

<sup>62</sup> BBC-WAC, John R., ‘Bevin Boy’ (15.11.1945)

have been working in an office before – not heaving coal. Pen pushing is my business, and I intend that it should remain that way too.’<sup>63</sup>

These first impressions gives some idea of how the Bevin Boys were, with very little warning, thrust into a job that demanded hard work and stamina. Many were, at the beginning, physically not fit enough and certainly not used to the work. These first impressions, told by the Bevin Boys in their own words, show that for many the first descent in the pit was something never to be forgotten. Interestingly, the descriptions given by the Bevin Boys who were looking back over nearly 60 years are very similar to the reports by Eric G., the Mass-Observation investigator who was reporting whilst still in the pits.

#### Training for work in the pit

The training centre was a new and innovative idea, which Bevin hoped would have far reaching effects.<sup>64</sup> He must have been pleased that the first block of conscripts finished their training ‘without one serious accident, which, considering that the trainees are all unaccustomed to the strange ways of tubs below ground, is highly satisfactory.’<sup>65</sup>

Each man was given a travel document and instructions on how to reach their destination. On arrival they were first kitted out with the tools of their trade. ‘We were given free safety helmets but had to pay for clothing and lodgings. I had no clothing that was remotely suitable or durable, but was given an old Home Guard greatcoat and battle dress, which solved my problem.’<sup>66</sup>

‘After an hour or so of kicking my heels and taking in the sounds and sights of a busy colliery at work - the head gear winding wheels continually spinning, I was taken to a building to be fitted out with my uniform for the next nearly five years. Not the naval uniform I craved - merely a black Bakelite helmet a snap tin and a shiny pair of steel toecap boots of which I was very proud. That was it - I was a miner.’<sup>67</sup>

‘Now the first thing that they had to do was to kit us out with equipment. ... we were given a helmet, a pair of steel capped boots for which we had to surrender six clothing coupons and you were given a pair of overalls and some

---

<sup>63</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Interests, (26.5.1944)

<sup>64</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (29.6.1944), col. 938

<sup>65</sup> *The Times*, (14.2.1944)

<sup>66</sup> Fred C., draft for an article in Farnham Herald

<sup>67</sup> Norman B., *My Story*, account of pit life e-mailed to Ann Kneif, September 2002

PT kit – a vest and some shorts and pumps as they were called in those days, plimsolls for PT.<sup>68</sup>

The Government had stipulated the nature of the training and the amount of time to be spent on each aspect. Training was set at a 44-hour week with 25 percent physical training, 25 percent classroom training, 20 percent surface work and 30 percent underground training,<sup>69</sup> although *The Times* reported that the practical training underground was more like 45 percent.<sup>70</sup> This, no doubt varied according to the management of the individual training centres.

Eric G. gave a timetable for a typical week at the Swinton Training Centre.

'Monday: trainee arrives. Given instructions, fills in forms, sent to billet.  
Tuesday: reports at 8, is shown round till 12. Then lecture in the afternoon.  
Wednesday: 8 - 9.30 lecture.  
                  9.30 - 11.00 first aid.  
                  11 - 12 lunch. 12 - 3.45 underground.  
Thursday: 8 - 11.45 on surface at pit.  
                  12 - 1 lunch.  
                  1 - 2.30 lecture.  
                  2.30 - 4 PT.  
Friday: 8 - 9.30 PT.  
                  9.30 - 11 lecture.  
                  11 - 12 meal.  
                  12 - 3.45 underground.  
Saturday: 8 - 11.45 on surface at pit.  
                  Afternoon off.  
Sunday: All day off.'<sup>71</sup>

The training appears to have been varied as can be seen from Table 4.3. Those answering the questionnaire did however admit to only having a rough idea of what training was given after so many years.

---

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>69</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p44

<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, (8.1.1944)

<sup>71</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, May 1944

What was the nature of the training given?	
Nature of training	%
Basic	30.26
Lectures	47.37
PT / physical training	32.89
Underground	51.32
Safety	14.47
Use of equipment	7.89
Don't Remember	0.00
None	2.63
No answer	1.32

**Table 4.3 Results from questionnaire: What was the nature of training given?**

Some thought it a waste of time, whilst others said the preparation was nothing like the work in a real mine.<sup>72</sup> General remarks on the training were often negative. 'It [the training] was very basic. They took us underground. We had sort of lectures. The idea for the Bevin Boys was that we would become tub pushers and it didn't require a lot of training frankly.'<sup>73</sup> 'Training was a joke really ... four hours underground ... four hours on the top, which more often than not consisted of a walk round the village. A three mile walk in your pit boots.'<sup>74</sup> 'The notion that it was a place where we could play learning to coal mine was a figment of imagination.'<sup>75</sup>

'I can remember feeling that they hadn't really thought through properly the way in which they should train people who'd had no experience whatever, either in the mine or through family connections. I mean it was all so theoretical to the point that it was several weeks after I had finally been allocated to the Sneyd Colliery and started working underground that I realized that I hadn't got the first idea how to use a shovel, which one would have thought anybody who was planning a training course would have put to be high on the agenda.'<sup>76</sup>

However, some training centres had thought of including this activity in their programme and the following is a good example of how different centres reacted to the Government guidelines. The training should have been standard throughout the country but the reality was somewhat different.

<sup>72</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Tony C. (4.5.2000)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ken P. (11.7.2000)

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Peter F. (6.6.2000)

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

‘The main thing that I remember was being taught how to use a shovel. There was a large heap of coal dust yards and yards long. In the morning we would move it all over. In the afternoon the second shift would move it back. But when you saw the town boys using a shovel you know why it was necessary.’<sup>77</sup>

Not all comments were negative. Peter H. was more pragmatic, ‘they taught us the theory of mining, which I found quite fascinating. And we spent quite a lot of time underground, actually seeing in practice what we were being taught in theory and learning to do simple jobs underground.’<sup>78</sup> ‘And the training was darn good. That’s straight and honest and I think all the boys will agree about it.’<sup>79</sup>

Physical training appears to have varied in intensity and the amount done. It had been designed as a way of allowing the trainees to develop strength and exercise the muscles they would need for underground work.

‘A quarter of the time would be spent in actually doing physical training. Now physical training would be given by ex-Army, Navy or Air Force PT instructors. It was very important to get us into a fit condition. One must realize that we’d all come from all walks of life. In my case a typical suburban middle class community. We’d never got our hands dirty in our lives so we had to be licked into some sort of shape.’<sup>80</sup>

‘Trainees have to do one-and-a-half hours of PT a day (mainly football) and this on a fine day is held on the football ground while, if wet, at the drill hall 200 yards up the road.’<sup>81</sup> There were also other physical activities such as stacking bricks or shovelling dirt on the slagheap.<sup>82</sup> The instructors were not always popular.

‘I found myself being singled out by the RAF instructors, who had been seconded from their normal duties with the RAF, for special attention in the gym exercises. Whether they thought we were a bunch of conscientious objectors or service dodgers I don’t know, but they took great delight in showing us their superior PT skills and whenever possible they would try to humiliate some poor sod who was not able to keep up.’<sup>83</sup>

‘This PT that we had the other day I reckon that we get much too much at one go. An hour-and-a-half is too long for one session - half that would do easily.’

---

<sup>77</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Peter H. (20.4.2000)

<sup>79</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, ‘Previous Experience Unnecessary’, Forces Educational Broadcast, (24.1.1946)

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Warwick T. (18.4.2002)

<sup>81</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>82</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, John W., ‘Memories of a Bevin Boy 1944-1947’

<sup>83</sup> Roland T., *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript (undated)

As to the instructors who take us, well they are a very rough and ready crowd aren't they. According to my friend, they used to tour with one of the local fairs as professional toughs before the war. They look that sort.'<sup>84</sup>

Norman B. arrived at the Pontefract Training Centre soon after it was opened. 'The days were interspersed with physical training - grim memories of bitter March days on Pontefract Racecourse made time spent below ground seem pleasant by comparison.'<sup>85</sup> His experience seems at odds with the report in *The Times* on the same training centre.

'One outstanding way in which this keenness showed through cheerfully was in vigorous physical training, stripped to the waist, in the open air. This so far north in January is Spartan fare ... the instructor, an old Army man, soon had his squad comfortably warm and enjoying every minute of their exercise.'<sup>86</sup>

Classroom training was mainly in the form of lectures on the theory of mining and the practical aspects of work both on the surface and underground.

'In the stadium buildings (the training centre is at a big football ground) there are four classrooms (one for each week's progress) where theoretical teaching is given by mining officials for one-and-a-half hours a day.'<sup>87</sup>

'They gave us cinema shows of all the different parts of the pit and explained what it was all about and what must be done in each job and what mustn't be done and so on, and then when we went down ourselves it was easy to recognise what was happening.'<sup>88</sup>

The lectures were given by experienced miners with special qualifications who had themselves been given extra training. 'The atmosphere was admirable – informal and friendly but with the trainees showing a keen interest in the lecturer's words.'<sup>89</sup> This might not have always been the case and there were complaints that some of the instructors had not even qualified for the Deputy's Certificate.<sup>90</sup>

'The training course was a bit of a laugh. They told us a bit about geology. It was all very didactic teaching. No cooperative drawing out of people to find out how little they knew, how much they knew, anything of that sort but we just had to learn a little bit about strata and the geology sense and at the end of

---

<sup>84</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>85</sup> Norman B.

<sup>86</sup> *The Times*, (8.1.1944)

<sup>87</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Report on Swinton Training Centre, (May 1944)

<sup>88</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, 'Previous Experience Unnecessary: Forces Educational Broadcast, (24.1.1946)

<sup>89</sup> *The Times*, (8.1.1944)

<sup>90</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Miner's Opinions, (16.9.1944)



the four weeks – well we had one or two visits to mines but at the end of that time we were allocated to our particular pits.’<sup>91</sup>

An awareness of the safety measures was high on the agenda for training.

‘There’s a Safety Officer – he gives you a lecture about safety in the mine, and then they give you pamphlets about it – no matches or cigarettes, keep clear of the ropes, don’t use the tub way, use the travelling way, and a whole lot more.’<sup>92</sup>

Although safety rules were given in ‘Conditions of Training at Ministry of Labour and National Service Coalmining Training Centres’ (Appendix TR-I), some centres issued their own book on safety. Figure 4.1 is an example from the rulebook issued by the North Staffordshire Technical College, which included photographs to demonstrate the various points of safety.

**Protect your head with a Safety Helmet**



*Photograph—W. L. Darban*

The stone shown in the photograph weighed 7 lbs. ; It fell 4 feet before striking the hat. The wearer was uninjured, but if he had not been wearing a hard hat his skull would probably have been fractured.

**Figure 4.1 A page from a safety book issued to trainees<sup>93</sup>**

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>92</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, (24,1,1946)

<sup>93</sup> Leaflet giving advice to boys starting work at North Staffordshire Collieries, kindly supplied by Geoff B.

Underground work was only undertaken once the trainee had been instructed in safety procedures.

‘There were about forty other lads in the same intake and we were given a detailed rundown of the sort of work we would be required to undertake underground - two days later we were issued with a hand lamp and were ready for the big drop. Down the shaft for the first time, I don't remember any feelings of apprehension and as far as I can remember I quite enjoyed the experience. The shaft we were in was not used for production and was given over to us Bevin Boys for training purposes only.’<sup>94</sup>

‘(The first day) we stayed down for about four hours and we soon began to get used to it. We walked about three quarters of a mile. We saw the tubs on the endless ropes, and various machinery, and the ponies – I never thought then that I'd be driving one of them – but they didn't take us right to the face that first day. And then we started the regular routine of training. ... Underground for four hours every other day.’<sup>95</sup>

‘Instruction underground was basic – laying rails, how to handle coal tubs and deal with derailments, timbering and the use of pit ponies.’<sup>96</sup>

There was some concern on the merits of using qualified miners, who could be working on coal production, to teach uninterested trainees.<sup>97</sup> However, the official figures show that within a few weeks over 4,000 new recruits were employed in the mines (see Table 4.4).

---

<sup>94</sup> Norman B.

<sup>95</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, (24,1,1946)

<sup>96</sup> Fred C., draft for an article in *Farnham Herald* (undated)

<sup>97</sup> M. Gowing, ‘The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War’, in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2 (January – April 1972), p157

	No. of men (including volunteers) who have entered Coalmining Training Centres	No. of men now in training	No. of men already transferred to employment
Midlands	1,190	468	712
North Midlands	1,143	557	577
North Eastern	2,475	1,236	1,232
North Western	1,000	377	618
Northern	2,057	1,045	1,001
Scotland	81	81	-
Wales	661	385	263
London & S. Eastern	119	44	73
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,726</b>	<b>4,193</b>	<b>4,476</b>

**Table 4.4 Coalmining Training: Position on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1944<sup>98</sup>**

The official figures also show that very few trainees entered the industry in Scotland and Wales at the beginning of the training scheme. By the beginning of 1945 arrangements with Chislet Colliery in Kent had been terminated and the centre closed. It was the least used of the training centres with only about 1.1 percent of the total recruits training there (see Table 4.5).

	No. of men completing training by 22.1.1945
Midlands	5,138
North Midlands	5,439
North Eastern	6,936
North Western	3,328
Northern	7,438
Scotland	3,091
Wales	4,457
London & S. Eastern	394
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36,221</b>

**Table 4.5 Coalmining Training: Number completing training by 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1945<sup>99</sup>**

<sup>98</sup> Hansard, Vol. 398, (30.3.1944), cols 1569-70

<sup>99</sup> Hansard, Vol. 408, (13.2.1945), col. 41

About half the trainees were ballotees. By May 1945, when the ballot scheme was abandoned, the total number of trainees since the beginning of 1944 had risen to approximately 43,500.<sup>100</sup>

As far as the majority of Bevin Boys were concerned the main problem was that they did not like the job and did not intend staying in the industry any longer than necessary. Even the optants often saw it as the lesser of two evils. 'Practically none of the trainees like the job of mining. Some were conscripted, many of the older ones volunteered to avoid going into the army.'<sup>101</sup>

Eric G., writing at the time he was a trainee, has left a detailed report of the first day he went down a mine. It is a fascinating description of his thoughts and experiences. In his conclusion he writes:

During the past fortnight the present trainees have been taught both by a lecture and by practical experience a lot about the mines and the mining industry. All types and classes are represented from university students and refugees to labourers and engineers ... From opinions expressed and attitudes shown the investigator feels certain, that as with the first week, about 28 out of the 30 pupils dislike the job, and hate the idea of going and working underground ... but one fact in the whole affair is clear, and countless opinions have shown this to be true, that the majority of trainees are not working in the mines because they want to, but because they have to.<sup>102</sup>

It was perhaps for this reason more than any other that no amount of training would ever encourage the majority of Bevin Boys to remain in the pits any longer than necessary.

Proper training was something new in the mines. Previously colliers had learnt on the job. The Bevin Boy scheme at least started a trend, which was continued after mine conscription had been abolished. It also paved the way for many other specialised courses. During 1944 courses were offered on the use and maintenance of coal cutting and power loading machines, an intensive 26-week course on electrical and mechanical engineering and various one-week courses on the correct care of

---

<sup>100</sup> Hansard, Vo. 410, (8.5.1945), col. 1858

<sup>101</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further report on the opinions and views expressed at Swinton Training Centre, (1.6.1944)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

machines.<sup>103</sup> Many of those taking advantage of this higher-grade training were those miners released from haulage work by the Bevin Boys.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to this the Government wanted to encourage the trainees, especially the Bevin Boys, to continue with further education and were prepared to make arrangements for this. Some did make use of this opportunity. Derrick L. went to evening classes and day-release college and was able to obtain mining management certificates. He stayed in the industry and retired as an assistant area ventilation engineer. George L. and Robert A. also stayed in mining, both becoming mining engineers.<sup>105</sup> John B. was offered a place on a 'Directed Practical Training' scheme. He eventually became a Fellow of the Institute of Mining Engineers and ended his career as general manager at Harworth Colliery in Northamptonshire.<sup>106</sup> They were, however, exceptions and the norm was quite different.

'The almost complete lack of interest among the young men is ... difficult to understand. They reach the centres in a somewhat bewildered state of mind, in which, in the case of ballotees, a feeling of resentment is probably uppermost, and at once embark on a strenuous period of training. In addition to the arduous nature of the underground training and the physical training programme, they are called upon to pay close concentration at lectures on an industry in which many of them have little or no real interest.'<sup>107</sup>

Once Stage A training had been completed the Bevin Boys were sent to the mine where they were expected to work for the rest of their service. This was often at a different pit to the initial training, although there were ways around this. Having finishes training at Chislet, Peter M. did not relish the upheaval of moving to another mine. He quickly joined evening classes in technical drawing. 'If one was doing education in the area one would be allowed to stay at Chislet.'<sup>108</sup>

Training programmes for directed workers to other industries in wartime had varied from one business to another. Many learnt on the job, much as the miners had done in the past (see 'mobilisation of manpower'). However, the Bevin Boy scheme

---

<sup>103</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p45

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p49

<sup>105</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>106</sup> Interview with John B., (18.9.2002)

<sup>107</sup> PRO LAB 19/113 'Educational and recreational needs of young persons in the coalmining industry', internal letter from V. Goddard, Ministry of Labour and National Service to W. Taylor

<sup>108</sup> Peter M., (17.8.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

standardised training in the mining industry. This would have an effect on training in many post-war industries.

The unions saw that training was helpful to the coalmining industry and was vital if young men who had no connection to the industry were to become aware of the hazards of pit life. The unions wanted youths trained properly 'in the various phases of mining operations.' With nationalisation on the agenda they wanted the provision for further training if a miner wanted to work his way up to become a technician.<sup>109</sup>

The majority of Bevin Boys were not from mining areas. They were the first young men sent to the pit with no prior knowledge of how to deal with the work. It was apparent that the training they had been given helped in some way in their acclimatisation to the work and their understanding of the health and safety issues. The Coal Board was farsighted enough to see that in future miners would have to come from the whole country and not just mining areas. They could no longer rely on the sons of miners following in their fathers' footsteps. There was an appeal for miners after the war when the labour force became more mobile. The coal industry needed to cope with modern changes. These new miners would be given the same kind of training as had been available to the Bevin Boys.

At the beginning of 1946 the National Union of Mineworkers prepared a 12-point plan for the encouragement of recruits into the coalmining industry. High on the agenda was:

'Adequate and careful training of youth; a clearly defined scheme of promotion; and provision for further training where workers desire to enter for a colliery technician's career'<sup>110</sup>

The campaign for new miners was fought on the promise of proper training. It meant that the industry could be modernised with the knowledge that the workers would be able to adapt to new technology.

---

<sup>109</sup> A. Horner, 'Nationalisation of the Coal Industry' in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 28, (February 1946), p43

<sup>110</sup> *The Times*, (11.1.1946)

## Chapter 5

### Work in the Mines

Mining work has always been hard work. Other European countries followed America's example of mechanisation in the mines during the inter-war period. This was not the case in Britain. The Reid Report showed that, among other problems, many pits had a poor underground layout and an inefficient haulage system, which was still not mechanised. The industry remained dependent on hard manual labour.<sup>1</sup> The most difficult work was on the coalface, followed by haulage work, maintenance and surface work. Eric G. gives an idea of the hierarchy within the mine.

'The colliers who are the men who cut the coal, draw for it and bore it, have a certain yardage to cover in a shift generally six yards wide, 3 ft-high, 2 yards deep, and once they have finished they may go home for the day. These men are the highest paid down the pit... Usually these men are able to finish soon after 1 o'clock but sometimes they may be forced to wait till three, four or five if their coal cannot come off successfully. Relying upon the work of these men are the haulage people who operate the conveyor belts, the moving ropes, and the tubs on the railings. They naturally have to wait until the coal is all got off, but if it has all been sent up to the pit top before two, they still have to wait all that time until they can go home. These men who were recruited mainly from Boys (Bevin and volunteers etc) only get the minimum wage ... The other people employed down the pit, also get the minimum wage - but all have to wait for 2 o'clock. Others are the repairmen, road repairer, brickies, electricians, salvage and the such like.) In the investigator's opinion it is these last who have the most interesting less tedious work. The colliers although being highly paid, have plenty of hard work to do, and are not working in the best of, nor the safest of, conditions. The haulage men, who were generally considered the worst off, although overtime is of course paid, have heavy work to do which is on the whole very monotonous - for instance such jobs as merely pushing empty wagons from one place to another all day.'<sup>2</sup>

After the initial Stage A training the Bevin Boys were allocated to a colliery. The first few weeks of work, Stage B, was carried out under the auspices of an experienced miner. It was necessary to work underground for at least four months before being transferred to the coalface,<sup>3</sup> although most of the Bevin Boys were left to carry out more menial tasks. By 1945 less than 15 percent of the Bevin Boys were employed on the coalface. The remainder were engaged on other underground work such as

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913-1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p616

<sup>2</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (1.8.1944)

<sup>3</sup> *Tuesday Express* (local Kent paper), (8.6.1943)

haulage, maintenance and controlling the movement of underground transport.<sup>4</sup> ‘You were just there for the jobs no-one wanted really.’<sup>5</sup> Skilled labour was scarce in all war industries and had to be sent to where it was needed. Proficient workers could be released for skilled work by using dilutees for the more menial tasks.

Table 5.1 shows the number of Bevin Boys employed in each area and the number of regular miners upgraded as a result.

	Total no. of trainees directed to pits			No. of Bevin Boys employed at coal face	No. of regular workers upgraded to coal face as result of ‘Bevin Scheme’
	Ballotees	Others	Total		
Northumberland Cumberland	1,165	674	1,839	130	719
Durham	4,115	2,663	6,778	611	2,303
Lancs, Cheshire, North Wales	1,302	2,560	3,862	290	1,501
Yorkshire	5,027	4,959	9,986	460	2,387
Notts, Derby, Leicestershire	2,164	3,161	5,325	857	1,996
Staffs, Warwick, Cannock Chase, Shropshire	2,310	3,058	5,368	766	1,646
S. Wales*, Forest of Dean, Bristol, Somerset	2,586	2,315	4,901	2,895	Not available
Scotland	1,305	1,768	3,073	398	456
Kent	260	172	432	13	360
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20,234</b>	<b>21,330</b>	<b>41,564</b>	<b>6,420</b>	<b>11,368</b>

\*Arrangements in South Wales Coalfield provide that trainees may take up employment at the coalface on entry

**Table 5.1 No. directed to the pits, employed at coal face and regulars upgraded<sup>6</sup>**

The Government’s aim was to upgrade men already working on haulage to more experienced jobs.

‘(T)his labour ... will be aimed at securing the maximum amount of up-  
grading in the shortest possible time. They [Bevin Boys] may replace the men

<sup>4</sup> Hansard, Vol. 410, (8.5.1945), col. 1858

<sup>5</sup> Interview with George R. (9.5.2001)

<sup>6</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 – 1945*, E.V. Newbegin, October 1946, p47-48





The table shows that South Wales had the highest proportion of Bevin Boys working on the coalface, whilst the majority in other areas were working on haulage.

### Haulage

The majority of the former Bevin Boys interviewed started on haulage, although some went on to do other jobs later. Peter H. described it as a bit like playing trains.<sup>12</sup>

Others described the work they did.

‘Disconnecting full tubs, pushing them or guiding them into the empty cages at the shaft bottom and sort of locking them in and then taking the empty tubs from the cages alongside the shaft and collecting them up and sending them off inbyes it was called, to the coal face. That is basically what I was engaged on.’<sup>13</sup>

‘I worked on haulage. The arrangement in Chislet was the miners dug out the coal, put it on a conveyor belt along the face and it then travelled to the parting where at the tip end, as we called it, it dropped into the tubs. And the tubs were made up into journeys of about 30 or 35 tubs in length. Each tub would contain about ¾ton of coal and of course it had to be packed in well so that none of it spilt on the partings that went out to the pit bottom.’<sup>14</sup>

Peter M. described how the rope haulage system at Chislet worked.

‘Chislet Colliery was run on what was known as a rope haulage system. There was no locomotive pulling trains or tubs from pit bottom to coalface. There were stationary engines consisting of two big drums of steel rope. One played out rope on one drum and drew it on the other and by an ingenious system of pulleys the train moved along the rails unseen by the engine driver, whose actions were controlled by a system of bell signals run from wires going along the length of the tunnels.’<sup>15</sup>

The work on haulage could be boring. One of the jobs was to sit in pitch-blackness, except for the headlamp, for a whole shift, ready to stop the rope if the tubs came off the rails.

‘We just had to take books in. That was all you could do. The amount of actual work I did was maybe half an hour and I got through dozens of books ... They got very black but we were swapping books around ... they never came up again. They stayed there until you could no longer read them.’<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Ivor H., (2.10.2000)

<sup>15</sup> Peter M., (17.8.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

Norman B. found a way to get out of a job that he found both boring and unpleasant.

'My first job was the exalted task of chalking a number on each tub as it was being filled from the belt under the loader head. As this seam produced small coal for Ferrybridge Power Station you can imagine the dust that was produced, five minutes of this and I was completely black. My shiny black helmet and bright steel toecaps forever tarnished, I was eating coal -- no masks, it was impossible to avoid it, no point in complaining. ...After two weeks of this I decided on a deliberate strategy to put an end to this task --- we were producing around 380 -400 tubs of coal each shift and I would start off at T1, T2 etc. Get to about T50 and then go back to T48 missing a few numbers out every so often. When these tubs reached the surface they first went over the weighbridge and were recorded by the weighman - it was not long after that I was relieved from this post. Never was any good at figures --- Well that was my excuse!'<sup>17</sup>

There were many other unpleasant aspects to the job.

'But a number of datalers as they were called, with the boys they were responsible for, would simply wait at pit bottom, crouching on your haunches, as most miners do, waiting for the deputy or the overman to tell you what your job was that day. And it was a bit like a slave market. You sat there looking up, wondering if, well there was almost no doubt that you would get a job, because everybody had work to do, but what kind of job? And sometimes you got a reasonable job and sometimes you got a terrible one. A terrible one would be one where you probably had to walk three or four miles from pit bottom until you even got to your place of work, by which time, as you go further and further into the pit, the air becomes more and more foul and rancid, because it circulates and the further it has to go the less oxygen there is in it.'<sup>18</sup>

Alan H. found the manual work to be a problem. 'You had to use your hands. We weren't built for it but we did it.'<sup>19</sup> This was the main complaint. The majority of Bevin Boys were simply not physically fit enough for hard manual labour. A typical comment was:

'I have never been used to such work before. I am not suited to it -- I don't think I am really strong enough to make a good miner. I often have to stand a four-hour stretch on my job, which I maintain most of these miners couldn't do. There's such a world of difference in the types.'<sup>20</sup>

Gerry G. also found the work hard.

'Coalmining is quite a skilled industry. You are not only shovelling coal but you have to be something of a carpenter, something of a builder. All sorts of skills are needed to be a coalminer and we had none of them. Nor of course

---

<sup>17</sup> Norman B. *My Story*, account of pit life e-mailed to Ann Kneif, September 2002

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Alan H., (17.7.2000)

<sup>20</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (18.5.1944)

did we have the muscles. We were really quite weaklings compared with the miners themselves.’<sup>21</sup>

‘Certainly in the early days before our muscles got attuned we couldn’t produce the output that the miners produced.’<sup>22</sup> Some, like Peter H, were content to stay on haulage. ‘I didn’t fancy crawling through narrow coal faces.’<sup>23</sup>

‘I have heard how we are not going to be allowed on the coalface for 4 months. A bloody good thing I say. I don’t want to go on no coalface. They may earn the money, but by God the poor blokes have to work for it. No thank you. I would much rather have an easy job tipping or something like that.’<sup>24</sup>

There were Bevin Boys who saw their limitations and felt that they were just not up to work on the coalface. When asked why he should not become a real miner, that is a coalface worker, John P. replied:

‘In my opinion you’ve got to be born to the job to be a cutter. You’ve got to have a pit sense as keen as a pony. You’ve got to know every creak and crack and rumble you hear and what it means. You see Bevin Boys, as I see it, are to do the other jobs in the pit and to release the real miners to work on the face.’<sup>25</sup>

Some of the Bevin Boys with special qualifications were moved on to other work.

‘I myself, perhaps because of previous maintenance experience as a fitter in a factory, served most of my time as a pump minder in the lowest point of the mine, where considerable time had to be spent with the face below the black and evil waters clearing the filters.’<sup>26</sup>

After six months on haulage Tony C. was transferred to a job deemed more suitable to his expertise.

‘I was training to be a quantity surveyor. They didn’t know what a quantity surveyor was but they read the word surveyor and thought well, we can perhaps use him. So I became what was called a linesman.’<sup>27</sup> A linesman’s job was to paint a line in the middle of the tunnel roof and this had to be accurate. ‘I had to put two lines on to stop them going too far into the pillar that was being left.’<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>24</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Nottingham – Bevin Boy view on pit work, (29.6.44)

<sup>25</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, ‘Previous Experience Unnecessary’, Forces Educational Broadcast, (24,1,1946)

<sup>26</sup> Letter from John W. to Ann Kneif (6.8.2002)

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## The coalface

Others were keen to try work on the coalface.

‘At Gedling and many other mines all the Bevin Boys are taken on with a view to being put on the coalface. Any other job, such as haulage, which they might do early on, is considered only as part of their training. Nearly all the Bevin Boys and men from the services have to go on - and it is said that 40 per cent of the coalface workers are made up of them. But here (Clifton) they keep you off it, they don't want you to go on the coalface, they say you couldn't stand up to it which is probably true, but I want to have a go at the coalface, so I am going to ask for a transfer to Gedling - especially since they want me to go on the afternoon shift here.’<sup>29</sup>

Jack M. thought he was not doing his bit to coal production on haulage work and asked to go onto something else.

‘They sort of treated us as more of a nuisance than extra manpower. So much so that after the first week or two, being given low grade jobs, which weren't contributing very much to coal production, I went to the manager and asked him for more meaningful type of work and so he sent me on the coalface which was difficult for me not only because of the hard work, which I didn't mind doing but because I always had trouble with my eyesight and had to wear spectacles and even with special splinter proof spectacles it was difficult on the coal face because it was so warm and one would sweat and my glasses would get covered with coal dust and I'd run out of pieces of clean rag to keep my glasses clear and see what I was doing by the first hour in a seven and a half hour shift. So I was then moved onto quite different work. More on the night shift, which involved repairing or restoring some of the underground roads that had been reduced in height from a normal 8 foot to about 2 foot 6 and we had to widen them up again and put in new very heavy roll steed girders and that was very tough going.’<sup>30</sup>

Work on the coalface seems generally to have been unpopular in spite of much higher wages. It required a great deal of stamina and often meant working in cramped and uncongenial conditions. Peter F. started in haulage but then progressed to the coalface as a coal cutter. ‘The task of coal cutting was not one that many wanted to do. It was blinking hard work but it was also dangerous.’<sup>31</sup>

‘Eventually I graduated to the coalface and there found new problems. The claustrophobia, the heat, the dust and the physical effort of loading coal on the conveyor pans and manhandling steel supports and machinery.’<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (December 1944)

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>32</sup> G. Baker, ‘Miner's Memories’ in *Staffordshire County Council Education Department – Local History Source, Book G32, (1987)*



The local people tended to think that the Bevin Boys were better off in the mines than fighting in the war.

‘When you come to think about it you realise that you are much better off in the mines than if you were out fighting. It must be terrible fighting out in the jungle of Burma. You couldn't get home just when you please like you do now, and actually comparatively speaking you are quite well off with plenty of money in your pocket.’<sup>33</sup>

The attitude of the regular miners was to try and dissuade the Bevin Boys from working on the coalface as they felt they were not capable or suited to such work.

‘You don't want to go on the coalface until you are sent on. You want to keep off it as long as you can, forever if you can, it is no job. I have been there since I was 16 and a half, and I know. It has completely bugged me for life.’<sup>34</sup>

‘I was talking to some of the old miners today and I said that really the mines weren't as bad as what I had imagined. One old collier got mad at that, said they were fucking bad, and that I would soon change my tune when I had been down a bit longer, and had to work on the coalface. They think that you are not a hero until you have got your eight yards of coal off. That is as maybe.’<sup>35</sup>

‘The coalface is no good to anyone. It takes the piss out of you. My back is a mass of scars and bruises.’<sup>36</sup>

Gerry G. was working in a Welsh pit, where it was the exception that the Bevin Boys started work immediately on the coalface (see chapter 4, ‘training’).

‘I found the most horrifying was the 2 foot 6 tunnel. This is where I developed claustrophobia. It was so narrow that I couldn't lie on my side to shovel coal; I had to lie on my back and shovel the coal across my stomach. That's how narrow it was.’<sup>37</sup>

As Thompson points out there is a different emphasis over time and as events are reorganised in the mind they can be distorted.<sup>38</sup> Although the interviewees, looking back on their time in the mines, generally did not complain about the work, comments made at the time show more dissatisfaction. ‘I have never liked the work and I never shall. I shall be glad when I can get my release and get back to my old way of life

---

<sup>33</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (21.10.44)

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, (3.11.44)

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, (24.10.44)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, (1.8.1944)

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>38</sup> P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Oxford, 1988), p112

again.’<sup>39</sup> Eric G., writing whilst still a Bevin Boy, mentioned speaking to about 50 colliers and Bevin Boys and claimed to have not met one man who liked the job.<sup>40</sup> Feelings are best summed up with the following comment from a Bevin Boy.

‘All of these old colliers talk about leaving the mines after the war. But it is only talk. They have been born and bred in the pit - it is their only occupation. They would be out of place elsewhere - they would not be fitted for anything else. It is different for us chaps who have had a better past.’<sup>41</sup>

### Pit ponies

Many of the Bevin Boys mentioned their work with pit ponies. Ponies were a tradition in the coalmines. They had always been used to help in the heavy haulage work. By February 1945 the total number of ponies used in British coalmines was 24,530. However, some areas relied on them more heavily than others, much depending on the suitability of the conditions in the pits.

‘The advantage was that they could get to various parts of the mines, particularly where the escape routes had to be dug out, without the need to import expensive machinery.’<sup>42</sup>

The majority of ponies were to be found in Durham and South Wales, whereas there were none in Kent and very few in the Scottish coalfields.<sup>43</sup> They were kept in stables near the shaft bottom and were usually only taken to the surface for one week in the year, when the mine was closed for the annual holiday. ‘Some were brought fresh from the fields and you’ve got to break them in down the pit. They’re a bit flirty at first, and you’ve got to get them used to the sounds and the feel of a tub behind them.’<sup>44</sup> Ken P. worked with the ponies. ‘After about a week they asked me to get a pit pony and become a pony driver and I’d never handled a pony.’<sup>45</sup> Alan W. also worked with a pony. ‘He used to help me out with the timber you see. I must say he didn’t help me. He did it.’<sup>46</sup> ‘There were some that seemed to have a devilish mind of

---

<sup>39</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines survey, (29.5.1946)

<sup>40</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (1.8.1944)

<sup>41</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (1.8.1944)

<sup>42</sup> Peter M., (17.8.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

<sup>43</sup> Hansard, Vol. 408, (27.2.1945), col. 1245

<sup>44</sup> BBC-WAC, John Pierce, ‘Previous Experience Unnecessary’, Forces Educational Broadcast, (24.1.1946)

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

their own. If they could possibly make the tub come off on those curves they would.<sup>47</sup>

‘One of the main jokes and this probably took place at many of the Welsh collieries, was to get the Bevin Boys to drive the pony. A pit pony could haul up to two loaded tubs so they’d put us on with the pony to get him to move off. He couldn’t. Pony didn’t respond. It stood there stubbornly. You’d pull it, you’d push it. No - and the miners would be laughing their heads off wouldn’t they. The reason is of course the ponies could only understand Welsh.’<sup>48</sup>

Various Acts had been passed that were designed to ensure the well being of the ponies. The 1911 Protection of Animal Bill set a maximum fine of £25 for anyone who was found to ‘cruelly beat, kick, ill-use, over-ride, over-drive, over-load, torture, infuriate, tease or terrify any domestic or captive animal.’<sup>49</sup> Further legislation in 1934, specifically designed to protect pit ponies, stipulated that ‘no horse shall be worked for more than 8 hours in any 24 hours except in cases of emergency.’<sup>50</sup> In spite of these Acts the ponies were sometimes badly treated.

‘The (handler) in our particular gate wasn’t in my opinion a very kindly person. He had to get his tubs in and out and if of course that meant beating the pony then he would do it.’<sup>51</sup>

‘The miners didn’t treat the pit ponies at all well. They bullied them and hit them very sharply on the nose and the pit ponies were ... snappy and would kick or bite if they could. So the myth of the miner loving his pit ponies certainly didn’t apply in the pit where I was.’<sup>52</sup>

‘(On seeing a pit pony been viciously struck across the kidneys by the fist of a collier). That sort of business makes me sick. Treating an animal like that. I know that at times they are lazy and won’t work, but in this case I don’t really think that it was the pony’s fault - the tub just got stuck at a pair of points that’s all. I am sure that that pony could do with a drink of water too. I know I’m blooming thirsty myself. Things are not however as bad as in the old days. I have heard us how they used to work them from one shift to another - continuously for the 24 hours - how they used to drive them on until they dropped dead on the rails. After all though they are supposed to do the work of horses - they’ve got feelings just the same as us.’<sup>53</sup>

‘Some of the men are bastards the way they treat the ponies. There is one particularly objectionable little “Jawdy” (man from Jarrow) who when he gets

---

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Warwick T. (18.4.2002)

<sup>49</sup> [1 GEO 5] Bill 39, ‘Protection of Animals’, (1911)

<sup>50</sup> [24 GEO 5] ‘Coal Mines (‘Protection of Animals’), (1934)

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Tony C. (4.5.2000)

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Gerry G. (26.3.2002)

<sup>53</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, treatment of pit ponies, (28.6.1944)



a pony out, kicks it, hits it, chases it, and swears at it all day. Bill is a quiet old pony but when he has been with him his nerves are all broken – so that the slightest noise will make him rear and shy away. Some of the things that happen are terrible. They shouldn't have ponies in a mine.'<sup>54</sup>

However, not all the ponies were badly handled and there are several reports on the ponies being well looked after.

'The pit ponies which hauled the trams to and from the coalface were fine beasts, stabled underground, cared for particularly well, each with its own name and regular haulier. They were trained to respond to verbal commands so as to function more easily in restricted areas – see or see-way turning to the right, come here - turn to the left and delightfully, tam back and wow. Everything was made as easy and safe as possible for them. There were to be no protuberances which could hurt them in passing and if there threaten to be insufficient headroom, then either the top had to be heightened or the floor lowered which was delightfully termed "cutting pookins". On rare occasions a pony might develop some lameness owing to a hoof infection, which was pretty smelly. This "greasy heal" condition was, of course, urgently treated. It was jokingly claimed that the management were far more anxious about the well being of the horses and they were of the men!'<sup>55</sup>

Tit-bits were often taken into the mine or the ponies might help themselves.

'Rusty was a real cheeky pony that loved to go through any jacket pocket in search of food that he might find there.'<sup>56</sup>

'Many of the men would take bits of food such as cabbage stumps into work for the ponies, which they obviously enjoyed.'<sup>57</sup>

The ponies could also be useful to the miners and some were quite fond of their charges.

'These animals [ponies] are very intelligent as I discovered when, on occasions, my lamp failed down the haulage road, which left me in complete darkness. By instinct (we called it pit sense), I grabbed hold of the pony's tail who led me back to the pit bottom where the stables were situated.'<sup>58</sup>

'The amazing thing about all these ponies was that they did not need light in which to work - if by some chance my lamp failed - by holding on to its tail the pony would take me back to the stables.'<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Survey, (27.9.1944)

<sup>55</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Desmond E *Gone to Earth*, (1998), pp9-10

<sup>56</sup> Norman B.

<sup>57</sup> R. Norris, 'More memories of Wales by a former Bevin Boy' in *Lymington Advertiser and Times*, (9.11.2002)

<sup>58</sup> P. Yates, *The Bevin Boys' Story*, (Stoke-on-Trent, 1993), p11

<sup>59</sup> Norman B.

'From the stables to T unit was a journey of about a mile and a half along a little used back airway, where I seldom met anyone - so, it was not long before I was tempted to do something strictly forbidden I frequently rode Dandy. He didn't seem to mind this but despite my urging to go faster he would only walk to work at his own pace. To my delight at the end of the shift going back to the stables he became a potential Derby winner. Lying flat on Dandy's back and my head along his neck --- there were some very low girder supports in places -- we streaked back to the stables. A thrilling end to each shift.'<sup>60</sup>

It was not until nationalisation and the subsequent mechanisation of the mines that pit ponies were no longer used in the industry.

### **Conditions and Morale**

The conditions encountered in the mines have been mentioned in the chapter on manpower. Conditions and morale were never good. The British coalmining industry failed to keep pace in terms of modernisation and new machinery compared to other European countries and America. Lack of investment in underground locomotive haulage was one of the main problems criticised by the Reid Report in 1945.<sup>61</sup> The first legislative provisions relating to miners' welfare were included in a 1911 Act and consolidated in the 1920 Mining Act.<sup>62</sup> However, private owners were often unwilling or unable to invest in modernisation of the mines. There was no incentive, especially when it was realised that nationalisation of the industry was inevitable. In addition there was difficulty in obtaining machinery during the war.<sup>63</sup> In some mines there had been no improvements for 20 years.<sup>64</sup>

'Private ownership had resulted in unduly small or awkwardly shaped leaseholds, an excessive number of mines and inadequate regard for conservation of coal resources. The antiquated method of haulage was one of the greatest single technical causes of lower output per man shift in Britain in comparison with those in the Ruhr and Holland. ... British mining engineers were not allowed the freedom of experts in other countries. Underground lighting standards were too low which was adverse to production, health and safety of miners.'<sup>65</sup>

Eric G. spoke to three miners who were at Clifton Colliery before the war in order to find out their working conditions.

---

<sup>60</sup> Norman B.

<sup>61</sup> M.W. Kirby, *The British Coalmining Industry 1870-1946*, (London, 1977), pp189/190

<sup>62</sup> 'Miners' Welfare', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, June 1945), p97

<sup>63</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, Appendix XII

<sup>64</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 - 48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (16.9.1944)

<sup>65</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, Appendix XX, Reid Technical Committee (28.3.1945)

'It was terrible down here at one time. We never had electric lamps nor anything like that you know. We were given about half a dozen candles and they had to last us. Frequently of course we had to work in the dark.'

'Before the war we had no props or anything like that. The roof was just bare with pieces of rock hanging down. You had to bend double in places. Accidents were frequent.'

'When I came here from Durham I was never more surprised in my life. The pit looked derelict. It is no exaggeration to say that the travelling cages were in such a condition that when you came up to the surface your feet sunk 10 feet! The drilling at the coalface was done by hand too! (Undoubtedly true about cages. Had huge holes inside. Have been condemned twice by government).'

<sup>66</sup>

Clifton Colliery had been one of those threatened with closure. In order to keep it open it had been brought under Government control, after which conditions did improve, although they were not ideal.<sup>67</sup> Some pits were obviously better than others. Eric G. considered conditions worse in the private collieries than in the Government controlled concessions such as Clifton, where he worked, although he still thought it neither a safe nor an ideal place to work in.<sup>68</sup>

'I have been working at Clifton six months now, and I can now see that it is not the men who are to blame for the big coal shortage. It is the old broken-down machines, and the wasteful methods that are causing the present trouble. I think that rather than lose their profits the mine owners will continue to work with their old machinery until it breaks down completely. They are afraid to spend money on modernising the pits.'

<sup>69</sup>

When the Bevin Boys entered the mines the conditions were in many cases still very primitive. This first became apparent to the Bevin Boys once their training had finished and they were sent to the mine where they were to work. A fully productive pit could not compare with the superior facilities at the training centre. Especially boys from better homes often found it a culture shock.

'Many of the directed men may have a shock when they first come to know the conditions of mining life and work ... for in scores of mining villages conditions are still no more tolerable than in the slums of the great cities. Though the chronic poverty of the past has largely disappeared and social welfare has been immensely improved, conditions of life in many mining areas still cry out for sweeping reforms.'

<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B, Safety and Compliance to Coalmines Act, (3.8.1944)

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (16.9.1944)

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., (19.1.1945)

<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, (10.1.1944)

Morale was very low. It was felt that the management were not replacing old equipment or modernising the pits. Maintenance was often poor or non-existent. They were trying to save money wherever possible for reasons given above.

‘The machinery too began to show the ravages of wear and hardly a day passed by without the breaking down for anything up to an hour.’<sup>71</sup>

‘It is no wonder that they cannot get the coal off of a day, using broken and worn-out machinery. Why I suppose not a day passes but that one belt or the other will break. Sometimes more than once, it is no wonder that they cannot get finished until two. What good can they do with the belting they use down here. Why it must be all canvas. They ought to get some decent stuff for the whole pit and then they wouldn't get half the trouble that they are getting. But this pit won't bring in anything new if they can help it, they want to spend as little as they can. If they did things properly it will pay them in the long run.’<sup>72</sup>

‘Up at our end of the surface, tubs full of dirt are sent along to be emptied on down the side of the hill. Sometimes only a few will come along, and then it's not too bad, but when a lot arrive the weaknesses show up. You see the railway tracks are so badly laid that to work it properly you cannot have more than two or three tubs along at once to unload. You see there are no sidings for the empty tubs to return by, to allow the full ones to use the main road unhampered. It's so silly. Such a waste of extra time and work.’<sup>73</sup>

The Bevin Boys usually spent the first weeks at the top of the pit. Even those working on the surface were subjected to unpleasant conditions, depending on the time of the year.

‘When the coal comes up from the pit it's thrown onto a conveyor belt. There's a long conveyor belt and people have to stand there picking out the stone from the coal. Now this conveyor belt was in what looked like a huge barn. That is it had a cover overhead but no walls and if you stand there in January, with the rain and the howling wind and trying to pick up lumps of stone from a moving conveyor belt – that was horrible.’<sup>74</sup>

Stones were not the only rubbish that came up to the surface.

‘Our first work was upon the screens, where the contents of the coal tubs coming up from the pit were emptied onto a moving belt, our job was to remove anything other than coal from the moving lumps. Normally this was bits of stone or rubbish that have been thrown in at the coalface, but as there were no toilets in the coal seams there was the chance of other rubbish!’<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> D. Day, *The Bevin Boy*, (Oxford, 1995), p105

<sup>72</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (2.11.1944)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., (29.6.1944)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>75</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Alan W., (typescript, undated)

The first thing the Bevin Boy noticed when he went down the pit was the noise and dirt. It was something they had to get used to, as it was virtually impossible to prevent.

‘A pit’s a noisy place you know. There’s windy-picks [pneumatic drills] and shots and machinery, and cracking noises and floor heaving and sometimes roof falling.’<sup>76</sup>

‘The noise was such that you couldn’t hear yourself speak.’<sup>77</sup>

‘I had cause to know about that dust when I was walking out behind a long file of men at the end of the shift, all eager to get to the pit bottom and to be first in the cage. They’re hurrying feet kicked up a cloud of fine, gritty particles that stuck in your throat and blurred your vision.’<sup>78</sup>

‘All day long the air was thick with dust. It got in your eyes, your mouth, your hair.’<sup>79</sup>

It was this dust they mentioned that was such a health hazard to the miners and was responsible for some debilitating lung diseases such as pneumoconiosis and silicosis. Protective clothing and masks were seldom provided. When they were they could prove uncomfortable and in heat impossible to wear.

The method of circulating the air through the pit was inefficient and there were many complaints of the air being either too hot or too cold. Gerry G. noted how the system worked.

‘The air circulates through a mine by being drawn down by huge fans at the bottom of the pit shaft. So the air comes down half a mile, a mile, mile and a half, depending on the thing and it then circulates through the pit and there are – they were called brad sheets. They’re curtains as it were of a leather type substance, which acted as valves and cut off. In the winter the air comes down from the surface and it’s freezing cold as you can imagine, but it then circulates through literally miles of shafts and you’ve got the heat of the earth itself I suppose and the heat of people and the heat of machinery and by the time it finishes its journey it is a) very hot and b) oxygen starved and I remember twice falling asleep standing up. I lent on my shovel and fell asleep. This of course is why they had canaries as you know, because it’s dangerous. So, depending where you are in the pit, you could be, in Fahrenheit terms I suppose, 35° or 40° Fahrenheit where the pit comes down so you’re shivering, but if you were posted to another part of the pit at the end of the air

---

<sup>76</sup> BBC-WAC Broadcast by John P., ‘Previous Experience Unnecessary’, Forces Educational Broadcast, (24.1.1944)

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>78</sup> BBC- WAC, Broadcast by John Raymond, Bevin Boy, (15.11.1945)

<sup>79</sup> Day, p81

circulation, it might be 70° or 80° and oxygen starved. So you were cold or hot depending on where you were in the pit as it were.’<sup>80</sup>

‘I think Snowdown was 3000 feet deep and at that depth the temperature ... has no relation to the temperature above and they were hot ... All I had to do was sit there and pull a lever on this machine when I was given a bell and I would sweat doing just that.’<sup>81</sup>

‘Life in a coal pit is one of really unending but varying discomfort. You know you’re either freezing cold because the air has just come down or you’re boiling hot and sweating and you find it difficult to breath because the air has just finished.’<sup>82</sup>

The deeper the pit the hotter it became when working below. The mines in Kent were especially deep, some extending out under the seabed. An added disadvantage in these pits was the water, which could not be pumped out fast enough. ‘Sometimes men were working in water up to their knees and sometimes above.’<sup>83</sup>

Vermin was also a problem in the mines, especially as most pits still used ponies to help with haulage. They were stabled at the pit bottom, which led to infestations of rats as well as smell. ‘The stench, particularly close to the stables, is pretty awful and as I say coal has a strong smell of its own.’<sup>84</sup>

‘(T)he horse feed that came down brought rats with it. And one of the things I didn’t expect one and a half miles below the surface was the enormous number of rats in a coalmine. And the tins that we took our lunch down with us, which you know was sandwiches, had to be specially designed so that rats couldn’t open the tins because they would quite easily climb up into your jacket. You took your jacket off of course when you were working - kept your lunch box in your jacket pocket - climb up in your jacket and try and get hold of the sandwiches. But as I say the overwhelming smell was that of horse urine and manure and coal.’<sup>85</sup>

‘It was impossible to keep the stables free of vermin. I had seen, at a training pit visit, the stalls teeming with mice. The Tower harboured rats, despite the presence of the resident cats. Spilt feed chaff together with discarded bread crusts kept the creatures fed. One morning when several of us were having a brief lie down before starting work there was a scuffle accompanied by some sharp oaths and the next moment a large rat landed on my chest before

---

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Gerry G. (26.3.2002)

<sup>83</sup> East Kent Federation of the WI, *East Kent Within Living Memory*, (Canterbury, 1994), p147

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

scampering away into the darkness. It was difficult to say which party was the most startled!’<sup>86</sup>

‘A large bottle of cold tea was like champagne and I soon learned that if I did not have a snap-tin I would have no grub. The first time I put my sandwiches in my pocket the rats ate them and my pocket while I was away working.’<sup>87</sup>

‘Being found asleep in a coalmine was a punishable offence – snap time I settled down in a cubby hole with my snap and fell asleep. I became aware of the most curious feeling at the top of my thigh - it was as though something was vibrating beneath my trousers and moving! I clapped my hand on my thigh and the vibrating stopped. Dropping my trousers I was surprised to find the carcass of a crushed mouse. From then on I always tied some string around my ankles. It taught me a lesson. You can't be too careful!’<sup>88</sup>

The regular miner took many of the conditions for granted, as it was part of his life. He had to take everything with him that he needed whilst working, including water. The Bevin Boys had to get used to doing the same. One of the things most often mentioned by the Bevin Boys was the lack of toilet facilities.

‘And of course one of the things that you have to get used to in a mine is that there's no running water, there's no latrines and if you're taken short you just have to go where you stand. It's a messy, dirty, smelly business coalmining.’<sup>89</sup>

‘You had to take down your own water of course because as I say there is no water down there. And as I say going to the lavatory is a pretty primitive business. You behaved like a cat; you tended to cover it over with coal dust.’<sup>90</sup>

‘I suppose one of the things I found irksome  
In my new cloistered life down the pit,  
Was the question of personal toiletry,  
Especially with nowhere to sit.

I sought some advice from my workmates:  
“Where's the best place to go in this hovel?”  
Their answer was not what I needed:  
“Get thee pants down and go on thee shovel!”<sup>91</sup>

Geoff B. noted about the poem above: ‘The incident, like many more too numerous to mention, whilst humorous in retrospect, was agonisingly dreadful at the time.’<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Desmond E, ‘Gone to Earth’, (typescript, 1998)

<sup>87</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Alan B., ‘Short History of Life as a Bevin Boy’, (handwritten, 2.10.1992)

<sup>88</sup> Norman B., e-mails to Ann Kneif (September 2002)

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Geoff B., ‘Ode to Joe’ amongst typewritten notes (undated)

<sup>92</sup> Geoff B., typewritten notes (undated)

Although a welfare fund had been set up to provide facilities such as pithead baths, the money was not forthcoming for their upkeep and it was left to the miners themselves to pay for maintenance from their wages.<sup>93</sup> This meant that even where they were available pithead baths were not always used.<sup>94</sup> Those Bevin Boys who found themselves in mines with working pithead baths could think themselves lucky, although they had to pay a weekly subscription, deducted from their pay packet, for their use.

‘(T)he pithead baths were not provided by the owners. They had to be paid by the miners themselves and I think it was something like 3d a week for the pithead baths and it struck me as quite iniquitous that the workers themselves had to pay for cleaning off the coal dust and the filth and the mine owners didn’t lift a finger to help.’<sup>95</sup>

John W. described how the system for pithead baths worked.

‘The surface ‘apartments’ were such that to be able to travel back home in a clean state one entered the ‘dirty end’, took off and placed working clothes in the lockers, then, to be able to proceed, had to escape through a tunnel of showers and pouring rain from overhead sprinklers in the ceiling (it was impossible to dodge water), emerging at the far end in a drying off room and the ‘clean’ lockers, which retained our outdoor clothes. Unfortunately (or luckily if so inclined) on the way from the drying room to the lockers there was the opening to the tea bar, where excited or bored waitresses stared, laughed and, in my case, ridiculed the way we ‘hung’ about. We waved – with our hands (see I can read your mind) – picked up our towels and speedily prepared for a cuppa and wad!’<sup>96</sup>

Where there was no pithead baths miners had to wash at home. This meant travelling home in dirty clothes. Many of the houses belonging to the billeting families did not have bathrooms. In this case the norm was to use a tin bath in front of the fire.

‘At the Clifton Colliery, Nottingham there are no such pithead baths – in fact there is only one cold water tap which the miners can wash their hands under when they come up. Bevin Boys and Service volunteers, who without exception come from Government training centres situated at modern collieries where good modern baths are provided, are always making complaints about the lack of washing facilities. They and the younger colliers in particular have a reluctance to walking through the streets in their old clothes and pit dirt.’<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> ‘Miners’ Welfare’ in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, June 1945), p97

<sup>94</sup> B. Jones and C. Williams (Eds) *With Dust Still in His Throat – A.B.L. Coombes Anthology*, (Cardiff, 1999), p164

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>96</sup> Letter from John W. to Ann Kneif, (6.8.2002)

<sup>97</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B, Mines Survey, (27.9.1944)



Other specific discomforts were also mentioned. Each colliery had its own methods of working and equipment, often dependent on the circumstances of the individual mine. Lamps were a case in point.

‘(W)here we were the lamp was in the helmet but it ran off a wet battery not a dry battery and it was a wet battery about that high, which is about 18 inches high, which you slung on your belt and it banged your knees and within about three months your trousers had – the acid in the battery had worn holes in your trousers. It was rather unpleasant because the acid stung.’<sup>98</sup>

Cramped working conditions were also a hazard of the job. This affected particularly those working on the coalface, as some of the coal seams were very narrow.

‘The tunnel was 4 foot 6 inches high, except where there had been a fall. As I am almost 6 feet tall, this meant that I hardly ever stood upright after leaving the shaft.’<sup>99</sup>

Management were often derided for the way they treated workers. This resulted in lack of co-operation between the owners and the miners. The miners had seen their livelihood threatened in the recession between the wars and felt that mechanisation would take yet more jobs away from them once the war was over.<sup>100</sup> This attitude was quick to rub off on the Bevin Boys.

‘I have got a rotten job on the haulage at the leader end. But it makes it worse when the deputies come round telling you off. Old Sam (S. Ibbetson, deputy) sometimes gets in a bad mood and chews the rag. A month or two ago Mac (Macpherson, overman) came round and bollocked us up. It made me mad, and I told him so. I threatened to skip off home. He quietened down a bit then, and offered to help me with my job for a few minutes which I gladly let him do. It's a bit thick though. We are doing our best, but they still moan.’<sup>101</sup>

‘They are a rotten lot down the pit. When you're done early, they do not want you to go, but when something goes wrong they expect you to do overtime all the time. This morning's ‘one’ was finished at 12 o'clock, and of course the colliers went home. The loader-end lads went off too, but they were sent back. Some dirt had to be sent up their belt to keep them there until time. They only filled a couple of tubs between 12 and two. I think that's a rotten trick, especially when they are on an awful job like that. I would have told them to fuck it. I would have said - very well then I shan't stay after 2 another day when you want me to. They try to treat you like prisoners they do - but we are not prisoners yet.’<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>99</sup> Fred C., typewritten notes (undated)

<sup>100</sup> M.W. Kirby, pp189/190

<sup>101</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (6.11.1944)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., (8.1.1945)

'Failure to provide a high enough wage, hostility and negligence on the management's part as far as safety and improvement are concerned as well as the income tax, make conditions what they are.'<sup>103</sup>

The grievances held by the miners led to very low morale and a great deal of dissatisfaction in some mines. This was bound to have a diverse effect on the Bevin Boys.

'They're not working so hard down the pit as they used to. The men realise that it is not doing them any good. Even the coalface workers are taking things very easily, and not troubling to do too much work. I don't blame them.'<sup>104</sup>

'There is a popular contention that a man who works as a coalminer has his health ruined for life. Even in a good modern pit it stands to reason that a man who has to work seven – eight – nine hours a day down a 2ft – 2ft 6in – 3 foot coalface is going to suffer in the long run.'<sup>105</sup>

The quotes by miners and Bevin Boys in this chapter intend to give some idea of the conditions that they experienced. Mining had always been a dangerous, dirty and unsociable occupation. It is perhaps hard to comprehend in our modern day and age that people could be expected to work under what amounted to Victorian conditions. One only has to read *Geminal* by Émile Zola to see that the conditions he was describing in mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century northern France could equally well be applied to the wartime mines in Britain. The majority of Bevin Boys were completely unused to manual work and the environment in which they found themselves. Some had come from working class backgrounds where sanitary conditions at home were not always ideal. It is difficult to judge whether the fact that they have got used to present-day conditions and have moved up the social ladder has influenced their recall. However, there is no doubt that in the pits the complete lack of any sanitary facilities was something only the hardened regular miners were used to. The working conditions as well as the general war conditions prevalent in all industries, involving long hours and reduced free time, could never be good for morale.

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., (16.9.1944)

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., (6.11.1944)

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., (24.9.1944)

## Accidents

Coalmining has always been one of the most dangerous industries. The worst year for fatalities was 1910, when 1,800 miners lost their lives. The largest single accident was in 1910 at the Pretoria Pit near Bolton, where 344 men were killed in an explosion that was thought to have been caused by a faulty lamp igniting a gas build-up.<sup>106</sup>

The number of accidents in all industries was high at the beginning of the war and the Government had endeavoured to reduce it. Jackson puts this down to the inexperience of wartime workers and the development of new technology. Between 1938/39 and 1939/40 accidents in the workplace rose by 42 percent.<sup>107</sup> In 1942 the Government published information on 'the general factors affecting the incidence of accidents.' This was split into four sections:

1. Environmental conditions (hours of work, heating, ventilation and lighting)
2. Personal factors (experience, age, fitness for work)
3. Technical aspects (speed of work, organisation)
4. Preventive influences (attitude of management, attitude of workers)

It concluded that an increase in industrial accidents during the war was due to longer working hours and inexperienced people performing dangerous work, not just in coalmining. Especially younger, inexperienced people were involved in accidents.<sup>108</sup> This led to various safety reports and research was carried out into the causes and means of preventing dangers in the mines.<sup>109</sup>

During the early years of war fatalities in the coalmining industry remained around at about 900 per year (see Appendix ACD-I). By 1943 the number of deaths and serious injuries was diminishing, although the number of persons injured and away from work for more than three days had risen. Even allowing for the decrease in the number of

---

<sup>106</sup> *The Times*, (23.12.2002)

<sup>107</sup> L. Jackson, 'Working in Wartime: Health and Safety at Work' in *BBC History*, Volume 6, No. 1, (January 2005), p22

<sup>108</sup> 'General factors affecting the incidence of accidents' in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, November 1942), p191

<sup>109</sup> 'Report of the safety in mines Research Board for 1943' in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, November 1944), p181

those working in the mining industry the figures were encouraging (see Appendix ACD-II).

‘[The statistics] show a decrease in the number of fatal accidents and those producing serious injuries. The total of 713 fatal accidents is, indeed, the lowest ever recorded for a full year’s working ... The decrease in serious accidents has been evident both at the pits and on the haulage roads, the former being due to fewer falls of roof.’<sup>110</sup>

The Bevin Boys were, therefore, entering an industry that was renowned for its dangers and with a high percentage of accidents involving death and permanent injury. More than one in four of those employed in the industry were injured.<sup>111</sup>

‘People who do not live in a mining area have little conception of the dangers inherent in mining. I suffered some minor injuries myself (no pay when off work) but I saw some horrendous injuries and one fatality in my work station.’<sup>112</sup>

Even when they were not involved in accidents there was still the permanent threat that something could happen.

‘There was the constant fear of the roof coming in or ... when the cable’s lying slack and you’ve got one and a half miles of it and the engine at the other end suddenly starts tightening it up, that cable rises ten feet, just pfwang up there and if you’re anywhere close to it you could be hit. There was the fear of that.’<sup>113</sup>

Although accidents were common, there were only two fatalities among the Bevin Boys.<sup>114</sup> This may be because the most dangerous area in the pit, and therefore the most liable to accidents, was the coalface,<sup>115</sup> where few of the Bevin Boys worked. During their training (see chapter 4, ‘training’) they were made aware of the dangers in mines and given lessons on safety. Although none of the interviewees personally had any bad accidents, minor incidents were part of the job. Tony C. recounted a near miss when a coupling on the tubs snapped.

‘The tubs were coming down between us. If they’d jumped the rails, which was a happening, we’d have been killed ... but they went past us ... it was the nastiest moment in my whole life.’<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (13.7.1943), col. 1926

<sup>111</sup> H. Wilson, *New Deal for Coal*, (London, 1945), p39

<sup>112</sup> Questionnaire, September – November 2002

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>114</sup> P. Yates, *The Bevin Boys’ Story*, (Stoke-on-Trent, 1993), p13

<sup>115</sup> M. Heinemann, *Britain’s Coal – a study of the mining crisis*, prepared for the Labour Research Department, (London, 1944), p70

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

Peter H. had an accident in his second year.

'I got my foot trapped under a heavy wheel, between the rail and the tub ... I was off six weeks because I had terrible ligament damage.'<sup>117</sup>

Alan H. also had an accident.

'I did drop a chain on my toe one time and broke my toe. ... But I have seen some nasty things happen when the roof falls and things like that, but it's a hazard of the job I'm afraid. It's like any of these jobs, there's always a risk factor.'<sup>118</sup>

Peter H. was in the pit when there was an explosion. 'It was only a small one. It didn't cause any damage. No-one was hurt but that was a bit terrifying.'<sup>119</sup> 'I had a couple of minor accidents, leg cuts and things.'<sup>120</sup>

'And we were standing a bit too close to the roof when it fell in and a large, fairly large piece of stone, not bigger than the size of your fist, fell from the roof onto my bare shoulder and burst the blood vessel and the blood spurted all over my chest, I was only wearing a pair of shorts and I must have looked a terrible sight, because the lad working with me, Roy, he collapsed, he fainted. He thought I'd been cut to pieces. It was only a small gash but the blood was spurting. Anyway I had to go out of the pit and I was off work for four weeks until the stitches healed. But Roy, he was off for six weeks. He was, I'm afraid, a little too pampered and perhaps he took advantage of the fact that he was somehow involved in this little incident so he stayed off for six weeks.'<sup>121</sup>

Robert K. experienced a fatal accident when a roof fall in his part of the pit.

The area had to be cleared by detonating the rubble. 'Unfortunately the borer ... put in a couple of holes, took off his machine, laid it down and was thinking on where to punch in the next hole and he always wore a hard hat. He took it off looking up thinking where am I going to put the next hole and just a small piece, no bigger than his fist, hit him on the head and killed him. Now these are the sort of things that happen every day – almost everyday underground.'<sup>122</sup>

Joseph H. made an attempt to leave the mines 'after injury to my back when a full tub of coal came off the line.'<sup>123</sup> He was downgraded from medical grade AI to A III and still has back pains. Fred C. experienced gas in the mine.

'My main experience of being gassed occurred when our gang was working in an old tunnel which had collapsed and which was known to contain

---

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Alan H., (17.7.2000)

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Robert K. (28.3.2002)

<sup>123</sup> Questionnaire

'firedamp'. We stopped for a mid-shift break to eat our sandwiches and settled down on heaps of stones. I was hot and soon we were all asleep. The foreman shouted at us to remain awake, but we ignored him. At last he shouted and raved at us and forced us out into the main tunnel where the air was clear. He saved our lives as we would never have woken on our own.'<sup>124</sup>

Compensation in the case of injury or death was the responsibility of the mine owners. The law stipulated a maximum rate of compensation 'with the proviso that they are not to exceed two-thirds of the pre-accident wage.'<sup>125</sup> A single man would be entitled to a maximum of 35s rising to 55s for a married man with three children. In case of death a widow alone would receive £400 and a widow with children £700 maximum.<sup>126</sup> Ness Edwards, Labour M.P., took the matter up in Parliament.

'You direct a man into the mining industry under this scheme, and you pay him 35s a week workmen's compensation if he is injured. If he is directed into an Ordnance factory he gets 26 full weeks wages if injured. You direct a man into the mines and if he is killed his widow will get enough compensation for four or five years. If he is killed in the Army she will be looked after for life, and the children will be looked after.'<sup>127</sup>

The Mining Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) was pushing for compensation of not less than the weekly wage in case of accidents and death.<sup>128</sup> However, the reality was that the miners were expected to look after their colleagues. Collections on payday for injured colleagues were the norm. Compensation claims for injury were slow in being paid.<sup>129</sup>

'Deaths and serious injuries are alarmingly frequent. I think I can safely say that there is literally not a week when on a Friday there wasn't a collection for some miner or other, who'd been seriously injured during that week. I really was quite surprised at the incidence of accidents.'<sup>130</sup>

'(T)hey didn't have any provisions for proper sick pay, they didn't have any pension arrangements and if you had an accident in the pit and had to be off work as a result of the accident you still didn't get any pay, which was really pretty rough. And in the case of the Bevin Boys they even stopped the 3/6d rent allowance on the assumption presumably that we'd move out of the accommodation we were using and sleep on the streets and go back again

---

<sup>124</sup> Fred C. 'Days as a Bevin Boy recalled' in *Farnham Herald*, (newspaper cutting, undated)

<sup>125</sup> Heinemann, p74

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p74

<sup>127</sup> Hansard, Vol. 392, (12.10.1943), col. 843

<sup>128</sup> A. Horner, 'TUC' in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25, (October 1943), p303

<sup>129</sup> B.L. Coombes, *These Poor Hands*, (London, 1939), p94

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Gerry G. (26.3.2002)

when we were able to work again but it meant of course that we were that much out of pocket.’<sup>131</sup>

Injuries resulting in three days or less off work or the death of a single man were not compensated. Most of the Bevin Boys were single. If they were killed in an accident the most the parents could expect would be the burial costs.

Not only were the miners exposed to accidents but also to lung diseases associated with the industry. Silicosis and pneumoconiosis were life threatening. The dust settles in the lung and solidifies, leading to breathing problems and eventually death. These diseases were particularly prevalent in South Wales because of the dust from the anthracite coal mined there.<sup>132</sup> There were other industrial diseases such as nystagmus and beat hand, knee or elbow (cellulites and bursitis). Many of these diseases were serious enough to force affected miners to leave the pit.<sup>133</sup>

‘Whilst, as I have said, no one was killed at our pit, several miners died of industrial diseases. One was the principal shot-firer who died of silicosis. He was seldom able to wear a mask at the coalface, as it was much too hot. Another, an avuncular figure to the Bevin Boys, died from pneumoconiosis after a short illness. They were both in their fifties.’<sup>134</sup>

‘My father was a miner at Snowdown Colliery. He’d come into Kent from the Rhondda Valley in South Wales in 1931. Unfortunately he’d had a lung disease and was certified as having pneumoconiosis in 1940 or 1941 and never worked after that time. He died at the age of 49 in 1947.’<sup>135</sup>

There are no records showing whether Bevin Boys suffered from industrial diseases, but they were exposed to the same environment and conditions as the regular miners. It was a hazard of the job. However, with only two fatalities the Bevin Boys fared far better than their counterparts sent to the Forces.

### **Demobilisation – A Case Study**

The Bevin Boys were released from their service in the mines on the same basis as that for Class A in the Army. The first releases came in 1947 and the last Bevin Boys left the pits in 1948. Apart from medical grounds there was very little they could do to

---

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>132</sup> Heinemann, p72

<sup>133</sup> Wilson, p42

<sup>134</sup> Fred C. letter to Ann Kneif, (October 2002)

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Edward W., (30.10.2002)

get an early release. The situation was highlighted by one Bevin Boy, Gerald Smithson (Figure 5.1), a cricketer, who was chosen to represent England in the West Indies test matches of the winter season 1947/1948. The matter first came to light in an article in *The Times* with the following small report.

‘Mr J.H. Nash, secretary of the Yorkshire County Cricket Club, has made an application to the National Service Board for leave of absence for G. Smithson, the young Yorkshire left-hand batsman, who is working at Askern Colliery near Doncaster, and who has been selected to accompany the MCC team to the West Indies in December.’<sup>136</sup>

This was followed by another small report in *The Times* nine days later stating that Smithson would not be available and that he had to continue with his employment in the mines. As he would be 21 in November he would be due for release in either December or January.<sup>137</sup> This seemed like pettiness on the part of the authorities and prompted a letter to *The Times*. The writer, D. Carew, felt that an exception could be made in this case, as Smithson was due for release within the next few weeks. ‘It is unreasonable to expect bureaucracy to be consistently imaginative, but could it not for once indulge in a human and generous fling and demonstrate that all is not yet under a stolid and undeviating rule of thumb.’<sup>138</sup> The following day it was reported that Smithson was trying to find out from the Ministry of Labour the exact date of his release from the mines. The MCC were to set sail on December 27<sup>th</sup> but Smithson had been offered an air passage that would allow him to catch up with the rest of the team.<sup>139</sup> The MCC had not given up hope that he would be able to join the team and were making their own enquires about his date of release.<sup>140</sup>

Not everyone was sympathetic with the plight of Smithson. One letter to *The Times* agreed with the Government that he should be refused permission to play.

‘At the moment coal is a more valuable export than cricket and Smithson is only being treated as he might had he been in the services and not in mining. Instead of taking further the Smithson case, the MCC would do better to explain why a more attractive side has not been chosen; or, if chosen, why the members have not accepted the invitation.’<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> *The Times*, (9.10.1947)

<sup>137</sup> *The Times*, (18.10.1947)

<sup>138</sup> *The Times*, (20.10.1947)

<sup>139</sup> *The Times*, (21.10.1947)

<sup>140</sup> *The Times*, (22.10.1947)

<sup>141</sup> *The Times*, (27.10.1947)



The debate continued and was taken up in the House of Commons. The Minister of Labour, G.A. Isaacs, was asked if he would release Smithson so that he could take part in the MCC tour. Isaacs answered that the production of coal was of paramount importance and it would not be fair to other Bevin Boys who were continuing to work in coalmining. He was, however, prepared to give him leave of absence so that he could go to the West Indies 'on condition that he completes his National Service obligation immediately on his return to this country.' It appeared that Smithson had applied for release on medical grounds. 'That, however, is a separate matter. Contrary to statements that have appeared in the press, Mr Smithson is not due for release until some time after the end of the year.'<sup>142</sup> So it was that the National Coal Board gave Smithson leave of absence on the understanding that he would complete his 'National Service obligations' on his return.<sup>143</sup>

Another letter sent to *The Times* from Barbados was published a day later, but sent before the matter was resolved. It pointed out 'the importance of the tour for cementing the friendly relations between the Mother Country and her colonies.' The letter went on:

'The MCC tour cannot be regarded merely as an escape from the rigours of an English winter and the austerity of post-war Europe to perpetual sunshine and lavish hospitality: it is a good will mission and, unless the imperial policy of the Government has undergone a change, Smithson will be serving his country as loyally on the West Indian cricket field as in an English mine.'<sup>144</sup>

Gerald Smithson duly set sail with the MCC tour to play in the West Indies. In the first test in Bridgetown, Barbados he was caught out for a duck. In the second test in Trinidad he fared a little better, scoring 70 in two innings.<sup>145</sup> So was all the fuss about him joining the team justified? He died in 1970, aged 43, and his obituary notes that he was conscripted as a Bevin Boy and went on tour with the MCC, where he played in two test matches. What started out as perhaps a promising career ended in 1957, when he took up a post as a school coach.<sup>146</sup> He was never again selected to play in a test match.

---

<sup>142</sup> Hansard, Vol. 443, (30.10.1947), col. 97

<sup>143</sup> *The Times*, (31.10.1947)

<sup>144</sup> *The Times*, (1.11.1947)

<sup>145</sup> I. Sharpe (ed), *Sunday Chronicle Cricket and Golf Annual*, (London, 1948)

<sup>146</sup> H. Preston (ed), *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack 1971*, (London, 1971), p1030

SMITHSON LEAVES THE MINES



Figure 5.1 Gerald Smithson<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> H. Preston (ed), *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack 1948*, (London, 1948), p38

## Chapter 6

### Wages

Wages had always been low in the coalmining industry, because they were determined by the owners' profits.<sup>1</sup> When war began coalmining was 80<sup>th</sup> in the wages table of 100 industries.<sup>2</sup> Wages at this time accounted for 70 percent of production costs. Other countries, notably Germany and America, had become more mechanised so that wages were not a vital element of total costs. In Britain energy was cheap and the export price of coal was low because wages were kept low.<sup>3</sup> During the early years of the war, miners became increasingly angry at their low level of wages compared with that of other industries. As an example, in the munitions factories even the women often took home higher pay packets than the miners.<sup>4</sup> 'The average earnings in the [coal] industry during 1941 were £4 plus 2/9d value for allowance in kind. Men in the aircraft industry averaged £6-7-5d and in the shipyards £5-16-7d.'<sup>5</sup> Miners' wages had not kept pace with the increasing cost of living.<sup>6</sup> Wages in the past were agreed between the Mineworkers' Federation and the owners at a district level, although the owners always refused to discuss a national minimum wage.<sup>7</sup> Dissatisfaction over wages led to strikes in May and June 1942.<sup>8</sup> The miners found themselves, for the first time, in a good bargaining position with a Government desperate to increase coal production. Faced with mounting opposition from the miners the Government appointed a Board of Investigation in June 1942. Its terms of reference were to look at the wage structure and 'to submit recommendations for the establishment of a procedure and permanent machinery for dealing with questions of wages and conditions of employment in the industry.'<sup>9</sup> Two weeks later the Board, under the chairmanship of Lord Greene, made their first report. The Government immediately accepted the recommendation of a national minimum wage. The minimum weekly wage for adult underground workers was set at 83s and that for

---

<sup>1</sup> W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, *British War Economy*, (London, 1949), p164

<sup>2</sup> P. Lewis, *A People's War*, Methuen, (London, 1986), p128

<sup>3</sup> C. Barnett, *The Audit of War*, (London, 1986), p75

<sup>4</sup> A. Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin – Volume II Minister of Labour 1940 – 1945*, (London, 1967), p165

<sup>5</sup> D. Agnew, *Bevin Boy*, (London, 1947), p17

<sup>6</sup> W.H.B. Court, *Coal*, (London, 1951), p329

<sup>7</sup> A. Bullock, p171

<sup>8</sup> A. Bullock, p166

<sup>9</sup> *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, 'Wages in the Coalmining Industry', (June 1942), p122

adult surface workers at 73s.<sup>10</sup> For the first time there was a uniform national minimum wage and the miners moved from the 59<sup>th</sup> position to the 23<sup>rd</sup> position on the list of industrial earnings.<sup>11</sup>

Later recommendations gave the miners a bonus for increased output, which varied from 3d to 3s 9d per shift.<sup>12</sup> This soon ceased to be effective in increasing output and the Greene Board suggested changing to a pit scheme. The owners' representatives were so much against this idea that early in 1944 a Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Organisation of the Coal Industry recommended an alternative scheme based on attendance as well as on factors governing the existing district scheme.<sup>13</sup> The Committee complained that: 'Of the fundamental issues affecting post war conditions in the industry the most important is the wages structure .... The present system is of such complexity that it is naturally conducive to dispute and does not provide sufficient incentive to greater efficiency and higher output.'<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the minimum wage agreement, there were still anomalies in pay. The following (Table 6.1) was produced by the Government to show the average wages per shift for those volunteering for mining instead of the Forces. Average rates of pay varied according to the district.

	Minimum at age 18	Minimum adult rate	Min. at coalface trained men
Nottingham	14/2	19/2	20/9
S. Derbyshire	12/-	17/6	18/9
Cannock Chase	9/10	14/6	15/7
Scotland	15/-	16/2	17/10
Cumberland	13/1½	15/10	16/0½
Kent	11/5	16/-	17/9½

Table 6.1 Average rates of pay per shift in various districts in 1943<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p134

<sup>11</sup> M.W. Kirby, *The British Coalmining Industry 1870-1946*, (London, 1977), p180

<sup>12</sup> *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, 'Wages in the Coalmining Industry', (November 1942), p191

<sup>13</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 - 1945*, E.V. Newbegin, October 1946, p51

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p2

<sup>15</sup> PRO LAB 19/53 Rates of pay in the coalmining industry

In the autumn of 1943 the failure of the original bonus scheme and the impending conscription of the Bevin Boys had also encouraged the Mineworkers' Federation to put in a claim for an increased minimum weekly wage of 120/- for underground and 110/- for surface worker. 'They insisted that before they would be agreeable to accepting these lads ... there must be a pay structure agreed for these boys, which would not undermine the pay structure of the existing miners.'<sup>16</sup> In a letter to Gwilym Lloyd George, Minister of Fuel and Power, Bevin made it clear that he wanted to dispense with the existing complicated system of wages. He wanted recognition that mining was 'a dangerous, specialised, arduous and unpleasant occupation.'<sup>17</sup> The letter shows that, unlike many politicians, he understood the complexities of the industry. The matter of wages was referred to a National Reference Tribunal for the Coalmining Industry under the chairmanship of Lord Porter.<sup>18</sup> The Tribunal's recommendations came into effect on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1944, so that within a few weeks the first conscripted Bevin Boy trainees were able to take advantage of the increased rates. The national minimum wage for adults was increased from 83/- to 100/- for underground workers, that of surface workers from 78/- to 90/-. In addition there were substantial increases for youths up to the age of 18 and a greater increase for those between 18 and 20, although it was still not as much as the unions had asked for.<sup>19</sup> Rates for weekend and overtime work were also agreed. The following table shows how rates of pay changed from a pre-war wage to those earned after the Porter Award came into effect. The amount of allowance in kind had generally not increased but the value, especially the coal allowance, had increased during the war.<sup>20</sup> The result was that the industry rose to the 14<sup>th</sup> position in the wage table.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Philip C. (1.10.2002)

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Bevin to Lloyd George, 29.11.1943, quoted in Bullock, p262

<sup>18</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, pp 51-2

<sup>19</sup> R. Page Arnot, *The Miners in Crisis and War*, (New York, 1968), p375

<sup>20</sup> Hansard, Vol. 403, 17.10.1944, col. 2221

<sup>21</sup> Kirby, p185

	Average weekly cash earnings	Value in allowance in kind
	£ s. d.	s. d.
During the year 1938	2 15 9	2 2
During the year 1943	5 0 0	3 3
During the first quarter 1944	5 5 9	3 10
During the second quarter 1944 (estimated)	6 0 0	4 0

**Table 6.2 Average earnings of men employed in the mining industry<sup>22</sup>**

Wages were not, however, as clear-cut as it appeared from Government reports. The colliers, that is those employed on the coalface, were paid on a piecework basis according to the yardage of coal cut on a shift and earned on average between 25 shillings and 30 shillings a shift or about £8 per week.<sup>23</sup>

The Porter Tribunal had rejected the miners' claim for an increase in piece rates because it judged that the whole wage structure should be examined.<sup>24</sup> There were anomalies as in some districts the minimum wage was already equal or above the new increase for some skilled workers. Those on the lowest scale would get a large increase, whereas others would get little or nothing.<sup>25</sup> The frustration of the miners led, as it always did in such circumstances, to reduced production, either through strikes or voluntary absenteeism. Lloyd George made a statement in the House of Commons, in which he said that 'it is deplorable that after raising wages there is a greater loss in tonnage than in any week since the war started.'<sup>26</sup> He failed to realise that even when earning more there was nothing to buy for the extra money. The miners were war weary and what they really wanted was to work less. By earning more they would not need to work as much. The question of piece rates was finally addressed at the end of April 1944, when they were increased by a percentage set out for each district. At the same time the bonus scheme was abandoned.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Hansard, Vol. 403, 17.10.1944, col. 2221

<sup>23</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (1.8.1944)

<sup>24</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p52

<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, (14.2.1944)

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, (9.2.1944)

<sup>27</sup> *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, 'Wages in the Coalmining Industry', (May 1944), p75

In spite of the increases awarded by the Porter Tribunal the wage level, when compared to the amount of physical effort required, still did not compare favourably with other industries. There was no account taken of the dangers inherent in the work, which led to lost time from accidents and sickness as well as short-time working.<sup>28</sup>

There were also complaints about pay in relation to actual time worked.

‘Miners were not paid from the moment they entered the colliery. They were not paid from the time they put on their helmets and their lamps. They were paid from the time they reached the coalface. Now when you bear in mind that the coalface could be one and a half miles, two miles from the pithead bottom and it took you half an hour or more to reach the coalface, all that journey was in your own time and wasn’t paid for by the owners.’<sup>29</sup>

The first training centres were opened in the second week of January 1944, and the first trainees soon became embroiled in the general dissatisfaction over wages. Payment for stage A training (the first four weeks) was to be at the national minimum rate for surface workers. For the first intake, at age 18, they received 44/- per week.

Within days of arriving at the training centre in Doncaster the Bevin Boys were already making demands for an increase in their allowances. Other training centres soon followed (see chapter 4, ‘newspaper coverage’). They claimed that after paying for board, travelling expenses to and from the pit, canteen meals and bath charges they were left with only 5s or 6s for clothing and amusement. Many found that a visit or a holiday at home was prohibitive without a travel warrant.<sup>30</sup>

‘Matters came to a head when the first young conscripts [Bevin Boys] entered the industry and were expected to keep themselves on a wage of 44s. a week during training. In many areas they had to pay 35s. for lodgings, and after paying bus fares and for midday dinners they would have been penniless.’<sup>31</sup>

A question was raised in the House of Commons as to whether Bevin was aware of this discontent and whether any steps were being taken to improve the Bevin Boys’ welfare. One member gave an example of transport to the pit from the hostel amounting to 5 shillings per week.<sup>32</sup> At the end of January 1944 The Porter Award raised wages during training to 60/- a week for 18 year olds and travelling expenses

---

<sup>28</sup> M. Heinemann, *Britain's Coal – a study of the mining crisis*, prepared for the Labour Research Department, (London, 1944), p25

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Gerry G. (26.3.2002)

<sup>30</sup> *The Times*, (21.1.1944)

<sup>31</sup> Heinemann, p57

<sup>32</sup> Hansard, Vol. 396, 20.1.1944, col. 338

over 6d a day were also reimbursed.<sup>33</sup> In theory young men should not have been called up or sent to a training centre before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday but in practice those volunteering for the mines could go earlier, in which case their pay, even after the Porter Award, was as little as 45/- a week.<sup>34</sup> When it is considered that the official opinion on charges for hostel, meals, snacks, laundry and transport to the pit was 42/6 per week and on top of that there were deductions for tax and replacement of pit clothes,<sup>35</sup> it is difficult to see how a young trainee could survive without help.

'The older men appeared to take reduced pay for granted but some of the Bevin Boys complained of low wages. These complaints may have had some grounds, since wages varied with age, but billets and food costs the same for all. Consequently, the younger men had only a shilling or two pocket money left after paying living expenses.'<sup>36</sup>

Others were happy to miss the odd day training in order to reduce the amount of tax they had to pay.

'Some of these chaps are scared to do anything - they are afraid to lose a day's pay. But I look at it this way. I am single and only 19, which means that I draw just over £3 a week - therefore, nearly 10 shillings is deducted. Now, if I am absent one day I am £2.10 shillings - just one or two shillings income tax, which is almost as good as if I were there the whole week. It's no good letting yourself be taken in by these people. You have got to use your loaf on this job.'<sup>37</sup>

The initial training at a centre was followed by stage B training at the pit where the Bevin Boy was expected to stay for the duration of his mine service. This usually lasted two weeks and involved surface work. The wage they received was appropriate to the district and for the occupation in which they were employed.<sup>38</sup> Once the training was complete the Porter Award stipulated a minimum wage of 70/- a week for 18-year-old underground workers, 75/- for 19 year olds and 80/- for 20 year olds.<sup>39</sup>

'Face workers were paid on tonnage sent to the top. This was checked by a company weighman and the colliers' representative, a check weighman. The

---

<sup>33</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p45

<sup>34</sup> PRO LAB 8/734, 'Direction of National Service Registrants to Coalmining', (note dated 16.12.1943)

<sup>35</sup> PRO LAB 26/14 'Residential hostels for new entrants to the coalmining industry'

<sup>36</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, 'Report on Swinton Training Centre', (May 1944)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, p45

<sup>39</sup> *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, Minimum Wages and Overtime Rates in Coalmining, (February 1944), p23



haulage men were paid a daily wage and the lowest form of life were the surface workers, who got paid less and worked longer hours.<sup>40</sup>

Bevin Boys were expected to start on haulage or datal work (any unskilled job earning a minimum wage).<sup>41</sup> Officially they would have to work underground for a minimum of six months before they could be considered for coalface work, although the latter was not a job they were ever expected to do. The work of the collier was the most exacting in the pit requiring strength and stamina, however, the majority of the Bevin Boys were not used to hard manual work. Many like Peter H. were content to stay on haulage. He thought he was earning well. 'More than I had ever earned in my life doing this particular job [haulage] and so I stayed with it.'<sup>42</sup> Ken P. spent most of his time on haulage. 'When I left I was on top haulage pay and I was getting 19 shillings and seven pence halfpenny a day. I never ever earned a pound a day, never, all the time I was in there.'<sup>43</sup>

When the coal was really coming in and the men were on a bonus system it was really good for them. We haulage workers, however, did not share in any bonus. We were on a flat rate all through the time I was there.'<sup>44</sup>

Peter M. noted on his pay statement that 'apart from income tax of 10/- there was a union subscription of 6d for the week, 2d for welfare, 1/4d for colliery doctor's fees and a voluntary 3d towards the Hospital Health Insurance.' In addition 3d was deducted from his wages when he needed a replacement cake of soap.<sup>45</sup> Some Bevin Boys were required to sign a contract form that required them to pay for materials and tools used in the mine. (Appendix WAG-I)

The following payslip (Figure 6.1) from John W., who was working mainly on datal work, shows the complexities of working out what each person earned. There are deductions for income tax as well as pensions, stores, hospital, insurance, pithead baths and union fees.

---

<sup>40</sup> Roland T. *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on diaries kept during the war, p20

<sup>41</sup> N. Harrison, *Once a Miner*, (London, 1954), p184

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>44</sup> Peter M., (17.8.1986), Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

149

# Ansley Hall Collieries.

Week ending..... 3 - MAR 1945

Name..... *J Wright*

	Dr.		Cr.	
RENTS			4 7/8	10/8
LOAN				PA
PENSION		6		
STORES		5		WAR WOOD
HOSPITAL		10		BONUS
INSURANCE	1	9		
BATHS		9		LESS
UNION		6		
INCOME TAX	4			
				2 18 8
				8 9
				2 9 11
				8.0
				<u>2-17-11</u>

*Tax refund*

Figure 6.2 Example of payslip for an individual worker<sup>46</sup>

In spite of pay increases and sometimes the chance to work overtime, Bevin Boys restricted to the more menial tasks in the pit often found it hard to make ends meet. 'After paying one's board and lodging there remained just enough for a few necessities and an occasional visit to a cinema or a drink on a Saturday.'<sup>47</sup>

Once they had become established in the mine some of the Bevin Boys did chose to move to the more lucrative work on the coalface. Working on the coalface meant a much fatter pay packet at the end of the week. Roland T. found the wages for coalface work good.

'We did about three yards a shift, which for me meant that at 35 shillings per shift I could get £10-10s before tax and stoppages, which in those days was a good wage and about double what most of the other lads were earning. I could

<sup>46</sup> Payslip supplied by John W.

<sup>47</sup> IWM IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, letter from A.T. Gregory, (1.10.1998)

easily manage on four shifts and still be better off than the lads working six shifts on the haulage.<sup>48</sup>

Peter F. was also satisfied with his wages as a coalface worker. 'I stepped up to being face worker at piece rates. So we were immediately interested, you could say, in yardage and getting cut out in time. ... We were earning, however, hard graft £13, £14 per week as against £5 to £6 average.'<sup>49</sup> His payslip (Figure 6.2) shows the money earned by a group of six men.

Name		No.			
HOUGHTON COLLIERY.		Pay			
Backshifts - 5 PAY NOTE. Feb. 29/10		1947			
No.	Work done	Shifts	£ s. d.	Deductions, etc.	£ s. d.
207	PIECEWORK - (inclusive earnings) N <sup>o</sup> 3 N <sup>o</sup> 6	1	1 8 0	Coal leading	
	Hewing	2	1 8 0	Fines	
	Scalloping	4	6 6 0	Water	1 6
	Filling			Stores, etc.	3 11
	Cutting			N. Insurances	17 0
	Drilling			Provident Fund	6 6
	Putting	12	9 5 1	Doctor	
	Rolleyways			Catholic Fds.	
	Pulling			P.R. Fund	2 0
	Onsetting			Nursing	6
	Drawing			County Fund	
	Bargain	4	5 2 11	Savings	1 11 0
				Advances	
				Rent	
				Smith	
				Baths	
				Baths Goods	
				Welfare	5 0 7 5
				Infirmaries	11 0 7 5
				Institutes	46 0 3 4
				Cricketer Club	48 0 6 7
				Band	24 0 0 7 5
				Y.M.C.A.	
				Total	33 11
				Income Tax	2 14 0
				NET AMOUNT	£ 31 9 6
	DATAL WORK				
	War Addition				
	Porter Minimum				
	1944 Addn.—skilled				
	do. —suppl'y				
	Porter Overtime		4 6 1		
	Total				
	Rent Allowance		10 0		
	GROSS AMOUNT		£ 49 7 5		

Figure 6.3 Example of a payslip for several workers<sup>50</sup>

Peter F. described the background to this particular payslip.

<sup>48</sup> Roland T. *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on diaries kept during the war, p22

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>50</sup> Payslip supplied by Peter F.

'There was a time when working on the coal cutters, three groups were amalgamated together, so there were 6 men, working different shifts in different parts of the pit. But we were flexibly moved about by the management so it seemed a good thing to call us a bargain. We were a bargain of 6. But this produced a separate pay sheet. And the pay sheets were issued on Friday at the colliery offices and everybody collected their pay sheet, whereon it would show how many tubs of coal you'd filled, put, how many yards of coal you'd cut and so on. ... And in this particular instance, there were 6 of us on the note ... There were the, shall we say intricate interests of 6 men. At least every 2 men was a pair. But even then there were discrepancies. I might be working with a Roman Catholic, who was paying a couple of pennies every week, in case he needed the priest to come down the pit and give him the last rites. Or he might be paying off a shilling a week for a new pair of boots and so on and so on. We might be working all the week dry, but the other 2 might be working wet so they would get so much a shift wet working [working in water]. All sorts of things. So come Friday one of the six of us would have to go and collect the note. And since I was a single man, there might be 5 other ladies, wives waiting up there for me to come to pick up the note. ...

On the back of it there's probably a lot of working out, pencil doubtless, to who had got to pay income tax, how many children they'd got, no tax – all those sort of things had to be understood. And the wives preferred me to do it, shall we say on the basis that I probably understood best how to work this out. But I suspect more because having worked it out they had enough faith in my arithmetic but also I would be handling the cash myself directly out of the pay office. I would sort it out and I would put it into their hands in little paper bags, but I would put it into their hands. Now on that understanding there was no keepy backs. And if their men had gone up and collected it from me they would not necessarily have got the total. When they held their hand out there would be keepy backs. I am quite sure you can understand what keepy backs means. So pay packet on the end of the table was always suspect depending on whose hand had just put it there. How many hands had handled it after the pay office? The pay office was absolutely sacrosanct. The accountants in there, old men, everybody was old men. You never argued with them. It was always you that got it wrong.'<sup>51</sup>

The 'keepy backs' mentioned by Peter F. was common practice in the pits and is alluded to by Roland T., who referred to it as 'gaffer money'. It was the 'tip' for being the gang leader, who was responsible for keeping the men working as a team.

'The day men got their wages in little tins, which he [George, a contractor] collected in a box from the pit offices and then the remainder was divided equally, except for 3/6 a day "gaffer money" as George called it, which he retained as his.'<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>52</sup> Roland T., p13

Because the work was dangerous there was a far greater risk of accidents than in other industries. Compensation was, however, only paid with a doctor's certificate and then only after two days and was only a percentage of the wage. Eric G. had an accident where he slipped on a stone and badly hurt his leg. The doctor gave him a certificate for a week off work.

'On the investigator asking about compensation money he learnt that this could not be paid until the third day, regardless how serious an accident may be, a man would have to have the first two days completely without money as far as the pit was concerned anyway! Imagine what financial plight would result if that man were married!'<sup>53</sup>

There is no doubt that many Bevin Boys were earning better money than they had ever been able to before, especially those who went on to work on the coalface. However, outgoings on items such as lodgings, meals in the canteen, extra clothing and fares to and from the pit left little over for entertainment if they were working for a minimum wage. The efforts of the Government in their continuing recruitment campaigns directed towards juveniles and the extra incentives offered by a higher wage than their fathers had been able to earn in the pits, was still unsuccessful in persuading young people of the merits of the coalmining industry. This shows that wages alone could never be a prime issue in the coalmining debate.

---

<sup>53</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, 'A further report upon the conditions found and experienced at Clifton Mine, (4.8.1944)

## Chapter 7

### Unions

As has been discussed in detail in 'mobilisation of manpower', the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) had a long and turbulent history of disagreements with the coal owners and industrial unrest. The MFGB had pressed for nationalisation of the coal industry after the First World War but progress was slow because the districts were always looking to their own interests.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the Second World War that the emphasis changed from a district to a national basis for solving the industry's problems.<sup>2</sup> Finally, in 1944 the way was made clear for the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which took over from the district organisations the responsibility of industry wide wage bargaining, contributions and benefits. From January 1<sup>st</sup> 1945, the miners became members of one national union with centralised control.

The Bevin Boy scheme was introduced at a time when the MFGB still held sway. It was widely thought the Government would have been unable to direct boys into mining without the agreement of the trade unions. When questioned on whether the MFGB had agreed to conscription to the mines, Bevin answered that both the union and the mining industry were aware that he had the power to direct anyone in order to maintain the industry.<sup>3</sup> Bevin had been the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, which, together with the MFGB, were the two largest unions. He was called into the coalition Government in 1940 and because of his strong union background the trade unions would have given him some support.<sup>4</sup> At the Annual Conference of the MFGB in July 1943 the president, Mr W. Lawther, assured Bevin that whatever steps he took to increase coal production the miners would support him. The MFGB had always been against directing youths into the pits as it had inevitably been the sons of miners who were called upon first and they should be given their own choice. However, if there were no other alternatives they

---

<sup>1</sup> Baldwin, p586

<sup>2</sup> Baldwin, p589

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (2.12.1943), col. 524

<sup>4</sup> R. Page Arnot, *The Miners: One Union, One Industry – A history of the National Union of Mineworkers 1939 – 1946*, (London, 1979), p130

would try to secure favourable conditions for those directed to the mines.<sup>5</sup> In October 1943 the MFGB presented a statement on the union's position in time for a Commons debate on the subject of direction to the mines. The Federation thought that anyone directed to employment in the mines would be unproductive for some time. They felt that a better solution would be to release miners from the Forces and other industries. 'They could, of course, be supported by such additional workers as it may be possible to obtain through option or direction.'<sup>6</sup> In spite of their misgivings the miners' unions did not oppose the call-up. 'Such measures are inevitable in the crisis that has been reached.'<sup>7</sup>

A question was raised in the House of Commons as to what steps Bevin would take to ensure that those directed to the mines would not be compelled to join a union. The reply from Bevin was that there was no compulsion on his part and no statutory obligation to do so.<sup>8</sup> One of the points raised during this debate was that if one of the Bevin Boys should have an accident it would be likely that the mine owners would oppose compensation without the backing of the union and the union's support would be unlikely if the Bevin Boys were not members.<sup>9</sup> The question of whether pressure would be put on Bevin Boys to join a trade union if they did not want to was also raised in the House of Lords. The Earl of Mansfield was particularly concerned that the Mineworkers' Federation was going beyond its original function of looking after the welfare interests of its members by embracing political aspirations.<sup>10</sup> There appeared to be no pressure from the mine owners to prevent the new miners being obliged to join a union, however, there was pressure from some unions. The South Wales coalfield refused to take any Bevin Boy who did not agree to become a member of the South Wales Federation. Anyone refusing was transferred to another area.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, (21.7.1943)

<sup>6</sup> Ebby Edwards, 7.10.1943, quoted in R. Arnot Page, *The Miners in Crisis and War*, (New York, 1968) p383

<sup>7</sup> M. Heinemann, *Britain's Coal – a study of the mining crisis*, prepared for the Labour Research Department, (London, 1944), p30

<sup>8</sup> Hansard, Vol. 396, (20.1.1944), col. 338

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Hansard [Lords], Vol. 130, (22.2.1944), col. 899

<sup>11</sup> R. H. Griffiths, "*The Forgotten Army*" *The Bevin Boys in the South Wales Coalfield 1943 – 1948*, MA thesis for the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, (March, 1995), p63

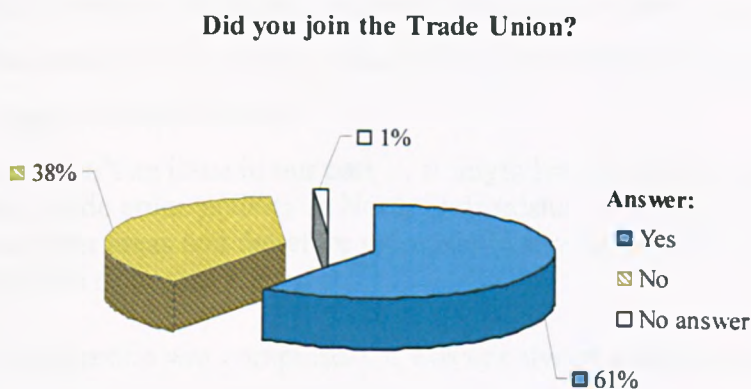
The debate continued after the formation of the NUM when questions were again raised in Parliament as to whether Bevin Boys were allowed, or entitled to belong to a miners' union.

'Bevin Boys are encouraged to become members of the union, and to play a full part in the union. In one of the hostels, they have even representation on the Miners' Lodge Committee, so that, on that point, there can be no doubt at all. They are fully welcomed into the miners' organisation.'<sup>12</sup>

In reality much seems to have depended on the district unions as each area entered into separate agreements with the coal owners and some district unions were stronger than others.<sup>13</sup> Eric G. noted that at Clifton it was not so much politics but a common cause that united the miners.

'Political consciousness is not marked towards any particular party, but there is the unity which binds them all together whenever they see any of their working lives threatened.'<sup>14</sup>

Table 7.1 shows that the majority of those Bevin Boys who replied to the questionnaire joined a union.



**Table 7.1 Results from questionnaire: Did you join the Trade Union?**

Of those joining the majority considered that they were forced to join (see Table 7.2), or if not exactly forced, they were subjected to some pressure.<sup>15</sup> Typical answers were: 'All the miners were in the union. It would have been foolish not to join but I

<sup>12</sup> Hansard, Vol. 414, (23.10.1945), col. 1936

<sup>13</sup> Harold Wilson, *New Deal for Coal*, (London, 1945), p129

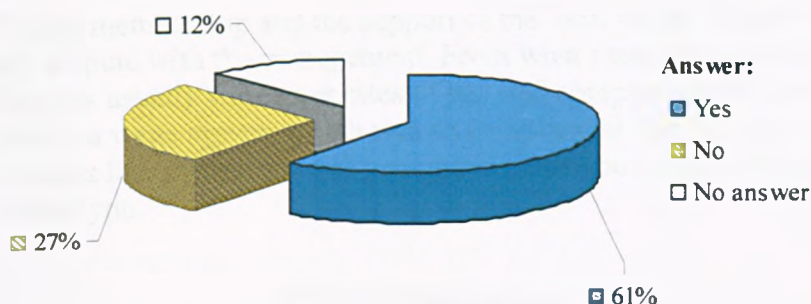
<sup>14</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Report (1.8.1944)

<sup>15</sup> Questionnaire



was not forced.’ ‘Life would be difficult if I did not join.’<sup>16</sup> ‘I was never really given any option about joining the union. One was told that was the done thing and none of us were sufficiently militant about it to object.’<sup>17</sup>

**If Trade Union member:  
Was membership forced on you?**



**Table 7.2 Results from questionnaire: If Trade Union member: Was membership forced on you?**

In some areas the miners, including the Bevin Boys, did not have a say in whether they joined the union or not as their subscription was deducted from their pay.<sup>18</sup>

Other areas were far more lenient.

‘It just wasn’t an issue in our part ... It might have been due to the fact that the level of trade union activity in North Staffordshire was so much lower than it was in other areas and therefore unionism in any aspect of its operation was hardly atop of people’s minds.’<sup>19</sup>

Even when membership was compulsory it was not always considered a bad thing.

‘You couldn’t work in the pit unless you was a union man. I couldn’t see anything wrong with that. Really it was a good thing. You had somebody to stand up for you.’<sup>20</sup>

Some, like Gerry G. were keen to join a union. ‘Being a theoretical socialist at the time, a schoolboy socialist I was quite eager to join.’<sup>21</sup> Philip C. had been involved

<sup>16</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>17</sup> Peter M., interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society, (17.8.1986)

<sup>18</sup> Hansard, Vol. 436, (1.5.1947), col. 2152

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

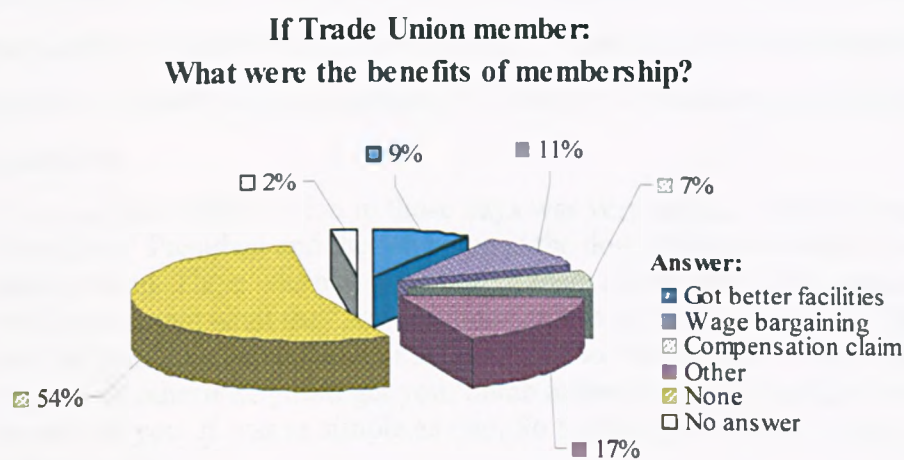
<sup>20</sup> Interview with Joe E., (5.3.2003)

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

with unions prior to call-up and for him it was also not an issue to join.<sup>22</sup> Others found a greater degree of acceptance and respect on the part of the regular miners if they did join the union. 'I think one of the things that possibly led to my early acceptance was the fact that I was very willing to join the unions straight away.'<sup>23</sup>

Those questioned on the benefits of union membership often mentioned welfare facilities, wage bargaining and compensation claims (see Table 7.3).

'Union membership and the support of the local lodge officials was vital in any dispute with the management. From what I can remember at Chislet, disputes usually were over rates of pay and compensation claims. I have never known a wage system which was so complicated, and if you were claiming for diseases like nystagmus and pneumoconiosis you needed to have the union behind you.'<sup>24</sup>



**Table 7.3 Results of questionnaire: If Trade Union member the benefits of membership**

However, some claimed there were no benefits.

'There seemed to be none. The coal allowance that miners received was denied to me. I had to contribute to a pension fund but received no benefits.'<sup>25</sup>

It was also suggested that the unions themselves would benefit most by recruiting Bevin Boys.

'In most coalmines it is virtually compulsory for the miner to join the union. I am wondering if this Fascist principle is to be applied to the conscript miners.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>24</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>25</sup> Questionnaire

Most of them will be temporary miners, so the unions will almost certainly make a profit out of the conscript.<sup>26</sup>

The miners often resented anyone who refused to join the union.

‘[S]ome resisted [joining the Union] and were resented for it because, the – “you toffee nosed buggers, you don’t know what you’re talking about. You’ve never worked in this industry. You didn’t suffer the privations that we suffered in the thirties”. It was very understandable but I think that did help my acceptance.’<sup>27</sup>

A letter sent to young conscripted miners commenced ‘Dear Friend’, but then went on to say that if they did not join their trade union ‘unfriendly action may be taken against them.’<sup>28</sup> Leslie W. was told that he had to join the union, to which he replied that he did not wish to join. ‘I had after all come from a staunch Conservative home: we had no time for unions.’ He was then told ‘the whole pit will come to a standstill if you do not comply. No one will work with you.’<sup>29</sup> Alan H. also felt intimidated by the union’s attitude. Whether this is a reaction in hindsight to the union problems of the 1980s is not clear.

‘You see the miners’ union in those days was very strong. Arthur Horner was the miners’ President and the tail wagged the dog. The miners were a very strong union. There was half a million of them at one time. They were telling the Government what they wanted more or less so they were strong. They had decided that they wanted us in the union and we had to join - or we didn’t have to join but otherwise you’d get your name on the risk board and they wouldn’t work with you. It was as simple as that. So for sixpence a week I wasn’t going to argue was I?’<sup>30</sup>

Some Bevin Boys feared that by joining a union it might be interpreted as an admission that they regarded themselves as part of coalmining, which was not the case for many of them.<sup>31</sup> They never thought of themselves as coal miners but rather as conscripts.

‘I think at certain parts of the country they did try to persuade Bevin Boys to join a trade union because really if you were in the mines as a career it would be compulsory to do so. But a lot of us said no, we’re conscripts under National Service, you know we’re not interested in joining trade unions.’<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, letter from Herbert Williams, (5.1.1944)

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>28</sup> Hansard, Vol. 404, (24.10.1944), col. 19

<sup>29</sup> M. and L. Wilson, *A Far Cry from a White Apron*, Queenspark Book 39, Brighton, 2000, p40

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Alan H., (17.7.2000)

<sup>31</sup> David Day, *The Bevin Boy*, (Oxford, 1995), p93

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

The Government was aware from the outset that the majority of Bevin Boys would not stay any longer in the mines than they had to.<sup>33</sup> '(T)he majority of trainees [Bevin Boys] are not working in the mines because they want to, but because they have to.'<sup>34</sup>

This was borne out by comments from the Bevin Boys:

'I don't want to stay in these bloody mines one day longer than I have absolutely got to. It's no life.' 'This job is a dead loss. The sooner it is over and done with the better.' 'They can keep the mines as far as I am concerned. They know what they can do with them'.<sup>35</sup>

Although Bevin Boys from middle class backgrounds often resisted the idea of unions, some were better able to make the adjustment than others.

'There were a number who came from middle class backgrounds, to whom unions were an anathema in their normal family lives and they resisted the idea of unions and first of all refused to join, but, of course, they had to join.'<sup>36</sup>

Tony C. came from a middle class conservative background. 'I became a socialist whilst I was in the mines .... I was a Labourite. So were all the miners.'<sup>37</sup> Gerry G. was also from a middle class background. 'I went down the mines as a sort of theoretical socialist but came back up as a really true red-blooded socialist having seen what capitalism at its very worst, most blatant, could do.'<sup>38</sup> He later worked as a Civil Servant and became a union activist; finally ending his career as the General Secretary of a union. He was not the only Bevin Boy to hold high office within the Trade Union movement after the war. Jack M. had been a socialist before working in the mines but his experiences led him to become a trade union official in the Civil Service Union.

'(T)he attitude of the management was so atrocious and the fact that I'd experienced that sort of attitude between management and their employees, which I wouldn't otherwise have encountered if I'd remained a telephone engineer for the whole of my early part of my employment, I would have been missing a vital experience, which I'm quite sure played a part in shaping my political outlook on my involvement in the Labour movement of the Trade Unions and at a later stage the Labour Party and so on.'<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Hansard, Vol. 398, (23.3.1944), col. 1015

<sup>34</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Special Report, (1.6.1944)

<sup>35</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Report, (1.8.1944)

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Gerry G. (26.3.2002)

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

The Bevin Boys came into contact, often for the first time, with a group of people who had always supported socialism, but there was a general shift to the left throughout the war, culminating in a Labour victory in the 1945 General Election. However, Fielding argues that this was due more to disillusionment with the Conservatives.<sup>40</sup>

The MFGB may have had bad experiences with Bevin Boys as is shown in the example given by one of the Union representatives:

‘Politically they are a very slow crowd. They always play safe. In my memory I can only remember one bright spot in their trade union activity. That was some months ago when one of the first Bevin Boys came to Nottingham. He had refused to go underground. But the Court without giving him a chance to change his mind, without giving him the chance to pay a fine, sent him to prison. We all struck on that issue, and within a couple of days all the pits in the locality were out on strike. We could have won his case for him, but he rather badly let us down, by saying that he would go underground on the second day of his imprisonment.’<sup>41</sup>

However, this might have just been the excuse the union needed for a confrontation with the local bosses and it appears to have been played out at a local level.

In some instances the Bevin Boys tried to set up unions of their own, thereby meeting with opposition from the miners’ unions, who were threatening stoppages in the pits if this situation continued.<sup>42</sup> At the beginning of December 1944 leaders of the MFGB met the Minister of Fuel and Power to ask that steps should be taken to prevent the Bevin Boys from forming an independent association.<sup>43</sup> There had, for example, been an attempt to set up a National Bevin Boys’ Welfare Association, but as Roland T. reports it soon ran into trouble.

‘We decided to join the organisation, Bevin Boys’ Welfare Association, founded by a Midlands school teacher, a Mr Isaacs, and duly received our badges, which we wore with pride. In order to recruit new members we decided to hold a meeting on the camp [hostel] but we were met with a veto by the manager, who told us he was acting on the orders of the Ministry of Labour and if we went ahead he would call the police and have us evicted.’<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> S. Fielding, ‘What Did “The People” Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election’, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 1992), p623

<sup>41</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Report, (14.10.1944)

<sup>42</sup> *The Times*, (21.11.1944)

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, (2,12,1944)

<sup>44</sup> Roland T., *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on personal diaries (undated)

The Association soon collapsed because of intimidation by the miners and the assurance that the Miners' Union would support the Bevin Boys when necessary.<sup>45</sup> Not all were convinced of this. 'I felt that we were indeed a separate entity and that our primary objective – release from coal mining – could never be shared by the miners.'<sup>46</sup> It also appears that the Bevin Boys were not involved in the ballot, held in October 1944, to decide on the formation of only one miners' union. 'I suppose they consider we are not real miners, and as we shall only be here for the war anyway, not in the real position to state any definite view or claim.'<sup>47</sup> The fact that they were not entitled to a full say in union decisions shows that they were not regarded as part of the mining fraternity, even if they were fully paid up members of the union.

Another organisation, The British Bevin Boys' Association was formed in 1946 with the main aim of speeding up demobilisation.<sup>48</sup> They also pressed for reinstatement into their old jobs.<sup>49</sup> The Association started by representing Bevin Boys in the Doncaster and Castleford areas of Yorkshire, although there were plans to extend their activities to all coalmining areas. However, it too soon caught the attention of the NUM (see Appendix UNI-I).

'If the Bevin Boys are simply asking for the same treatment on demobilisation as men in the Forces the union will give them every help. But if they are seeking to organise themselves into a trade union there will be the utmost opposition.'<sup>50</sup>

The reply from the Bevin Boys' Association was defiant.

'We have no fight with the miners. If the miners want a closed shop their best plan is to get rid of us. We do not want to quarrel with the miners. We only want our release.'<sup>51</sup>

'We have our own problems not shared by the miners and we feel we need our own organisation to deal with them. There was no intention of forming a breakaway union '<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Day, pp92-3

<sup>46</sup> Day, p93

<sup>47</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Report, (24.10.1944)

<sup>48</sup> Letter from M.W. Pearce to Ann Kneif, (29.10.2002)

<sup>49</sup> *Daily Express*, December 1946 (undated press cutting)

<sup>50</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, December 1946 (undated press cutting)

<sup>51</sup> *Daily Express*, (7.12.1946)

<sup>52</sup> *Daily Express*, December 1946 (undated press cutting)

Interest in the Association dwindled once demob numbers were issued and the Bevin Boys headed for home.<sup>53</sup> Jack M. claimed that there was never any need for a separate Bevin Boy Union.

‘Certainly there was no evidence in North Staffordshire of Bevin Boys getting together to form separate unions or of the union branch trying to obstruct the employment of Bevin Boys.’<sup>54</sup>

No doubt the attitude of the miners was an influence on some Bevin Boys. The union representative at Clifton Colliery had very definite left-wing socialist views.

‘For myself it is not the work at a pit which I object to, but the methods used. When I was asked some time ago to come on to the works production committee I agreed, but at the first meeting I stated that I was a socialist and would always remain one!!... I never agreed with war as a means to solving differences... Only revolution can sweep the capitalists from power...’<sup>55</sup>

Whatever their views, some Bevin Boys found that in spite of paying their union dues they were being excluded from participation. Dave W. agreed that the Kent Union was very active.<sup>56</sup> However, the Bevin Boys were not always made aware of union meetings or activities.

‘I was never ever aware of any union activities. I knew meetings did take place at Hersden [Kent], which was really the centre of the mining population of the colliery [Chislet] but I never received any personal information inviting me to meetings.’<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps Jack M. was more forceful.

‘Some people have suggested I understand that some of the Bevin Boys resented being members of the union but that wasn’t my experience. They were all very happy, as I was, to join the union. Not many of them were active but I insisted on going to the meetings.’<sup>58</sup>

The miners required the backing of the union when calling a strike. The history of strikes in the coalmining industry shows a strong militancy on the part of the miners. They always thought that they were given a bad deal. During the General Strike of 1926 the majority of workers in other industries returned to work after nine days but

---

<sup>53</sup> Letter from M.W. Pearce to Ann Kneif, (29.10.2002)

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>55</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Harold Church union representative, attitude to pit, (13.1.45)

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Dave W., (2.10.2002)

<sup>57</sup> Peter M., interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society, (17.8.1986)

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

the miners held out. When they refused to return to the pits and accept a reduction in wages, the coalmine owners issued lock-out notices. Anyone trying to work was soon stopped by the union. Work was not resumed until nearly six months later.<sup>59</sup> Strikes on a smaller scale continued throughout the 1930s, but by then the miners were not in a good bargaining position as there were too many of them chasing too few jobs.

During the war limitations were placed on the right to strike, which had been laid down by the 'Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order' of 1940. No strike could take place unless elaborate provisions were taken and three weeks notice was given. This made virtually all strikes illegal.<sup>60</sup> However, at a time when the country needed as many workers as possible to build up supplies for the war effort and patriotism was at an all time high, the trade unions were still fighting a battle with management for better wages and conditions. They were in a strong position and as a result strikes were not infrequent. In 1943 nearly half of all stoppages reported were in the mining industry.<sup>61</sup>

'Because their lot has been such a bad one in the past, because the mining occupation has been regarded so low, they have acquired an inferiority complex, which in part perhaps explains their great bitterness and tendency to rash actions.'<sup>62</sup>

Stoppages were not always in agreement with all the workers but it was the local unions that made the decisions.

'I don't think the majority want strikes in fact I know they don't. The men put up with a lot here and if there is trouble it is usually a pretty genuine grievance. Strikes cost money you know and if you haven't any money put by you don't want to strike do you?'<sup>63</sup>

The number of stoppages rose each year throughout the war as can be seen in Table 7.4 below.

---

<sup>59</sup> I.J. Harding, *The Kent Miner: 1915 – 1926. A Social History of the Kent Mining Community – its Organisation, Leadership and Militancy*, unpublished extended essay for UKC, (March 1971)

<sup>60</sup> Mass-Observation, *People in Production*, (Middlesex, 1942), p246

<sup>61</sup> *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, 'Strikes and Lockouts in 1943', (May 1944), p76

<sup>62</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Report (1.8.1944)

<sup>63</sup> M-O A: Report 3007, Attitudes to the nationalisation of coal – Doncaster area, (1948)



Year	No. of stoppages	*No. of workers involved	No. of working days lost through stoppages	Est. loss of output through strikes (tons) <sup>64</sup>
1941	463	153,000	334,000	341,900
1942	526	252,000	840,000	833,200
1943	843	294,000	890,000	1,090,700

\* Some workers were involved in more than 1 stoppage and have, therefore, been counted more than once.

**Table 7.4 No. of stoppages, number of workers involved, days and output lost through stoppages<sup>65</sup>**

The figures rose even more sharply in 1944 when an estimated loss of production for that year was 3,001,700 tons, a higher loss than the total for the previous four years.<sup>66</sup> Most of this loss can be attributed to the first quarter of the year when strikes had followed the announcement of piece rates suggested by the Porter Tribunal (see chapter 6, 'wages'). At the meeting of the executive committee of the MFGB in April 1944 Bevin pointed out the damage that would be done to the standing and influence of trade unionism if unions were to impede the war effort. It was the district unions that had instigated the strikes and it was left to the MFGB to persuade them that to continue was not in the best interests of trade unionism.<sup>67</sup> It became another reason for pushing for a national union.

As an example, a strike by miners occurred in January 1942 at Betteshanger in Kent. Nearly 2,000 men came out on strike on a question of district wage rates. The miners alleged a breach of a wage agreement with the management.<sup>68</sup> All those involved were summoned under the Defence Regulations for 'unlawfully taking part in a strike in connection with a trade dispute not reported to the Minister of Labour and National Service.' The colliery company sued the miners for damages for breach of contract.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Figures for estimated loss of output through strikes from H. Wilson, p121

<sup>65</sup> This table has been put together from various sources. Figures for 1941 from *Mass-Observation, People in Production*, p248 and for 1942 and 1943 from *Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (May 1944), p76

<sup>66</sup> H. Wilson, p121

<sup>67</sup> *The Times*, (8.4.1944)

<sup>68</sup> *Tuesday Express* (local paper for Kent), (13.1.1942)

<sup>69</sup> *Tuesday Express*, (20.1.1942)

It proved impossible to jail everyone involved or even collect the fines.<sup>70</sup> The Government reaction was to jail three of the union officials as an example to the rest of the miners, but in the end the Government were forced to back down and the men were released.<sup>71</sup>

Bevin Boys entering the industry would be only too well aware of the force that could be exerted on the Government by the threat of a strike. Although, as we have seen, it had proved difficult for the Bevin Boys to form their own union, it did not stop them from taking concerted action when they felt it was necessary. This became apparent to the Government the day after the first conscripted Bevin Boys started at the training centres in January 1944. There were reports in the national press of demands by Bevin Boys for 24 shillings a week subsistence allowance and the threat of strike action if their demands were not met. Several days later the *Daily Mirror* reported on 130 Bevin Boys who had walked out of the Askern Training Centre and the attitude of the union chief who felt that they were being pampered.

‘It is making a laughing stock of the industry and giving the boys an exaggerated idea of their own importance. The public will begin to think they are the only men in the mines.’<sup>72</sup>

Bevin was quick to promise a review of the situation and within days the Porter Tribunal had worked out a new deal, which increased the national minimum wage for all miners. This action had shown the Bevin Boys that they could achieve results by strike action if they stuck together.

‘It appears that there (Shrewsbury area) the Bevin Boys have got really organised. Whenever one is affected by an injustice the rest stand-up and take action. Many of the boys take off a long weekend (Friday to Monday) in order to travel home, and a fortnight ago a demand was sent into the management asking that Bevin Boys should not have to work on Saturdays. This demand the management flatly turned down, so the conscripts took the matter into their own hands by just refusing to come into work on a Saturday, which policy they are now carrying out.’<sup>73</sup>

The first Christmas in the mines also caused consternation among the Bevin Boys, as they were unhappy when they had learnt that they were entitled to only one day, Christmas Day, as holiday. For many this meant that they would not be able to get

---

<sup>70</sup> *The World at War*, Part 3 ‘Home Fires’, Thames Television, 1974

<sup>71</sup> *Tuesday Express*, (3.2.1942)

<sup>72</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (25.1.1944)

<sup>73</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Mine Opinions, (18.7.1944)

home for Christmas. In some pits there was an outcry and the Bevin Boys made united demands on the management.

'Bevin Boys are not fully organised. But I have heard that 200 Bevin Boys in Durham have sent in for 10 days' holiday at Christmas. The management have had to give it to them. ... 232 out of 250 stuck together on that issue. They all signed a joint ultimatum. They won their case. The Government could do nothing about it.'<sup>74</sup>

The Bevin Boys were, however, a minority of the workforce in the mines and although they generally participated in union strike action, they were not experienced or organised enough to take matters into their own hands. Many found themselves in pits with very few other Bevin Boys.

The miners always tried to get recognition for a just wage and decent welfare facilities through the unions, and strikes were often the way of achieving this. In order to prevent such struggles in the future, they saw the only alternative as nationalisation.<sup>75</sup> Since the First World War the question of nationalisation was permanently on the agenda at union conferences but it was always defeated because of the opposition of the mine owners.<sup>76</sup> During the 1930s there were over 1400 separate colliery companies. Many were small and inefficient and were therefore on the brink of closure.<sup>77</sup> During the war 110 collieries under threat were given financial assistance to help them stay open under the Necessitous Undertakings Scheme.<sup>78</sup> Nationalisation was not possible under the coalition Government, especially as there was a Conservative majority.<sup>79</sup> However, it was felt by the unions that, if a Labour Government could be returned after the war, nationalisation would eliminate the position of the miner being tied to an employer and give post-war security to the industry.<sup>80</sup> 'The effect of public ownership of the mines is that it at once removes the fear of unemployment and oppression.'<sup>81</sup> It was also seen as a way of developing the

---

<sup>74</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B Mine Survey: a further report upon Clifton Colliery and the general Nottingham situation, (13.12.1944)

<sup>75</sup> Horner, (1960), p90

<sup>76</sup> R. Page Arnot, p105

<sup>77</sup> Martin Pugh, *State and Society – A social and political history of Britain 1970 – 1997*, (London 1999)

<sup>78</sup> Hansard, Vol. 393, (10.11.1943), col. 1163

<sup>79</sup> H. Wilson, p1

<sup>80</sup> Arthur Horner, 'TUC' in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25, October 1943, p302

<sup>81</sup> Hansard, Vol. 427, (16.10.1946), col. 967

industry and improving technical efficiency.<sup>82</sup> '(T)he most advanced faces were still only using chain cutters, first introduced from America in 1916, and pan belt conveyors. Most coal was still shot fired and loaded by hand.'<sup>83</sup> After the General Election of 1945 the new Labour Government made nationalisation of the mines a top priority. The Reid Technical Committee had published a report early in 1945.

'Recommendations: -

- On technical grounds alone, there was a strong case for a 5-day week of 8-hour shifts for underground workers.
- All large undertakings should employ full time planning staff.
- Safety recommendations of the Royal Commission on Safety in Coal Mines should be implemented.
- Rights of mineworker should be accompanied by his recognition of certain duties.
- National plan needed for intelligent use of the limited resources of coal in the country.
- National programme of boring for coal needed quickly.
- Reorganisation should be based on coalfields not individual mines.
- National scheme needed for recruiting mining engineers.'<sup>84</sup>

The Committee concluded that the system of coalfield ownership meant that there were too many mines, which led to inadequate conservation of coal resources, antiquated machinery compared to the rest of Europe, no proper training programme, poor health and safety standards and a lack of freedom for mining engineers.<sup>85</sup>

The cost of reorganising the industry was prohibitive for the mine owners and therefore a national plan was needed.<sup>86</sup> The Government started to draw up plans for nationalisation based on the recommendations of the Reid Committee. The NUM was given the responsibility of keeping the miners in check. From then on the Union was keen to stop any unnecessary strikes and limit absenteeism for fear that talks with the Government would be jeopardised. In response to the Reid Report the NUM drew up a Miner's Charter and their demands were presented in January 1946. Top of the

---

<sup>82</sup> G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate, *The Common People 1746 – 1946*, (London, 1963), p672

<sup>83</sup> Peter Heap, 'Coal Comes Full Circle' in *Energy World*, No. 225 (February 1995), p14

<sup>84</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, Newbegin, E.V., *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 – 1945*, (October 1946), appendix XX

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> *The Times*, (26.6.1945)

agenda was a request for rapid modernisation, a guaranteed weekly wage and a five-day week with no reduction in pay.<sup>87</sup>

Vesting Day was 1<sup>st</sup> January 1947 but there were no great celebrations to mark the arrival of a nationalised coal industry. Emanuel Shinwell, Minister of Fuel and Power, portrayed as the father figure of the National Coal Board, is seen appeasing the miners as the cartoon below demonstrates.



Figure 7.1 Cartoon appearing in Daily Mail, (2.1.1947)<sup>88</sup>

Many of the Bevin Boys were still working in the mines at the time of the changeover. They noted that nationalisation had little effect on their everyday lives.

<sup>87</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913–1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p685

<sup>88</sup> UKC Cartoon Library, NEB0542, *Daily Mail*, (2.1.1947)

‘There was not any noticeable ceremony to mark the transfer of the mines into public ownership. The long time aspirations of the miners for their industry to be nationalised had been realised, but it was business as usual at Brookhill Colliery.’<sup>89</sup>

‘I can remember nationalisation. I can remember going the first day, when the notice was up, that this colliery is now owned by the people, for the people and we all thought that was a marvellous day, although it didn’t make any difference either to our pay or the fact we were going to work the same day.’<sup>90</sup>

‘But work on Monday morning was no different from usual. The gaffers, the day’s routine, the underground life were all unaltered; though the colliery had changed ownership it still functioned the same way as before.’<sup>91</sup>

‘At the beginning the effect was nothing at all, for almost everyone continued to work as usual. All that really changed was the top person you were working for: it was now the Coal Board. The mine manager was the same and each and everyone did roughly the same work as before.’<sup>92</sup>

Many had expected immediate changes and were disappointed when that did not happen. Asked if nationalisation made any difference Gerry G. said: ‘The managers still managed and the workers still grumbled and conditions were still bad.’<sup>93</sup> One of the immediate problems after nationalisation had been that there were no qualified miners to take on the control of the mines leaving the old managers in office, although they had often been the cause of friction with the miners in the past.<sup>94</sup>

‘Chislet at that time did not have the political ambitions of their more militant neighbours. The consensus of the Chislet men was that while the name changed the masters did not.’<sup>95</sup>

The people had voted the Labour Party into power with a resounding majority on the back of the nationalisation bandwagon. ‘Labour’s most “extreme” intentions were accepted as the will of the people.’<sup>96</sup> However, bureaucracy and a coal industry weakened by war could do little to help in the short term.

---

<sup>89</sup> Roland T.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with John B., (18.9.2002)

<sup>91</sup> Day, p131

<sup>92</sup> M. and L. Wilson, p66

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>94</sup> B. Jones & C. Williams (Eds.), *With Dust Still in his Throat: A.B.L. Coombes Anthology*, (Cardiff, 1999), p59

<sup>95</sup> R. Llewellyn, *Hersden: Chislet Colliery Village*, (Sturry, Kent, 2003), p62

<sup>96</sup> A. Calder, *The People’s War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969), p583

Some did see improvements after a time. Fred C. was issued with an electric cap lamp, which until then had been the prerogative of the deputies. Conveyor belts and coal cutting machinery were also installed.<sup>97</sup> However, the Bevin Boys were nearing the end of their time in the mines and for them any improvements were too late.

The unions can best be summed up by the following comment.

'Unions are good and bad. Sometimes they rightly interfere but as in most things you find slackers but the manager can't sack them in the pits - he would have the Union after him.'<sup>98</sup>

Full employment during the war led to a third increase in trade union membership generally between 1938 and 1943 with those involved in war industries registering the largest increases.<sup>99</sup> Unions in the mining industry were well supported by the workers. Six out of every seven miners were union members. This compares with only two in five for other industries.<sup>100</sup> This meant that the miners were a strong body. Miners thought of themselves as one consolidated group but the Bevin Boys were, in the main, not part of this group. They were there for a limited duration and would never really belong. Individually some did find acceptance but as a group they were outsiders. Unlike other wartime industries, where the employees had been assimilated into the workforce, the Bevin Boys never thought of themselves as miners and because of this their attitude to the unions was different to that of other wartime workers. The war had made many people more politically aware, not just within the coalmining industry, hence the Labour win in the 1945 election. The Bevin Boys were directed to the mines at a period of great unrest within the industry. Many had no previous experience of trade unions and were unhappy at the prospect of being forced to join, as they saw no benefits. Several of those interviewed, who came from middle-class backgrounds had been involved in left-wing politics before entering the mines. They had their socialist beliefs strengthened by seeing first hand how the working-class miners lived and worked. It allowed others, who had never thought about it before, to engage in politics. It enabled them to come into contact with people outside their own class and culture and to realise the conditions under which the miners were forced to live and work. For some it was an experience that altered their political

---

<sup>97</sup> Fred C., letter to Ann Kneif, October 2002

<sup>98</sup> M-O A: Report 3007, Attitudes to the nationalisation of coal – Doncaster area, (1948)

<sup>99</sup> Calder, p394

<sup>100</sup> Heinemann, p135

allegiance and changed their whole outlook on life. The rise in trade union membership continued after the war.<sup>101</sup> Due to their links with the Labour Party, the trade unions increased their political and economic power in the immediate post-war period.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> S. Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy 1914 - 1950*, (London, 1962), p392

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p313



## Chapter 8

### Absenteeism

The coal industry was always prone to absenteeism. Involuntary absenteeism, which included accidents and work related illnesses, such as silicosis, was just as much a problem as voluntary absenteeism, where a miner simply stayed away from work without a satisfactory explanation. Absenteeism had an important effect on production. Just a few workers missing the shift could considerably add to this problem. For example, a lack of miners on the coalface could lead to the haulage workers standing around idle. Production could also be affected by reasons outside the power of the miners: trade disputes, lack of supplies, breakdown of machinery and recognised holidays.<sup>1</sup> These were sometimes included when presenting statistics for absenteeism, as it was the coalmine owners who supplied the figures.<sup>2</sup> The output fell with increased absenteeism. In 1939 it was 1.14 tons per man shift, falling to 1.03 tons by 1943 and only 1.0 ton by the end of the war (see Appendix ABS-I). However, a direct comparison between pre-war and wartime absenteeism and production can be somewhat misleading. Before the war many pits were not working at full capacity and miners sometimes had two or three days without work, allowing them to rest. During the war production was at an all time high and the miners were getting no time off. Consequently they often suffered from fatigue.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for absenteeism was a cause for much debate in Parliament, where it was noted that 'a certain class which has no right to do so are prone to criticise the miners.' In Parliament attention was drawn to a cartoon in the *Daily Herald* (Figure 8.1), where 'that class was well portrayed'.<sup>4</sup> There was certainly a lot of animosity between the miners and the coalmine owners.

---

<sup>1</sup> W.H.B. Court, *Coal*, (London, 1951), p310

<sup>2</sup> H. Wilson, *New Deal for Coal*, (London, 1945), p54

<sup>3</sup> Hansard, Vol. 378, (17.3.1942), col. 1370

<sup>4</sup> Hansard, Vol. 378, (17.3.1942), col. 1369



Figure 8.1 Cartoon appearing in the Daily Herald (13.3.1942)<sup>5</sup>

It was suggested that, although many had a genuine reason for being absent, more attention should be paid to those who had no excuse. The General Secretary of the Mineworkers' Federation, Mr Ebby Edwards, had the following to say in a BBC broadcast, which shows that the union was also against voluntary absenteeism, especially during the war.

'The only men who should be penalised are those proved to be deliberately idle when they could have been at work. These men are sabotaging the war effort and should be subject to the full rigour of the law. The great mass of the miners are assisting in the war effort as any other body of workers. Compared job for job, their achievement is remarkable. The small percentage of deliberate idlers should not be allowed to besmirch the character and integrity of the mass. In a cycle of modern coal production the idle days of the deliberate absentee affect the production of those at work out of all proportion to their number. They must be dealt with.'<sup>6</sup>

Once the Essential Work Order was applied to the coalmining industry in 1941 and as the number of shifts per week was increased in an effort to increase production, so absenteeism also rose, thus becoming a vicious circle. The more work forced upon a miner, the more likely he was to take time off due to fatigue. In spite of this increase

<sup>5</sup> *Daily Herald*, (13.3.1942)

<sup>6</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, Broadcast by Mr Ebby Edwards M.P., A call to the mining industry on the urgent need for coal, (19.10.1941)

in the number of possible shifts, the average number of shifts worked per miner per week remained almost the same (5.14 in 1939 and 5.13 in 1943).<sup>7</sup> The percentage of shifts lost which could have been worked rose from 6.9 percent in 1939 to 10.4 percent in 1942 and 12.4 percent in 1943.<sup>8</sup> The Essential Work Order made it far easier to flaunt the rules as the miner could only be sacked from his job for gross misconduct. Amendments had been made to the Order in 1942, which made it an immediate offence to be absent from work without a reasonable excuse, persistently late for work, failure to comply with a lawful and reasonable order and to impede production and the work of the pit. Regional Investigation Officers were empowered to recommend prosecution.<sup>9</sup> However, the usual action, at least until mid 1943, was to issue a warning.<sup>10</sup> The Ministry of Labour and National Service was accused by the Minister of Fuel and Power of failing to deal firmly with absentees and not prosecuting when necessary.<sup>11</sup> This meant that there was no real deterrent to taking days off. From August 1943 there was an increase in the numbers prosecuted for absenteeism (see Appendix ABS-III), which led to strained relations between the coalmine owners and employees. The following report comes from the *Tribune*, a left-wing newspaper.

‘At the time of writing we learn of the 10,000 miners on strike in Nottinghamshire against a sentence of one month’s imprisonment imposed on a lad of 18 years for his refusal to work in the pit. Last week, in this place, we told our readers to expect an outbreak of strikes in the coal-mining industry if the court policy of the Government continues. This strike of the 10,000 is a new beginning. More can follow and on a variety of issues, and thus Mr Bevin learns that the big stick is no substitute for an enlightened and humane policy.’<sup>12</sup>

The Kent Coal Owners Association carried out an independent survey in the Kent coalfields over a seven-week period ending 12<sup>th</sup> November 1942. The results are shown in Appendix ABS-IV. These figures are higher than for the rest of the country as it should be borne in mind that the Kent miners were well known for their

---

<sup>7</sup> ‘Employment, output, wages etc. in the coalmining industry, 1936-1943’, in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, May 1944), p75

<sup>8</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, E.V. Newbegin, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 – 1945*, (October 1946), p31

<sup>9</sup> ‘Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) (Amendment) Order, 1942’, in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, September 1942), p160

<sup>10</sup> See Appendix ABS-II and Appendix ABS-III

<sup>11</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, Newbegin, p31

<sup>12</sup> *Tribune*, (17.9.1943), Interestingly *The Times* reported that 15,000 miners were on strike and that 50,000 tons of coal were lost (*Times*, 17.9.1943)

militancy and at the beginning of 1942 were involved in a strike involving nearly 2,000 miners. However, the percentages given for absenteeism by day of week correspond to the general trend, that is Monday, Friday and Saturday were the days when shifts were most likely to be lost.<sup>13</sup> Payday was on Friday and the miners had money in their pockets to spend on drink at the local pub or club. The age group of those most likely to be involved in absenteeism are also consistent with the national figures, with the most prominent being the under 30s.

Appendix ABS-II shows a record of investigation over a 45-week period of those cases of absenteeism dealt with in the Northern 'B' region (Durham). The figures are presented in a different manner to those of Kent but it does show that, like Kent, the majority of absentees were under 40. Supple gives an example of South Wales, where the level of absenteeism among workers under 31 was double that of those over 40.<sup>14</sup> This can be accounted for in that the younger miners especially would be less likely to have a family to support. The majority of cases dealt with under the amendment to the Essential Work Order were because of absenteeism (79.9 percent). 38.3 percent of all cases were of claiming sickness but failing to support this with a medical certificate.<sup>15</sup> By August 1943 a new scheme was implemented whereby employers could fine workers for absenteeism. The money taken in fines was put aside for charity. If a miner then worked regularly for a given length of time the money was refunded.<sup>16</sup> Appendix ABS-III shows figures for a 19-week period in the same area (Durham), once the new procedure had been agreed. Those being given a warning fell dramatically to be replaced by those being given a fine.<sup>17</sup>

In October 1943, Churchill, speaking in a debate on the coalmining situation, thought that "short absenteeism" could often be attributed to changes in the diet of the miners. They were not getting enough of the right sort of food for hard manual labour. It was estimated that a miner required 4,600 calories per 8-hour day or twice as much as a

---

<sup>13</sup> 'Labour in the coalmining industry', in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, March, 1942), p59

<sup>14</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4*, (Oxford, 1987), p566

<sup>15</sup> PRO POWE 16/77, Ministry of Fuel and Power Northern 'B' Region Record of Investigation. Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943, Period 25 weeks, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1942 to 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1943

<sup>16</sup> D Agnew, *Bevin Boy*, (London, 1947), p42

<sup>17</sup> PRO POWE 16/77, Northern 'B' Region, Period 19 weeks, 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1943 to 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1943

sedentary worker.<sup>18</sup> He felt that the miners were under strain because their average age had increased and they did not get the holidays and leisure time required by men in such arduous work. During the war, in order to stockpile for the war effort, they were expected to work harder than ever before, including during the summertime, which had traditionally been a time of lower production.<sup>19</sup> In some pits the one-week August holiday was stopped because of the need for coal.<sup>20</sup> Fatigue and war weariness also played a part in producing a low morale among the miners. On hearing that the Minister of Fuel and Power had complained that absenteeism had increased and that the coal production was at a serious level, the following comment was heard from a miner:

‘ I’d like to see that bastard come here. I’d tell him a thing or two. It’s not the workers who are to blame - it’s the managements which are at fault. They blame us for not getting the coal off. We’re too dead tired, and damned exhausted after four years of war to do the work. We’ve just got to have a day off now and then.’<sup>21</sup>

However, this was not specific to the mining industry. Morale could be low in all sections of war work, including the Forces. French maintains that soldiers were also liable to desert when under stress. Unlike the First World War, where soldiers faced the death penalty, the deserter in the Second World War could expect a prison sentence, which in some cases was preferable to fighting.<sup>22</sup> In the same manner the Bevin Boy sometimes found prison the lesser of the two evils.

The miners could be superstitious. Danger was ever present and they lived in closed communities where accidents were an everyday occurrence.

‘You’d never know what’s going to happen. In fact there was a kind of folklore that life in the pit was so unpredictable that almost for certain if you had some occasion or event to go to most miners – and this is going for the older men particularly, they almost knew something would happen to them in the pit the night before, or the shift before. So almost as a matter of course they avoided going into work on the day or night before they were due to go say to a wedding or holiday or whatever. It was so unpredictable that you

---

<sup>18</sup> M. Heinemann, *Britain’s Coal – a study of the mining crisis*, prepared for the Labour Research Department, (London, 1944), p81

<sup>19</sup> Hansard Vol. 392, (13.10.1943), col. 926

<sup>20</sup> Jones, B. and Williams, C. (eds) *With Dust Still in His Throat – A.B.L. Coombe Anthology*, (Cardiff, 1999), p187

<sup>21</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further report, (4.10.1944)

<sup>22</sup> D. French ‘Discipline and the Death Penalty in the British Army in the War against Germany in the Second World War’ in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 33, Issue 4 (October, 1998), p535

almost had you're fingers crossed the moment that you went down into the pit.'<sup>23</sup>

Geoff B. gave an example of superstition. When the time was fast approaching for his demob, the miners tried to persuade him not to tempt fate by working the last few days, but he wanted to take home a full pay packet. 'When it came to the last week, they all refused to have me on the coalface and I was found a job on haulage.'<sup>24</sup>

As has been seen in a previous chapter, wages increased during the war so that by the end of 1943 the coal industry was paying the miners a decent wage. However, as wages increased, so did absenteeism. The miners were used to a low income. As long as they had enough money to pay for essentials they were not prepared to put in more effort. There was, in any case, nothing to spend the extra money on.<sup>25</sup> It was suggested in Parliament that there should be a better distribution of consumer goods to mining areas.

'But if it can be made possible for the miners' wives to buy new curtains, new linoleum, new kitchen things, new dresses for themselves and new suits for the miners, absenteeism would go down with a bang.'<sup>26</sup>

However this was a policy that appears never to have been implemented.

There was always the worry that once the war was over the situation of unemployment and short working would return.

'The men have got a grievance. It's the chief reason for absenteeism. They think it serves us right for the years when they had to work short time. ... The reaction of the miner is natural and inevitable, although he probably does not clearly understand it himself and may even feel a little ashamed when he does take a day in the sunshine. At the back of his mind there is always that thought that there is no guarantee, in spite of the Greene award and the guaranteed week, but the same conditions will not recover as soon as the present national emergency has passed; that state of living in dread of unemployment, of once more being reduced to the new status of the cost of production, instead of being a partner in a united effort as he is for the duration; the return of conditions which breeds more resentment through fear of losing his job if he grumbles or complains.'<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>24</sup> Geoff B. typewritten notes (undated)

<sup>25</sup> Court, (1951), p330

<sup>26</sup> Hansard, Vol. 427, (16.10.1946), col. 980

<sup>27</sup> *New Statesman*, (14.8.1943)

Miners greatly resented having to pay income tax and as their wages increased so did the tax. Especially younger miners, often with a lower tax relief because they had no dependents, objected to the amount deducted from their pay packet, which could often be as much as 50 percent.<sup>28</sup> 'Among such workers the five-day week has become a habit as a means of reducing the tax to be paid.'<sup>29</sup>

'I tell you that in the last three months I have been away from work 26 times. I just haven't been attending regularly because I have had too much income tax to pay, and I don't get sufficient food to carry on. (This opinion is typical of many. It is quite widely held view in the mines that no personal advantage can be gained from working overtime. Many have at least a day a fortnight off, and beside the usual reasons of tiredness and overworking there is this important one that you can earn almost as much from a five shift week as a six shift).'<sup>30</sup>

The Bevin Boys joined an industry that was already renowned for a bad record on the number of working days lost. The Government had brought into the industry a group of young men from all walks of life, who in many cases just did not want to be there so they were often uncooperative. They were bound to be more susceptible to absenteeism than the regular miner.<sup>31</sup>

'I must say this I don't think that I have spent a whole week underground yet. I get home to London as often as I can. I see to that. The people at home mean much more than the mines do to me. I don't like the job anyway. (This attitude is typical. Nearly every Bevin Boy or service volunteer regularly takes off the day usually Saturday when he's going home. The question of what their absence may possibly mean to the war effort is rarely mentioned. The home, the family, the girlfriend, personal welfare are first priority.)'<sup>32</sup>

In spite of the threat of prison some Bevin Boys did not bother to turn up at the training centre and others were quick to abscond. Repeated absenteeism meant a court summons (see Appendix ABS-V). One Bevin Boy, who was summoned by a court for failing to undertake training in the mines, caused a problem for the magistrate who sympathised with the fact that he had been very keen to join the RAF. 'He is a fine young man with an excellent character and if the conviction can be avoided it should.'<sup>33</sup> Many magistrates were loath to give boys, who had been willing to fight for

---

<sup>28</sup> Hansard, Vol. 427, (16.10.1946), col. 979

<sup>29</sup> *The Times*, (11.10.1944)

<sup>30</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines opinions, (18.8.1944)

<sup>31</sup> A. Calder, *The People's War - Britain 1939 - 1945*, (London, 1969), p439

<sup>32</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines opinions, (21.8.1944)

<sup>33</sup> *Evening News*, (17.5.1944)

their country, a criminal record. By the end of 1944, of nearly 16,000 balloted men, 143 had been sentenced for not taking up work or leaving without permission.<sup>34</sup>

Eric G. worked at Clifton, a state controlled mine. The general impression there was that state controlled mines were far more lenient than those that were privately owned.

‘You don’t want to go absenting yourself too much from the pit or else you will find yourself suddenly up before court with a fine to pay. They say that it is all right to have one day off a fortnight - but no more. Still I do believe that comparatively speaking they are quite lenient here.’<sup>35</sup>

The Fuel Absentee Officer at Clifton Colliery appears to have been a very lenient and well-liked person and it might have been his personality rather than the fact that it was a state owned mine.

‘I went in expecting to find some tough and harsh person, some old bugger I could easily answer back and tell him what I thought of him. But I was disappointed because he turned out to be a nice person who was intelligent - and we had a long conversation. He told me the usual story that how much better off I was than in the army, but I pointed out that I went along home because my mother was ill and needed looking after. He then said that I would have to be warned, and told me his side of the case. I told him mine, and I think that we both finished feeling that we had the upper hand. I shall of course continue to take a day off when I feel like it.’<sup>36</sup>

‘You’ll find that he is quite a nice bloke to get on with. You will not be in the office two minutes. He just warns you that is all. There is nothing to worry about. I have been here about half-a-dozen times and he hasn’t done anything yet. I have told him straight that I’m a married man, and that I feel like a day at home now and then. I talk to him nice like, and he talks to me nice. He’s very easy to get on with. Of course I think that if a fellow goes in rough and bullying he could be rough too and would put them on the dot, fine them, straight away.’<sup>37</sup>

There were other means of getting a day off work without getting into trouble. The miners were always annoyed when, for no fault of their own, coal production in their shift came to a standstill because of equipment failure. They would be unable to earn much money if the fault could not be quickly rectified. Bevin, therefore, started a scheme, whereby the miners were guaranteed a fixed shift payment when this

---

<sup>34</sup> Hansard, Vol. 406, (14.12.1944), col. 1328

<sup>35</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines opinions, (15.8.1944)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., (14.11.1944)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., (14.11.1944)



happened. This was known in the industry as a 'Bevin'. 'The scheme should have been a good one but Bevin had not reckoned with its vulnerability to abuse.'<sup>38</sup> George A. described how an endless cable attached to them pulled the coal tubs.

'When all were at their stations the cable would start moving. ... this was the danger point as the cable took up the slack and started whipping up and down. It turned out that someone had unhooked the chain from the back of a tub and wound it around a pit prop, pulling it out of the wall and the roof caving in. This was a favourite. Another incident quite close to me, a chain had been hooked to an electric power cable, dragging it out of a junction box. I could see the flashes as the bare cable whipped around.'<sup>39</sup>

George A. was working in the New Monckton pit near Barnsley. There were continued problems with sabotage at this pit and the matter had been discussed in Parliament. A Court case had resulted in a fine of 20s for damages and 30s costs.<sup>40</sup>

'There were so many opportunities for sabotage and there were those ready and willing to carry it out. I had to go along with it – if I had informed I don't think I would be here telling you. It was not that they were bad lads; it was their ingenuity in spotting a loophole and exploiting it.'<sup>41</sup>

As with the regular miners the rate of absenteeism appeared to be more general on particular days and on certain shifts. Questions were asked in Parliament on whether absenteeism was more noticeable on any particular day. Gwilym Lloyd George replied that statistics showed the rate of voluntary absenteeism to be greatest on Mondays, including the Sunday night shift and on Saturdays.<sup>42</sup>

'Particularly this absenteeism affected the afternoon and night workers. Very few miners like to work on afternoons because it means bed and work with very little chance for recreation, i.e. the pub, the cinema, women. Consequently since they are paid double wages for Saturday afternoon shift, they can well afford to take off a day in the middle of the week. Night workers don't get paid any double shifts, but few like to come to work on a Sunday night so many are not now starting their week until Monday night.'<sup>43</sup>

Those Bevin Boys replying to the questionnaire were also aware of a higher rate of absenteeism on Monday. 'There was always a shortage of workers on Monday morning, after the weekend.' However, some claimed that absenteeism was higher

---

<sup>38</sup> Norman B. e-mails to Ann Kneif, (September 2002)

<sup>39</sup> George A. e-mail to Ann Kneif, (October 2002)

<sup>40</sup> Hansard, Vol. 378, (17.3.1942), col. 1386

<sup>41</sup> Norman B.

<sup>42</sup> Hansard, Vol. 404, (24.10.1944), col. 20

<sup>43</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines report, (1945)

among the face workers than among the Bevin Boys. 'A coal hewer, whose pay was around £20 compared to mine of £3, would have the Monday off.'<sup>44</sup>

In response to a request from the National Conciliation Board for the Coalmining Industry, the Ministry of Fuel and Power was in a position by the end of 1944 to give figures on the rate of absenteeism for Bevin Boys compared with other workers. The result can be seen in Appendix ABS-VI. It shows a marked increase in absenteeism, both voluntary and involuntary for Bevin Boys compared to other workers. The Ministry of Fuel and Power added:

'The figure for voluntary absenteeism of Bevin Boys may be inflated by the fact that it will include the shifts lost by trainees who have simply disappeared but who are still on colliery books. If 5 percent of the Bevin Boys come within this category, then the voluntary absenteeism percent for England and Wales would fall to 8.2 percent, i.e. about 45 percent greater than the corresponding figure for other workers. It is significant that the involuntary absenteeism for Bevin Boys is 60 percent above the figure for other workers. Probably the best way of summing up these figures is to say that Bevin Boys absenteeism is half as much again as the total figure for other workers.'<sup>45</sup>

The Bevin Boys were far more likely to apply for a sick note to have a day or two off or even a certificate to get out of mining altogether.

'It didn't really bother me all that much but there were some of the Bevin Boys who found it very difficult indeed and whether genuine or not some of them managed to get released through doctor's certificates confirming severe claustrophobia.'<sup>46</sup>

'I should think nine out of ten people working down the pit got backache. ...if you were working wet in particular. It was a matter of getting cold, a chill the minute you stopped working. You knew all about the ventilation because there was a draught. ... So it was most usual to find yourself going up to the doctor to complain of pains in the back. You couldn't possibly go to work. Sometimes that was very real. You would have to say your piece convincingly but they were as doctors, GPs, friendly. But obviously they couldn't be too blatant about it.'<sup>47</sup>

'A medical certificate was accepted as good reason for absence, but many doctors were canny about issuing them to Bevin Boys in case the proverbial lead was being swung. But Bevin Boys, unlike political parties, stand together

---

<sup>44</sup> Questionnaire, (September – November 2002)

<sup>45</sup> PRO POWE 26/441, Statistical information in respect of absenteeism by Bevin Boys and other wage earners in the coal industry, 1944-1945, Extract of letter from Ministry of Fuel and Power to H.S. Houldsworth, The National Conciliation Board for the Coalmining Industry, (30.1.1945)

<sup>46</sup> Peter M., interview by the Oaten Hill and District Society, (17.8.1986)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

and information on the best ways of jiggery-pokery was always passed around.’<sup>48</sup>

‘But I say of the younger men, a lot of them once they’d worked through their four days, they would be absent. Possibly to an excess of alcohol, then they would go to the doctor because they had to get a sick note to prove that they were not capable of going to work. Tax of course was very, very heavy at that time and the young men said it was hardly worth going to work to have to pay.’<sup>49</sup>

The regular miners tended to live at home and often had families to support so they needed the money and were therefore not absent as often as the younger men.

‘And of course another aspect of absenteeism was that if you didn’t work you didn’t get paid the shift. So if you were off for a day, a couple of days, even if you were off with a doctor’s note, you still lost your shift’s pay.’<sup>50</sup>

The majority of the Bevin Boys were unconcerned at this as very few were married. They only needed enough money to pay for their board and lodging. Some even found a way around going to work in the pit and made money by other means. Philip C. told of a Bevin Boy in the same lodgings who hated pit work and stayed away as much as possible.

‘He managed to stay away quite a lot because he always supplemented his meagre earnings ... he used to play cards with Mrs Davies [the landlady] and he almost invariably won. So he was always making a few shillings out of his game of cards so he could really keep his work down the pit to a minimum.’<sup>51</sup>

Other Bevin Boys found that they were penalised and marked as absent through no fault of their own.

If a man should arrive one minute late for work underground he is sent home, and he has to miss the shift. Many of the men at Clifton however have to travel long distances, which result in changing from one bus to another. Consequently it is understandable that at times some will be late. This regulation is disliked by all, because these drastic measures act against the so-called need for coal, and the maximum amount of work. It is no wonder absenteeism at Clifton both wilful and unlawful is at least 14 percent i.e. at least one day per week per man.’<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Agnew, p42

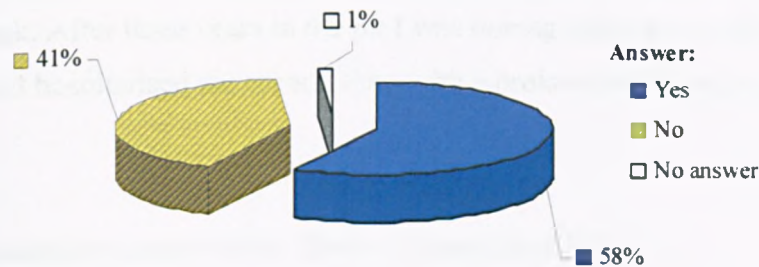
<sup>49</sup> Interview with Edward W., (30.10.2002)

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>52</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further general report, (13.7.1944)

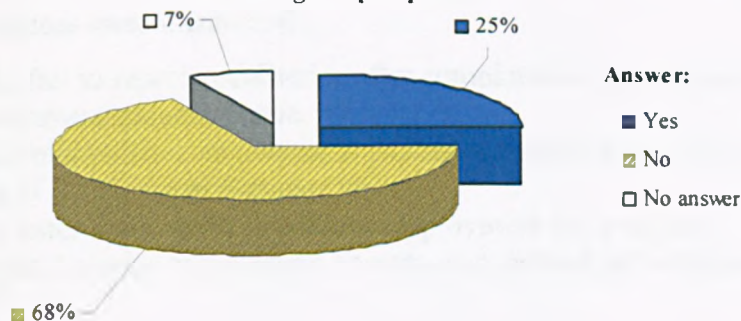
**Were you aware of absenteeism in the pit in which you worked?**



**Table 8.1 Results from questionnaire: Awareness of absenteeism in the pit in which worked**

The majority of those answering the questionnaire were aware of absenteeism in the pit where they worked (Table 8.1). The general opinion was that absenteeism was widespread. Some thought it was rife among the Bevin Boys whilst others claimed that the Bevin Boys could not afford to take time off. ‘It was widespread throughout the industry, not especially among Bevin Boys but mainly among young unmarried men.’<sup>53</sup> It was also claimed that if you were absent too often ‘you would lose the respect of the other men, and down the pit that was something which mattered.’<sup>54</sup>

**Did you make any attempt to leave the pit after having sampled pit life?**



**Table 8.2 Results from questionnaire: Whether attempt made to leave the pit**

Many claim not to have tried to leave the pit (Table 8.2) but of those trying to leave after starting work the majority claimed medical grounds. There were those who probably had no valid reason but were able to convince the authorities that they did. ‘I

<sup>53</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>54</sup> Questionnaire

developed fluid on the elbow, was discharged and shortly afterwards pronounced A1 fit for the RAF.' 'After two years I managed to get a discharge on medical grounds (claustrophobia) and served three years in the RAF.' There were also those with genuine medical problems. 'A full tub of coal came off the line. ... the other tubs crushed my back. After three years in the pit I was downgraded A1 to AIII.' 'I was buried twice and hospitalised the second time with a broken collarbone, arm and ribs.'<sup>55</sup>

Some were conscientious and did not think of taking time off.

'Tom hasn't had a day off for weeks. They say he won £100 or £200 on the football pools or crossword or something a fortnight ago. Even then he didn't take a day off. I know I would. I'd have some time off. I'd have a holiday from the pit I would.'<sup>56</sup>

Peter H. claimed to be 'terribly law abiding for some reason or other. I wasn't a rebel in those days.'<sup>57</sup> Others bowed to family pressure. Alan W. wanted to take time off to visit his family. 'When I arrived home without permission [my father] said I am not having any of my sons finishing up in prison you see.'<sup>58</sup> The threat of imprisonment was, for many, a deterrent.

At the Ministry of Fuel and Power Regional Controllers' Conference at the end of 1944 it was discussed how best to deal with discipline. Three categories of 'unsatisfactory' trainees were mentioned:

1. 'Those who fail to report at collieries after completion of preliminary training at the Government training centre.
2. Those who enter colliery employment and subsequently leave without the permission of the National Service Officer.
3. Those who enter and remain in colliery employment but who are unsatisfactory because of persistent absenteeism, acts of indiscipline or other reasons.'<sup>59</sup>

Soon after this a document was drawn up giving details of what constituted a breach of discipline. Where Bevin Boys had already been successfully prosecuted more than

---

<sup>55</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>56</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (13.11.1944)

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>59</sup> PRO POWE 16/88, Ministry of Fuel and Power Controllers' Conference, 22.11.1944, Memorandum by the Labour Directorate

once but still persisted in infringing the regulations, they could be taken before a tribunal.<sup>60</sup>

'If you were a persistent absentee, you went before a tribunal of the Ministry of Labour and you could be fined and if you really persisted you could be put in jail. And they made one mistake. If you were really, really bad they sent you into the Forces and of course one or two said 'oh my God, get out of the pit, let's get into the Forces this way.'<sup>61</sup>

The idea behind the discharge of unsatisfactory workers was to remove from the industry those having a bad influence on the more law-abiding miners. 'Ballotees and optants so discharged were as far as possible called up for the Forces.'<sup>62</sup> As a warning to other absentee miners, 10 young miners from the Durham coalfield, who had been persistent absentees, were ordered into the Forces.<sup>63</sup> One Bevin Boy sent to the Army had this to say:

'I hated all the time I was a conscript in South Wales and as a young man who wanted to fight for his country but not dig for it I rebelled. After going to prison for refusing to work there any more I was eventually sent to the Army where I served a total of 12 years.'<sup>64</sup>

There was controversy, however, because some thought that by allowing someone who was willing to serve two prison sentences to go into the Forces was just giving in to them.<sup>65</sup>

Jack M. was very active in the Trade Union Movement. He was very soon elected to the Pit Production Committee, whose original remit had been to look at cases of absenteeism. From August 1942 the emphasis of their work changed to production, however, some pits, including the one where he worked (Sneyd Colliery, North Staffordshire), still continued to handle cases of absenteeism.<sup>66</sup>

'Actually any miner who didn't turn up for work was breaking the law and would have been liable to imprisonment, which wouldn't have actually helped the war effort and so they established this quasi legal framework, which meant that the Pit Production Committee on which I served was actually carrying out the legal functions that otherwise would have been exercised by the courts. We could give exemptions from any legal action as long as we imposed what was thought to be a proper penalty. In our case we very rarely imposed the penalty

---

<sup>60</sup> PRO LAB 8/923, Breaches of Defence – Bevin Boys, (4.12.1944)

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>62</sup> PRO LAB 37/16, Mobilisation of Labour for Industry, report 1939 – 1946, (London), p196

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, (26.8.1946)

<sup>64</sup> IWM Misc 191, Item 2834, A.H. Mitchell, handwritten letter (undated)

<sup>65</sup> *The Times*, (6.2.1945)

<sup>66</sup> Court, (1951), p323

other than the need to continue to work all shifts available until we eventually invented a penalty, which went along the lines of well if there's no further absences during the next two weeks we'll forget about the fact that you missed a few days in the past. And so it all worked very smoothly. I think that the attendance was improved. Nobody was ever sent to prison and the output of coal continued merrily as a result.'<sup>67</sup>

Those Bevin Boys living in hostels, with all that it had to offer in comradeship and togetherness, were more prone to absenteeism than their colleagues in lodgings. They were more aware of just what they could get away with.

'I often think that these hostels contributed to the lack of effect that the Bevin Boys should have provided - they were too comfortable and made absenteeism an easy option. ... I started to take the occasional day off - hostels were not conducive to work. From being a reliable worker I am sorry to say I was absent on a few occasions.'<sup>68</sup>

'When I was in the hostel there were one or two men there they were almost habitual absentees, although the woman who ran the hostel, she came from the North East and she knew what she was about and she used to chivvy men up if she thought they were swinging the lead.'<sup>69</sup>

However, the number of Bevin Boys involved was not very great. The figures in Appendix ABS-VII from the questionnaire sample show that, once trained, the majority of Bevin Boys lived in lodgings.<sup>70</sup> Some landladies had lodgers who were absentees.

'I must say that I have been very lucky considering. All the lads I have had billeted on me have been very nice and decent. I have never had any trouble with them. There was one chap who was very lazy however. He was so sleepy some days that he wouldn't trouble to get up and go to work. I don't know how many mornings he didn't stay at home. Still they have rumbled him in the finish however. I hear that he is going up before the courts for continually being absent from work.'<sup>71</sup>

December 1944 was the first Christmas as a miner for many of the Bevin Boys. The regular miners lived near enough to the pit to spend their Christmas at home but the Bevin Boys were often faced with a long journey. Traditionally the winter holiday in Durham was Christmas Day and New Year's Day and had been worked out under an agreement between the Coal Owners' Association and the Union. The Northern

---

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>68</sup> Norman B.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ivor H., (2.10.2002)

<sup>70</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>71</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (21.5.1944)

Regional Fuel Controller gave a warning to Bevin Boys not to take 10 days holiday at Christmas or they would be liable to prosecution.<sup>72</sup> This was in reply to 232 out of 250 Bevin Boys in Durham who had sent in an ultimatum to the management for a 10-day holiday. Others had already gone home stating that they would take 21 days off.<sup>73</sup>

‘Another thing really was the fact that it came – we didn’t get much in the way of leave. We got a weeks leave a year and you got Christmas Day off but you didn’t get Boxing Day. We were liable to be fined £2 for every day of absenteeism. Well that was rather difficult when Christmas time came wasn’t it. You couldn’t get back anyway on Boxing Day if you tried. So most of us got fined or warned about this sort of thing.’<sup>74</sup>

‘In those days the pit holiday was one week, a depressing prospect for young men 300 miles from home. The Ministry allowed the Bevin Boys two 7/6 (37½p) warrants to visit home each year but were not prepared to allow them any extra time off to use them. Effectively this meant that no one could get home for Christmas, a situation much resented. I was fortunate; one of my spells of enteritis (not surprising in view of the living conditions) coincided with Christmas so I had a doctor's note. One school friend Ron was not so lucky; he took a week off, was prosecuted and fined for absenteeism.’<sup>75</sup>

‘I am afraid a number of us did rebel at that and we did go off home, which caused a bit of mayhem because about a year later we were summoned for being absent ... I got away with a fine but one chap decided to appeal and cause all sorts of trouble. Eventually he was sent to prison on two or three days before the following Christmas. He spent next Christmas in jail.’<sup>76</sup>

‘It was very lucky to get away Christmas because they – all the doctors were suddenly putting in sick notes for Bevin Boys and all sorts of other people to the point where it would get in the local papers.’<sup>77</sup>

‘At Easter I was once more hauled before the Regional Investigation Officer for absence on the Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Tuesday of the Easter holiday period when I had gone home to see my parents. I argued that living so far from home I should be given dispensation as there was a days travelling in both directions but it fell on deaf ears and I was warned that if it happened again I would go before the magistrate.’<sup>78</sup>

Absenteeism was increasing throughout the war and accelerated in 1944. It could be argued that this was a result of the Bevin Boys being conscripted to the mines and it is

---

<sup>72</sup> *The Times*, (2.12.1944)

<sup>73</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A Christmas Report, (19.12.1944)

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>75</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, B. Folkes, *The Forgotten Army*, typed manuscript, (undated)

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>78</sup> Roland T., *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on personal diaries (undated)



true that their rate of absenteeism was higher than among the regular miners (see Appendix ABS-VI). However, by mid 1944 they formed less than 5 percent of the workforce. The realisation that the war was drawing to a close did much to change the attitude of the miners, especially the younger ones, not only the Bevin Boys but those brought back from the Forces to serve in the mines and those kept in the industry against their will because of the Essential Work Order. They expected that once the war was over they would be released. 'The day the war is over I'll walk straight out I will' was a typical comment.<sup>79</sup> However, the Government planned on keeping the Bevin Boys in the mines.

'We were gripped in a hysteria of escape; it had not occurred to us that we would have to stay in the mines a day longer now that the war was over and we were all making plans to return to our civilian jobs within weeks. Our innocence was pathetic, for most of us there were years of mining ahead of us.'<sup>80</sup>

In these circumstances it is not surprising that many disgruntled Bevin Boy decided to spend more time away from work. Some did not wait until hostilities were over before engineering their release. Many tried to get out of the mines on medical grounds. Some were more successful than others.

'It was all hard graft and no future. But, how was I to find a way out, since a fit miner could not be released from his job of national importance. The war in Europe was virtually over and I felt no allegiance to the mining industry so, in order to quit, I invented my own medical disability. I obtained a small bottle of concentrated nitric acid from a local chemist and back in my lodgings carefully applied a few drops to each of my ankles. A few days later the treatment was repeated and within about 10 days my ankles were raw and look like a typical case of dermatitis. Now I was ready for a big show of pretence, which hopefully would result in my release. I was seen by the medical officer who had no hesitation in issuing me with a discharge certificate. Dermatitis is infectious and I was ordered out of the industry. Needless to say my "dermatitis" cleared up in a few weeks by which time I was back in the West Country and looking forward to a more satisfying career.'<sup>81</sup>

'A visit to Doctor Henderson to have my ears syringed because of the amount of dust collected there was just the start of my endeavours to try to get out on health grounds. I tried to say that the dust had caused havoc with my lungs as well; to no avail. Maybe too many other miners had tried that before me.'<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Report, (17.9.1945)

<sup>80</sup> Roland T.

<sup>81</sup> IWM Misc 191, Item 2834, E.P. Rainbow, *Bevin Boy Saga*, typed manuscript (undated)

<sup>82</sup> M. and L. Wilson, *A Far Cry from a White Apron*, (Brighton, 2000), p61

With the end of war with Germany in May 1945 the ballot system for Bevin Boys was abandoned, although the optant scheme, whereby men could volunteer for the mines in preference for the Forces, was still in operation. Appendix ABS-VIII shows how absenteeism peaked in August 1945 at 18 percent. The war in Europe was over by this time and the end of war in the Far East was fast approaching. The Essential Work Order was removed, which meant that men were not prosecuted for refusing to go down the mines. The comment of one Bevin Boy was typical. 'This is just what I have been waiting for. I'll be able to have a day off when I want one now. Sam (the deputy) won't stop me.'<sup>83</sup> 'Victory and the reaction it brought with it led men to knock off without giving good reason to the management.'<sup>84</sup>

'Absenteeism became worse and luckily for us the new Labour Government repealed the punitive powers of the defence regulations and we could take time off without reprisal, which for most of us meant that we worked a four or five day week. Enough to pay the board and lodgings and enough left over for amusement.'<sup>85</sup>

'The end of the war in the Far East has had its effect on the mining industry. There has been a certain relaxation, which has been noticed at Clifton Colliery. Contrary to reports absenteeism has definitely increased, and the recent decision to stop summoning men for absenteeism has resulted in a higher number of days being taken off. Towards the end of the war most men were having a day off a fortnight - but now many are having a day a week. Particularly does this apply to the Bevin Boys and to the younger workers. The older men are more stable - they cannot afford to take off days just when and where they feel like it.'<sup>86</sup>

The Bevin Boys were eager to leave the mines but the regular miners were resigned to staying. The sentiment of one old collier probably sums up the general attitude of those who were used to a life of working in the pits.

'I get fed up with the job. But I don't think I will try to make a change. The coal comes in useful during the winter anyway. (All miners with families get a regular supply every six weeks of 26 hundredweight of coal - from the pit for six and sixpence).'<sup>87</sup>

By the end of November 1945 the Government announced the rules for release from the coalmines. This was based on age and length of service as was applied to Class A release from the Army. 'Each of the services had a different period of service before

---

<sup>83</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Report, (17.9.1945)

<sup>84</sup> Court, (1951), p311

<sup>85</sup> Roland T.

<sup>86</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Report, (17.9.1945)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

they were demobbed. The Army served the longest.<sup>88</sup> Those released on medical grounds could still be called up for military service, in which case service in the coalmines counted for the purpose of release. However, those absenting themselves from work too often would be transferred to the Army with no allowance made for work already completed in the mines.<sup>89</sup> There were, however, anomalies.

‘A Bevin Boy at Gedling, spent two years in the Army, over two years down the pit. His demob number came up, and he secured his release on 20th December. Two days later he had a communication from the Ministry of Labour to say that Bevin Boys released from the Forces were liable to work for another six months down the pit after their group was released.’<sup>90</sup>

This system of release did not please many of the Bevin Boys, who had expected to stay in the coalmines only for the duration of the war. They considered that they had done their bit towards the war effort and now expected to pick up their lives where they had left them before call-up. By the end of 1945 many Bevin Boys had absconded. ‘Of the optants and ballottees on colliery books about 5,000 are unaccounted for.’<sup>91</sup>

‘After VE Day there were several empty beds in the hut; boys who had not come back for one reason or another. One ran off with a travelling fairground, which had been in the town for a week, some of our musician friends were living life on the road.’<sup>92</sup>

‘I went home for Christmas [1945] and visited my old boss who asked me if I wanted a job, and I thought why not take a break and work for him, cash in hand, no tax, for a couple of weeks until my courage failed me and I returned to the camp to discover many others had done the same thing so that we were now less than half the original 500 Bevin Boys who were there in January 1945.’<sup>93</sup>

Those from more upper class backgrounds were just as likely to abscond.

‘There was one lad who came down with the help of his tutor. He hadn’t been to a school at all. He came from a well to do family, Tunbridge Wells I think it was and he was found digs by the tutor and then at the end of the War, when we were all anxious to get away and get back to things, he got away before he should have done and had the misfortune to be brought back and had to start again but that is one of those things that happens.’<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>89</sup> Agnew, pp124-125

<sup>90</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Report, (30.12.1946)

<sup>91</sup> Hansard, Vol. 416, 20.11.1945, col. 205

<sup>92</sup> Roland T.

<sup>93</sup> Roland T.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Ivor H. (2.10.2002)

The situation was so bad that by the end of 1945 even the Workers' Representatives were worried about absenteeism being detrimental to agreements on nationalisation. A leaflet from the Workers' Representatives of Norton Colliery addressed to 'fellow workers' gave three principal causes for loss of output. These were: leaving work early, not coming to work when they should have and not working safely. It also added that 'present behaviour is poisoning our future.'<sup>95</sup> *The Times* reported that Clifton Colliery, Nottingham, was in danger of being closed because of absenteeism. The Pit Production Committee appealed to the miners: 'the troubles we have are due to some men not attending and work being left uncompleted.'<sup>96</sup> The Mineworkers' Union threatened not to give the protection or support of the union if legal steps were taken against a miner as a result of voluntary absenteeism.<sup>97</sup>

High levels of absenteeism continued during 1946 (Appendix ABS-IX). Towards the end of 1946 absenteeism had started to decrease, 'the main cause of this being attributed to the purge of unsatisfactory workers.'<sup>98</sup> During September and the beginning of October 1946 5,000 men were lost from the coalmining industry due to modifications to the Essential Work Order, which meant that 'incorrigibles' (regular absentees) could be dismissed.<sup>99</sup> Output per man-shift also rose but still needed improvement. However, the main attitudes to absenteeism remained the same. Shinwell, the Minister of Fuel, blamed the miners for the low production levels because they were not working properly. He gave examples of optants who had not worked for a month and others who only worked one day a week. Mid-week dog and horse racing and Easter holidays did not help either.<sup>100</sup>

The following cartoon (figure 8.2) was published as a result of a speech by Shinwell at Durham in April 1946, where he said that mid-week sports meetings were having a detrimental affect on production. 'The output of coal last week declined and we were

---

<sup>95</sup> Leaflet from the Workers' Representatives, Norton Colliery, (8.11.1945)

<sup>96</sup> *The Times*, (24.1.1946)

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, (21.9.1945)

<sup>98</sup> PRO LAB 37/16, Mobilisation, p196

<sup>99</sup> Hansard, Vol. 427, (16.10.1946), col. 921

<sup>100</sup> *The Times*, (12.4.1946)

unable to maintain the improvement registered in March largely because of absenteeism.<sup>101</sup>



"It's not really absenteeism - I'm working on a vein that runs this way"

Figure 8.2 Cartoon appearing in the Daily Mail (15.4.1946)<sup>102</sup>

The Government was particularly concerned about the detrimental effect of mid-week dog racing in mining areas.

‘Some help on the problem of absenteeism might be given if dog track owners in adjoining areas could be persuaded to hold their meetings on the same days, and not as is the usual practice in mining areas at the present time to stagger the days’<sup>103</sup>

This initiative was, however, doomed to failure, as the track owners would have lost custom.

There were other problems associated with racing, as absenteeism was not confined to those attending meetings.

<sup>101</sup> *The Times*, (15.4.1946)

<sup>102</sup> UKC-CSCC, NEB0374, *Daily Mail*, (15.4.1946)

<sup>103</sup> PRO CAB 124/1060, Memorandum by the Home Secretary, Regulation of Greyhound Racing in the interests of Coal Production

'Numbers of men who do not go to the races absent themselves because they know their colleagues will be away from work and, as a consequence, their piece work team may have to be split up.'<sup>104</sup>

A Government report looked at absenteeism due to sporting events in different areas. For example, in the Leeds area 40 percent absenteeism was reported due to a mid-week football cup-tie. 'The majority think that they may have not seen much good football in the last six years and that they were entitled to a little relaxation.'<sup>105</sup> The problem was solved by the Football Association dropping mid-week fixtures in the next round of cup-tie matches.<sup>106</sup> Horse racing also caused considerable absenteeism, especially when there were important race meetings at York and Doncaster.<sup>107</sup>

Absenteeism was not only due to mid-week sporting events. More miners were missing from the Saturday and Monday shifts than other days.<sup>108</sup> One of the main periods of absenteeism continued to be the Christmas holiday. 'Absenteeism amongst miners has been as high as 80 percent.'<sup>109</sup>

'On Friday December 27<sup>th</sup> [1946], out of the 200 workers on the day shift at Clifton, only 80 attended work. The position on Saturday was no better - 50 at work. The afternoon and night shifts showed practically the same results. There are many Tyneside and Scotch (sic) miners at Clifton, and if 1944 and 1945 are any indication investigator finds that they will not be at work on January 1st. ... The older men say they have worked hard enough on short rations during the war, and are ready for a rest. ... What's the use in coming to work Friday and Saturday. It spoils the week. We shan't be short of money until next Friday. We're getting paid for Christmas anyway.'<sup>110</sup>

Vesting Day on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1947 heralded the start of the nationalised coal industry. With the introduction of the five-day week on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1947, absenteeism, although still prevalent, was no longer the problem it had been through the war years and immediately after. Shinwell could not give any guarantee that the five-day week would result in an increase in output, although he hoped it would.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> PRO CAB 124/1060, letter from W.G. Nott-Brown, Ministry of Fuel and Power to Max Nicholson, Office of the Lord President of the Council

<sup>105</sup> PRO CAB 124/1060, 'Examination of the effect of mid-week sporting fixtures on absenteeism and production'

<sup>106</sup> PRO CAB 124/1060, letter from Board of Trade to Max Nicholson, Office of the Lord President of the Council

<sup>107</sup> PRO CAB 124/1060, 'Effect of mid-week sporting fixtures'

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, (26.8.1946)

<sup>109</sup> Quoted by Eric G., M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, The Christmas Holiday, (30.12.1946)

<sup>110</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, The Christmas Holiday, (30.12.1946)

<sup>111</sup> Hansard, Vol. 436, (24.4.1947), col. 1238

‘The introduction of a five day week gave the National Coal Board an opportunity to hit back at absenteeism. They could not force the men to come to work but by dispensing with the Saturday shift, which was virtually useless anyway, they could at least guarantee a good attendance on the other days. This was by giving the men their Saturday pay in the form of a bonus but only on condition they had worked all the other five shifts.’<sup>112</sup>

‘May [1947] brought about the introduction of the five-day week, but to qualify for the Saturday pay you needed to have done the previous five shifts, which meant to take Monday off you lost two days pay, and that was a bitter pill to swallow.’<sup>113</sup>

There appears to have been two main reasons for absenteeism. Firstly, the more money a miner earned the less incentive he had to work harder as his spending power was limited in the restrictions of wartime. Secondly, there was a general air of war weariness as the war progressed. Lack of holidays and free time and insufficient food in an industry relying on hard manual labour took its toll. It should be noted that individual absenteeism was not the only reason for loss of work. Industrial disputes also played a part and, for example, accounted for the loss of over 3 million tons of coal in 1944.<sup>114</sup> Miners were notorious for their left-wing views, and strikes were the natural result.

All industries suffered from absenteeism, especially among women workers. Long hours and bad conditions led to voluntary absence from work. Absenteeism at the time when Britain was at war and was dependent on as much coal being produced as possible was a major problem in the coal industry.

---

<sup>112</sup> D. Day, *The Bevin Boy*, (Oxford, 1995 large print edition), pp147-148

<sup>113</sup> Roland T.

<sup>114</sup> Court, (1951), p323

## Absenteeism – A Case Study

This case study is based on a file on coalmining in the Mass-Observation Archive at Sussex University<sup>115</sup> and letters and documents from the Public Records Office.<sup>116</sup> They show two sides of the story of a young man, Eric G., a Bevin Boy optant, who was possibly looking for an excuse to leave the pits. Eric G. worked as an investigator for Tom Harrison at Mass-Observation from the time he was sent to the training centre at Swinton, Manchester, in May 1944 until the end of 1946, when he secured his release from Clifton Colliery, Nottingham. He kept detailed hand-written records of his time in mining, which he filed as 'reports'. He also listened to what other Bevin Boys, miners and the community generally were saying on a variety of topics connected with mining and in particular Clifton Colliery. These were written down and sent to Mass-Observation as 'mines opinions'. These records, as well as those from the Public Records Office, are important because they are contemporary to the time under discussion.

Eric G. finished his training at Swinton on a Friday and was then expected to report on the following Monday to the Clifton Colliery, where he would be working. During that weekend he heard from a manager of a colliery company that 'Clifton from what I know of its history and the place is not all that could be desired. If a transfer is possible I think that you should get one.'<sup>117</sup> After a month of hard training it was not something that a young man wanted to hear, and he must have gone to Clifton with some trepidation. On arrival at Clifton, Eric G. found that it was a small colliery in the working class area of Nottingham. Conditions had been bad there, the mine had been on the verge of bankruptcy, and as a result the Government had taken over the running of the pit under emergency legislation. He reported to the general office and was told to report for work at 7am the following day. Another optant, Douglas M., a conscientious objector from the Army, reported at the same time and together they set off to look for accommodation, having been given two addresses to try.

At the first address the landlady said that she had volunteered to have Bevin Boys a year previously but as none had been sent to her she had gone out to work herself. The

---

<sup>115</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B

<sup>116</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, New entrants to the coalmining industry

<sup>117</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines report: the colliery – first day, (22.6.1944)



other also proved unsuccessful, so the two went to the Salvation Army canteen. There they were given three further addresses but these were not suitable. In two cases the landladies could not guarantee to get up and have breakfast ready by 6am or to have the main meal ready at 3pm. On their own initiative they then visited other houses to be told that the Americans had taken all the rooms and that it was, in any case, more profitable to take in people for Bed and Breakfast only. It was almost impossible to provide meals because of the food shortage. One house did have vacancies but quoted a price for Board Residence of £3.15s per week. This was 5/- more a week than Bevin Boys earned.

By six o'clock in the evening they had still found nowhere to stay so they made their way to the local police station. Again all the addresses they were given proved unsuccessful, either because there was no room or because the landlady did not want to provide meals. They then phoned the colliery and were given two more addresses with the same result. 'It was absolutely impossible to get accommodation of the sort that the Bevin Boys needed. No one was antagonistic, in fact every housewife was friendly and gave advice as to other houses and roads to visit.'<sup>118</sup> It was now 8pm and the two Bevin Boys were desperate so they visited the Police Billeting Officer at the Guildhall. He was unable to help and told them it was disgusting that the mine had not done something about it and had not updated the Billeting Survey carried out in the previous year. He recommended that the two went home to London until the mine had found them suitable accommodation. This they readily did.

On the train Eric G. and Douglas M. discussed what they should do. They decided to protest to the Ministry of Fuel and Power and contact various newspapers. At this point they expressed dismay at the fact that there were no pithead baths at Clifton and that they were involved in extra travelling expenses. These comments seem to confirm the suspicion that their main objective was to be released from mining. On arriving in London they sent a letter to the manager at Clifton Colliery giving the reason for not reporting for work and asking to be informed once the colliery had found suitable accommodation.

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

As soon as he was in London, Eric G. started on a round of Ministries and newspapers in order to gain their reaction to his individual case. His first call was at the offices of the *Daily Mirror*, 'a paper which concerns itself with industrial matters.'<sup>119</sup> There he spoke to a reporter, who found the case interesting and said that he would make enquiries with the various authorities concerned. Although Eric G. looked in the newspaper over the next days there was never anything about his case.

The next stop was at the Ministry of Fuel and Power enquiry desk, from where he was sent to the Mines Division. He found the person he saw there very officious and was told that he was under Industrial Conscription and that if he had been unable to secure accommodation he should have gone to see the Welfare Officer. Eric G. protested that this official was not available at 8.30pm but he was told that the police advice to return to London was unsound and that even if they had to sleep on a park bench they should have stayed in Nottingham. Eric G. left the Ministry disgusted. Later he visited the Headquarters of the Ministry of Labour, where he saw two officials who were more sympathetic to his problem. They thought his treatment had been bad but there was nothing they could do and he should go to his local Labour Exchange or to the one in Nottingham.

Eric G. next made his way to the Paddington Labour Exchange. The under manager arranged a temporary job but when the manager heard of this he said it was not the done thing. All the officials were reluctant to accept liability and Eric G. had the feeling that they thought that he was to blame. A whole day of travelling and waiting to see various people had not resulted in being closer to a solution. No unemployment benefit could be paid because Eric G. should have been working in the mines.

At some point Eric G. had approached his MP but he gave no details of this. The following day he went to see his own doctor who wrote:

'I have known Mr Eric G. all his life and I have a high regard for his character. I believe him to be one who would do his best at whatever work he was ordered to do.

After working for a month in the mines he finds that it is still very difficult for him to adapt himself to the work and that in particular he becomes dizzy when

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

he has to do stooping and lifting. This is not an uncommon symptom when a man is beginning, but after a month he might have expected to overcome it; as he has not done so, I think that the prospect of his becoming fit enough to be an efficient miner is remote.

In these circumstances I recommend that he should be put to some other form of service.'<sup>120</sup>

Armed with this letter Eric G. went along to Ministry of Fuel Welfare Officer in London but was told that unless he was radically ill there was no hope of leaving the mines. The National Service Officer at the Nottingham Labour Exchange, who was approached when the two Bevin Boys arrived back in Nottingham, confirmed this. 'If it weren't for the fact that Eric G. had one or two MPs fighting his case, he would find it extremely difficult to transfer to a war factory. As it is, it is obvious that he only stands a 50-50 chance.'<sup>121</sup>

The next Monday, following Ministry of Labour directions, Eric G. and Douglas M. returned to Clifton. They had been unable to get a free travel warrant from the Paddington Labour Exchange and were told that that they would have been prosecuted for absenteeism if it were not for the fact that they had involved an MP, had evidence of the failure to get accommodation in Clifton and that they had approached the press. On arrival at Nottingham station the Senior Welfare Officer for the district, who was very apologetic, met them. He said that there were always 100 beds available in Nottingham for transferred workers who were temporarily stranded. Eric G. doubted the genuineness of this official. 'How is it that the high Police Official who they interviewed a week earlier knew nothing about this? It was obvious that the joint activities of the two Bevin Boys in London had caused quite a stir of activity.'<sup>122</sup>

From the railway station they were taken straight to the pit, where an equally apologetic colliery manager sent them to the canteen for a hot meal before sending them to an address, where the landlady had been forewarned of their arrival. This proved to be a very satisfactory billet. They were charged 32/6 for board, which consisted of breakfast at 6am, sandwiches to take to work, a hot meal at 3pm and

---

<sup>120</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further report, (27.6.1944)

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

supper at 9pm. 'It was obvious once more that the joint action had resulted in the authorities stepping in and taking a hand in affairs. ... These latest events at the mines have proved that the worker, providing he has the initiative and opportunity to get press and authorities on his side can very effectively stand up for his rights. Alone he has really little chance to do so.'<sup>123</sup> The next day they started work at Clifton.

This account from Eric G. suggests that he was very unhappy in the mines and would go to some length to get out. However, it does not really tell us much about the person. To find this out one has to look at the official documents available on this case. Eric G. briefly mentions that he had approached an MP, without giving further details. Carbon copies of inter-departmental letters can be found in the Public Records Office. Unfortunately it is not possible to ascertain from where they originate. The first, addressed to Miss Garden (department unknown), gives Eric G.'s details.

'He is 20 years of age next month and his official history as given by him is as under: -

Voluntarily enlisted RAF Air Crew	October 1942
Called up for service	September 1943
Found medically unfit for flying because of high blood pressure and was told he would have to go into the army or mines; he chose the latter	January 1944
Entered Swinton Coalmining Training Centre (Manchester)	3 <sup>rd</sup> May 1944
Completed training and posted to Clifton Colliery, Nottingham	12 <sup>th</sup> June 1944

He came home to London that week-end (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> June) and sent a medical certificate to the colliery saying he would not be fit to report for work until 19<sup>th</sup> June. While at the centre he was medically examined and passed fit. On reporting to the colliery on 19<sup>th</sup> June he was told that accommodation was difficult and was given 2 addresses in Nottingham. His calls were unfruitful and the rest of the day was also unsuccessfully spent wandering from place to place in the town without calling at the Employment Exchange (which is very conveniently situated there). Finally on going to the police he states he was advised to go home until the mine had found him lodgings; he did so and subsequently called (apparently without useful result) at Ministry of Fuel and Power and also Ebury Bridge House [Headquarters of the Ministry of Labour]. He then went to Edgware Road Employment Exchange who took correct action and I find arrangements have already been made for his return to Nottingham on Monday next 26<sup>th</sup> June. We have ensured that accommodation will be reserved for him.

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

G. is intelligent and of good type; the real trouble is that he neither wants the mines nor the army and I am sure that most of his actions arise from his wish to influence the authorities to let him go into industry. In my own mind I have no doubt that he is well above medical Grade III and therefore even if he is ultimately declared unfit for mines he will be called to the Army.

He has been given a full explanation of his position and has expressed his satisfaction and willingness to return to work. From our angle the weaknesses in this case are

1. Apparent slackness on the part of the Region and the Colliery Company in regard to accommodation arrangements;
2. Incorrect advice by the police;
3. Failure by the lad to contact Ministry of Labour officials when in trouble.

We are following (1) and (2) up with the Region.<sup>124</sup>

In addition Eric G. gave a handwritten statement, which was attached to the letter together with a note from G.A. Ince, Director-General of Manpower, to Miss Whyte saying that the document was handed to him by Sir Edward Campbell, Conservative MP for Bromley, where Eric G.'s parents lived and asking her to deal with the matter. Ince also pointed out that as Eric G. had been trained for the mines, there could be no question of him leaving.

In his statement Eric G. said that he had volunteered for flying crew in the RAF after realising that he would soon be called up. He was called for regular service at the beginning of September 1943 but first he had a medical. He was found to be medically unfit for pilot but proclaimed fit for the duties of navigator or bomb aimer. He then started on training but then he was told that he was unfit for flying and that no further men were required for RAF ground staff. He had the choice of going into the army or the mines and chose the latter. After discharge from the RAF he reported at the Swinton Training Centre. Once his training was complete he went home for the weekend before reporting to Clifton. During the weekend he became unwell, obtained a doctor's certificate and said he could not report for another week. He then gives details of his abortive attempt to find accommodation and ends the report by saying 'I am prepared to do whatever war job I might be directed to in a factory but am against

---

<sup>124</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, letter signed G. Haynes, (23.6.1944) addressed to Miss Garden

going down the mines.'<sup>125</sup> This last remark probably shows his whole attitude. Eric G. was using the fact that he could not find accommodation to try and procure a release from the mines.

By going to his MP Eric G. produced some results. At the beginning of July 1944, in a question time in the House of Commons, Mr Lewis Silkin, Labour MP for Camberwell, Peckham, where Eric G. had last lived, asked the Minister of Labour if he was aware 'that men are directed to work in mines away from home without accommodation on terms within their means being first arranged for them, and whether he will give instructions that no man should be sent to work in a mine until such provision has been made.'<sup>126</sup> The answer from Bevin was that he was not aware of this. 'The instructions are that when men are sent to work away from home arrangements should be made to ensure that satisfactory accommodation is available for them.' He promised to look into any individual cases if Mr Silkin would give him the details.<sup>127</sup>

Once he had returned to Nottingham and had found accommodation Eric G. did not leave the matter there. Together with Douglas M. he spent his evenings checking up on official attitudes. The Welfare Officer, Mr Gillespie, officially apologised for the trouble and inconvenience caused but stated that had they gone to the Labour Exchange in the first place they would not have had any problems. He also said that the police always phoned him in cases of difficulty, implying that the two Bevin Boys had not been to the police. The Billeting Officer accused them of deliberate dereliction of duty with a view to having a week at home in London and that the landladies were at fault for not informing him when they no longer had vacancies. Mr Gillespie also claimed that this was the first case of difficulty in the area. However, other colliery workers had told Eric G. that the majority of new arrivals had problems finding accommodation.

Eric G. found out that this was not the first case of this nature. One previous trainee spent two nights trying to find accommodation but he did not go to the right

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., attachment

<sup>126</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (6.7.1944), col. 1283

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

authorities and so he was quickly passed over and forgotten about. If Eric G. had not returned of his own accord and had not caused trouble the matter could have dragged on for weeks and he could have been branded a deserter. In addition, he also found out that similar accommodation difficulties were being experienced at another local colliery, Bestwood. He was, however, upset that apart from a report on Mr Silkin's question in Parliament in the *London Star*, he had seen no other reports of the incident in the press.

Eric G. then tried to get compensation for the week he had been away from the pit, claiming that it was through no fault of his but he was told nothing could be paid out unless inefficiency could be proved. It was again stated that he was to blame.<sup>128</sup> The Union was approached and told Eric G. that he would have to put in a claim for loss of earnings with the Ministry of Labour. He received the following letter:

'With reference to your letter dated 10th August 1944 and addressed to Mr Gillespie concerning the claim for loss of earnings in respect of yourself and Mr M., full inquiries have been made regarding a transfer from Cresswell to Clifton Colliery and it has been ascertained that adequate arrangements were made with the Welfare Officer at Clifton for billets there; but as you failed to report there direct these arrangements could not be carried out: furthermore had you reported at the Nottingham Exchange, that office could have carried out the necessary arrangements with regard to billeting. It is regretted that your claim cannot be accepted.'<sup>129</sup>

This annoyed Eric G., who claimed that no adequate arrangements were made at Clifton Colliery, that he was not transferred from Cresswell, but came from Swinton, Manchester, that both he and Douglas M. had reported as directed on time and that neither of them had been told to report to the Labour Exchange. They went to see Mr Brighouse, who agreed to help as much as he could.<sup>130</sup> After a lot of bureaucratic red tape they finally heard that the claim for loss of wages had been approved and the compensation would be paid at the end of December, six months after the incident.<sup>131</sup>

The final word belongs to the Ministry Of Fuel and Power Absentee Officer, before whom Eric G. had to state his case.

---

<sup>128</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mine Survey, (24.7.1944)

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Mine Survey, letter from D. Brighouse, (7.10.1944)

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., A Special Report, (14.10.1944)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., A Special Report, (15.12.1944)

'You realise that you're putting yourself in a very difficult position, by being called in to see me, for it is I who say whether or not a man should be fined. I realise that you want to get home now and then, but if you were in the army what could you do? You realise that it is part of the contract that you made that you shouldn't stay away from work without reasonable excuse, but coal production is bad enough let alone with absenteeism coming along all the time. You owe it to your country to see that coal is got for the war effort, and for after the war to help our exports. Mr Bevin is looking to you fellows. Don't let him down.'<sup>132</sup>

This is an interesting case as it gives an example of how one Bevin Boy tried to obtain his release from the coalmines and throws light on the oppressive bureaucracy of the time. It also gives an insight into the character of the Mass-Observation investigator, whose work has been used extensively in this thesis. He becomes more than just a name.

---

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter 9

### Accommodation

Bevin was aware, as soon as he decided to send young workers away from home and into industry, that proper provision would have to be made for their accommodation. This applied equally to Bevin Boys and other wartime workers.

‘The direction of young workers raises other questions besides that of the nature of the employment. If direction took them from their homes and home influences or from school, then suitable billeting arrangements would have to be made and some alternative to parental discipline provided.’<sup>1</sup>

The Government gave Bevin Boys the chance to choose which mine they should be sent to, although this was not always possible.<sup>2</sup>

‘Individual preferences will be taken into account as far as possible, but will be subordinated to the need for ensuring that labour is sent where it is most required and that there is a proper flow of labour into the coalfields both from the coalmining and non-coalmining areas.’<sup>3</sup>

It was intended, where possible, to allow those from coalmining areas to remain at home, or at least to spend weekends with their own families. Those not able to live at home required accommodation. It was soon realized, with the first intake of trainees in January 1944, that there would be insufficient billets and it would therefore be necessary to restrict the number of Bevin Boys in some areas. *The Times* reported that from about 5000 enquiries for billets there were only 300 acceptances.<sup>4</sup> This was not surprising. Housing in mining areas always had a reputation of being bad. In 1945 the Ministry of Fuel and Power commissioned a Regional Survey of the coalmining areas. In the Midlands region, for example, the report states that ‘many of the miners’ residences ... place them in the category of slum houses under the Housing Acts.’<sup>5</sup>

The problem started at the training centre as the trainees were only there for four weeks. It was difficult to find households to provide billets when there was a continual change of lodgers.<sup>6</sup> Once their training was over and they were allocated to

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, (24.7.1943)

<sup>2</sup> Letter from the Ministry of Labour and National Service (E.D. 696) sent to George R., 3.2.1944

<sup>3</sup> PRO LAB 79/36, ‘Coalmining ballot boys memoranda’

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, (6.1.1944)

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Fuel and Power, ‘The Coalfields of the Midland Region – Regional Survey Report’, (London, 1945)

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, (10.1.1944)

the pit where they would be working full time the Bevin Boys still found that there were too many of them chasing too few billets. In some cases they were forced into taking undesirable lodgings. An example was given of a family of 10 in a three-bedroom house who took in four lodgers.<sup>7</sup> There were also examples of unscrupulous landladies charging too much. One landlady wanted £3-5-0 per week, 5s more than a Bevin Boy earned,<sup>8</sup> although the guidelines were between 25s and 30s per week.<sup>9</sup> The Government was aware from the outset that there would not be enough places for the number of Bevin Boys required in the coalmining areas and sanctioned the building of hostels.<sup>10</sup> They were to be capable of housing between 400 and 800 persons.<sup>11</sup> Although many were built specifically for Bevin Boys, sometimes, in order to utilise them to capacity, the use of the hostel was shared with other war workers.<sup>12</sup> By the beginning of 1945 'out of some 40,000 persons directed to coalmining employment (including 3,500 in training at Government training centres) approximately 10,500 (including 2,800 trainees) were resident in hostels ... the balance are living either in their own homes or with relatives or friends or in private lodgings.'<sup>13</sup> Table 9.1 shows where those answering the questionnaire lived according to whether they were an optant or ballottee.

Were you an  
optant or  
ballottee?                      **X**                      Where did  
you live?

	Lodgings	Bevin Boy hostel	Both	At home	No answer	Total
Optant	2.78	5.56	4.17	1.39	0.00	13.89
Ballottee	43.06	18.06	12.50	11.11	1.39	86.11
No answer	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.83</b>	<b>23.61</b>	<b>16.67</b>	<b>12.50</b>	<b>1.39</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 9.1 Results from questionnaire: Were you an optant or a ballottee by where did you live?<sup>14</sup>**

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, (10.1.1944)

<sup>8</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Report 2, (22.6.1944)

<sup>9</sup> *The Times*, (10.1.1944)

<sup>10</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, 'Residential hostels for new entrants to the coal mining industry'

<sup>11</sup> *The Times*, (6.1.1944)

<sup>12</sup> Hansard, Vol. 408, (16.2.1945), col. 528

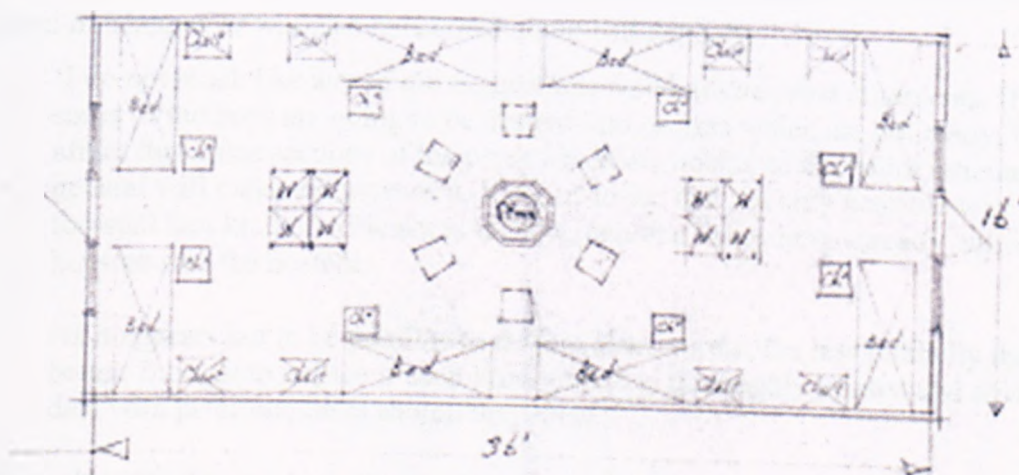
<sup>13</sup> Hansard, Vol. 408, (20.2.1945), col. 619

<sup>14</sup> Questionnaire September – November 2002

The majority of those answering the questionnaire were ballotees and were accommodated in lodgings. It might have been expected that optants would be more likely to live at home but this did not appear to be the case.

### Hostels

It was suggested in the House of Commons that hostels had to be built because of long term overcrowding in mining areas.<sup>15</sup> The hostels were built in the first instance for trainees, but they were also used at times to house the Bevin Boys when they moved on to their permanent pit. They consisted of a group of inter-linked Nissen huts. A main block housed amenities and the dormitory blocks had lockers and narrow beds on either side.<sup>16</sup>



HUT ARRANGED FOR 8 PERSONS  
SERVICE HOSTELS CORPORATION

Figure 9.1 Plan for hostel accommodation.<sup>17</sup>

A letter sent by a Bevin Boy to his parents at home describes them very well.

‘The beds are like [air raid] shelter bunks (single storey) with a wardrobe in-between each one. The camp consists of Nissen huts, which are linked together in blocks by short brick passageways. One block consists of the canteen, snack bar, reading room, games room, reception room and office. The canteen is a nice place and we get good grub. The inside of the huts are beaver-boarded and panelled. The wardrobe and racks are blue, the ceilings cream, the walls orange with a blue line where it meets the ceiling colour also the curtains are green, so you see it is all rather gay.’<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Hansard, Vol. 396, (26.1.1944), col. 674

<sup>16</sup> David Day, *The Bevin Boy*, (Oxford, 1995), p15

<sup>17</sup> PRO, LAB 26/14

<sup>18</sup> IWM, MISC 191, Item 2834, Letter from David B. in South Wales to his parents, (9.10.1944)

This can be compared with the hostel accommodation for other war workers in industrial hostels. This was mainly in larger, prefabricated buildings with sleeping accommodation in single or double cubicles.<sup>19</sup> In general the accommodation in Bevin Boy hostels was considered to be of a slightly lower standard than those of other war workers.<sup>20</sup>

Hostels building started towards the end of 1943 with the assumption that they would be ready by April 1944. Until then it was hoped that private billets would be available (see above).<sup>21</sup> Some hostels were still incomplete by this time, for example the first hostels in the North East region were not ready until May 1944,<sup>22</sup> and there was consternation about boys being moved into unfinished accommodation. The Director General of Manpower was also concerned about bad publicity.

‘I do not much like any of the suggestions which invite press comments. If some of the boys are going to be drafted into centres which are not ready, I am afraid that those sections of the press which are hostile to the ballot scheme in general will make the most of it. It seems to me that the only possible way to forestall that kind of criticism is to be certain that everything is ready when the boys go into the hostels.

As it appears not to be possible to do this, then, surely, the less publicity the better. It ought to suffice if each Press Office is thoroughly briefed and able to deal with press enquiries should they arise.’<sup>23</sup>

Various alternatives were sought in order to alleviate the immediate problem, sometimes with unforeseen consequences. In the Coventry area an already existing Salvation Army hostel, which had been the old hospital building, was seconded for the mining trainees. There were complaints about the quality of the food and the fact that when the trainees went home for the weekend, tramps were allowed to sleep in their beds.<sup>24</sup> (See Appendix ACC-I). Leslie W. was one of those put up in the hostel. Not only did he and many other Bevin Boys get scabies but the hostel was also infested with cockroaches.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> PRO LAB 22/57, ‘Charges in hostels’

<sup>20</sup> PRO LAB 22/57, ‘Accommodation provided by National Service Hostels Corporation’

<sup>21</sup> PRO LAB 8/734, Interdepartmental letter from Lumpson, Ministry of Labour to De Villiers (25.11.1943)

<sup>22</sup> PRO LAB 22/63, List of industrial hostels

<sup>23</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, letter from G.A. Ince (Director General of Manpower), (24.4.44)

<sup>24</sup> Hansard, Vol. 398, (30.3.1944), col. 1527. See also chapter on newspaper coverage, especially *Daily Telegraph*.

<sup>25</sup> M. and L. Wilson, *A Far Cry from a White Apron*, (Brighton, 2000), p24

Some of those interviewed for this thesis were accommodated in hostels and gave their impressions of them.

‘You were 12 in a dormitory, six each side. All the basics but no finesse ... the hot water pipes were at the top so the heat was non-existent. They were Nissen huts like the army would use joined up by a corridor and just basic sleeping really. We had a cabinet and our bed and the sheets were changed every two or three days. From that point of view it was comfortable and the food was very good ... but it was all a bit crudely done’.<sup>26</sup>

Alan H. was the only interviewee who initially opted for staying in a hostel. ‘I chose to keep in a hostel, I suppose being a bit lazy really but I thought while I’m here with the lads and you all got to be a community’.<sup>27</sup> After 18 months in the coal mines Alan W. had to leave his lodgings and was transferred to another mine from where he was able to get home at weekends. He stayed in a hostel during the week. ‘There were baths and accommodation and food. We had all we needed to live by’.<sup>28</sup>

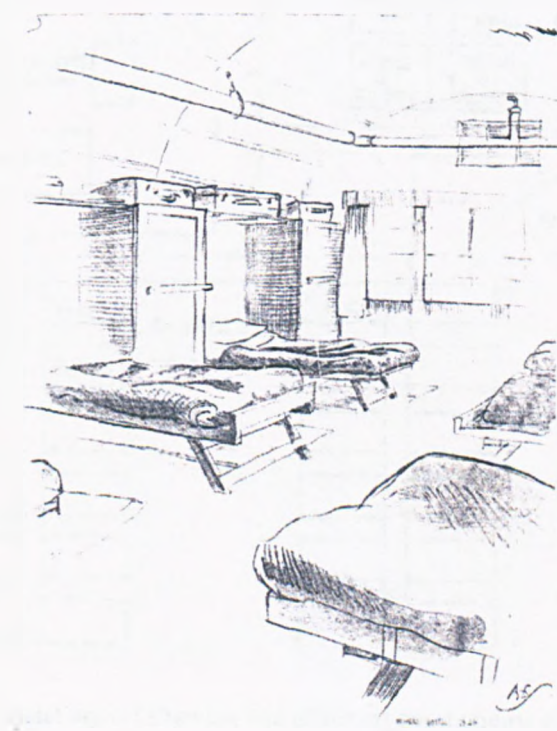


Figure 9.2 Hostel accommodation.<sup>29</sup>

The National Service Hostels Corporation issued a pamphlet, *Notes for New Residents*, which was circulated to all those being accommodated in miners’ hostels

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Alan H., (17.7.2000)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>29</sup> IWM, Misc. 191, Item 2834, Hostel accommodation drawn by a Bevin Boy, (1945)



and in which they tried to give an impression of community spirit and friendly atmosphere. Male guests and relatives were allowed to stay providing beds were available. A sick bay with a nurse in attendance was available for those suffering from minor ailments. The welfare officer, in effect the manager, was to supply the 'parental discipline'.<sup>30</sup>

'The administration [of the hostel] consisted of receptionists and an accounts clerk, whilst over at catering the head cook and her staff were busy preparing the menus for the day! Matron, with an assistant nurse, took charge of the sick bay. The cleaners' frightful task was keeping the hostel "spick and span" throughout, which included making our beds and seeing to the laundry. A supervisor was in control of this team.'<sup>31</sup>

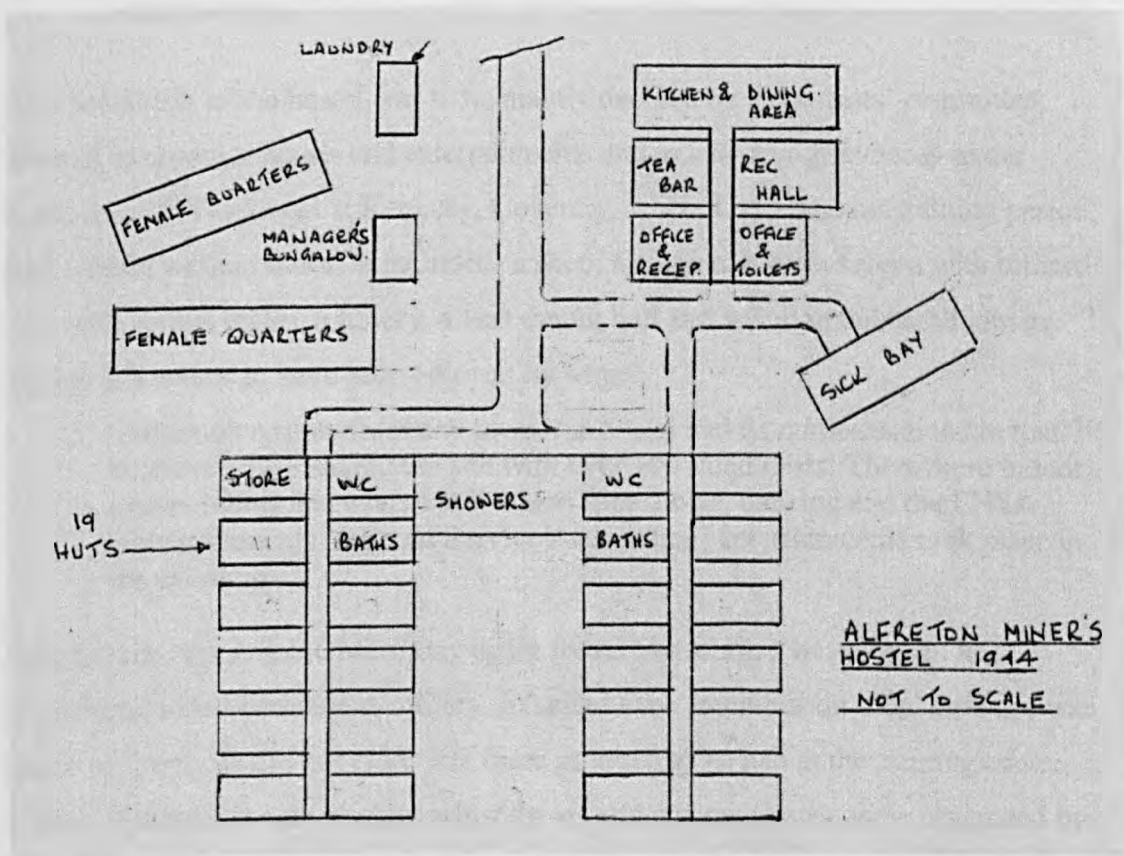


Figure 9.3 Hostel layout showing the different components of the hostel<sup>32</sup>

Ness Edwards reported to Parliament on the conduct of the boys in the hostels that he had visited and so it appears that the welfare officers were, in general, doing their job.

<sup>30</sup> Hansard, Vol. 414, (23.10.1945), col. 1937

<sup>31</sup> P. Yates, *The Bevin Boys' Story*, (Stoke-on-Trent, 1993), p6

<sup>32</sup> Roland T. *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on personal diaries (undated)

'I have met many of them in the hostels and I have attended their debates and discussions, their meetings, their plays and their dances, and I want to say that the standard of their conduct is as high as, if not higher than, that of any section of the community in this country. Their behaviour, on the whole, is first-class.'<sup>33</sup>

Much depended on the management of the hostel. The one described above was ideal as was the one where Roland T. stayed, however he found a different story when he visited a friend.

'When we left the reception to the hut area we were immediately struck by the disgusting state of the place. Windows were broken, doors hanging half off their hinges, curtains either non-existent or ripped and ragged, no light bulbs in the huts, and the smell of urine outside the hut windows was overpowering.'<sup>34</sup>

The social life of the hostel was to be mainly decided by a residents' committee, elected to organize sports and entertainments and to take any grievances to the authorities.<sup>35</sup> The hostel at Keresley, Coventry, where Day spent his training period, had a main welfare block. It included 'a shop, a cinema, a games room with billiard and table tennis tables, a library, a vast dining hall and a well upholstered lounge.'<sup>36</sup>

Hostel life seems to have been enjoyed by some.

'Although remote from any town, the hostel had its compensations in that 70 - 80 Bevin Boys shared the site with over 100 Land Girls! There were indoor games rooms and a large hall where film shows, dancing and the ENSA [Entertainments National Service Association] entertainments took place in the evenings.'<sup>37</sup>

Due to lack of a suitable billet Day again found himself in a hostel when he transferred to his permanent colliery. In spite of the amenities on offer little use was made of them. He did not enjoy life there as much as he had at the training centre hostel. 'Entertainments, such as whist drives and cinema shows, were organized but these received little support and the residents seemed resigned to an apathetic life of working and sleeping.'<sup>38</sup> He found that about 80 percent of the Bevin Boys lived locally and would go home at weekends. The rest would spend Saturday evening in

---

<sup>33</sup> Hansard, Vol. 414, (23.10.1945), col. 1937

<sup>34</sup> Roland T.

<sup>35</sup> 'Notes for New Residents' issued by National Service Hostels Corporation Ltd., reproduced in W. Taylor, *The Forgotten Conscript - a history of the Bevin Boy*, (Durham, 1995), pp37-39

<sup>36</sup> Day, p15

<sup>37</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, John W.

<sup>38</sup> Day, p66

the local pub followed by dancing in the Community Centre.<sup>39</sup> Norman B. gave a different impression.

'Life at the hostel was good - there was always something to occupy me and the ability to mix with other lads made the time pass pleasantly although we were at different collieries in the area. At least we were all doing the same ... Not only Bevin Boys were living there, an ENSA Concert Party was resident - from time to time they would put on a concert for us when they had no engagements at any of the many Forces camps in the area. Also the government had imported many Southern Irish lads to work in the mines, they also were living there. They were a lively lot - full of devilment and fun and did not mind an occasional fight among themselves - usually over cards on a Friday night - one or two of them always ended up losing their pay packets. A pastime I took no part in.'<sup>40</sup>

It appears that life in the hostel depended on the attitude of the Bevin Boy as well as on the management of the individual establishments.

There was much debate within the Government about the charges made at the hostels and the need to keep the costs in line with other industrial hostels in order to prevent trouble.<sup>41</sup> The National Service Hostels Corporation provided the hostels, although the Ministry of Fuel and Power fixed the price for accommodation.<sup>42</sup> The costs per resident varied according to the clientele: men and women, heavy and light industries, day workers only and day and night workers.<sup>43</sup> Industrial hostels were used by both men and women with charges of 25/- and 20/- per week respectively (see Appendix ACC-II). Women were deemed to require less food than men. This was in line with charges at miners' hostels, which were also 25/- per week, although they were of a slightly lower standard.<sup>44</sup> The charges included two main meals a day, breakfast and a three course evening meal, with an additional meal on Sundays.<sup>45</sup> Supplementary meals could be purchased at the hostel. A mid-morning snack was 5d, a midday meal 1/-, afternoon tea 5d and a light supper 5d.<sup>46</sup> Rebates of 2/6d were given for each day absent.<sup>47</sup> By the end of 1944 there were many complaints about the charges. An

---

<sup>39</sup> Day, pp64-5

<sup>40</sup> Norman B. *My Story*, account of pit life e-mailed to Ann Kneif, September 2002

<sup>41</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, 'Residential hostels for new entrants to the coal mining industry'

<sup>42</sup> PRO LAB 22/65, 'Comparative costs of hostels'

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> PRO, LAB 22/57, 'Charges in hostels'

<sup>45</sup> PRO LAB 22/55, Provision and management of hostels for workers engaged in the national effort

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



example is given in a letter to Miss Whyte at the Ministry of Labour and National Service from Gloyn Cox at the Ministry of Fuel and Power.

'Hostel charge for 7 days including 2 meals daily, 3 on Sundays	£1.5.0
Estimated cost for additional meals for 6 days	£0.6.0
Snacks to take into pit for 6 days	£0.2.6
Supper snacks for 6 days	£0.2.6
Laundry charges average	£0.3.0
Transport costs to and from hostel to pits	<u>£0.3.0</u>
Total	<u>£2.2.6</u>

The official deductions at the colliery office amount approx. to 4s. 10d per week with a tax deduction of 10s., leaving a balance of 12s 8d per week to a lad of 18 years of age (whose wage is £3.10s when working underground) to purchase clothing, footwear and additional expenses for replacement of pit clothes due to excessive hard wear, and for entertainments or recreation at the hostel or outside. If any of these boys loses a shift due to illness or accident, he incurs a debt on a particular pay week.

....

My Council are of the view that we are entitled to ask that residents of the hostel (Bevin Boys) are entitled to request that they shall not be placed in a worse position because they reside in a hostel, to those of their mining comrades who are fortunate enough to be private boarders. ...'<sup>48</sup>

The hostel residents also made complaints to the Government about costs.

'A boy or man living at the hostel must spend a minimum of 10/- a week i.e. 5d for sandwiches to take to the pit, and 1/1 for lunch at the pit each day. This of course leaves him without supper every night which means he must go from 6pm to 5 am without eating, and whilst doing mining work this is an impossibility. In addition to this, laundry is to pay for and 'bus fares to and from the pit, as in many cases the hostel is not as favourably situated as lodgings. This means we hostel people must pay 34/- a week to 'exist' plus laundry and bus fares. If, however, one wishes to 'live' he must buy supper each night, pay for laundry and bus fares bringing the total to a minimum of £2.0.0. This is 10/- a week more than the best lodgings in this area is costing.'<sup>49</sup>

The Government was aware of the discontent among the Bevin Boys regarding the pay and allowances they were receiving as it had been debated in the House of Commons in January 1944.<sup>50</sup> However, it appears that in spite of the Porter award (see chapter 6, 'wages') there was still discontent eight months later when this letter was written.

<sup>48</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, Letter (30.11.44)

<sup>49</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, Douglas W., letter signed on behalf of the hostel residents of the National Services Hostel, Adwick Road, Nexborough, (20.9.44)

<sup>50</sup> Hansard, Vol. 396, (20.1.1944), col. 338

In spite of complaints about costs the hostels were not always self-supporting because they were seldom full. Bevin later maintained that the costs were kept artificially low and gave his reasons in a letter to G.A. Isaacs, by then Minister of Labour (see Appendix ACC-III).<sup>51</sup>

The food was also a matter for debate. Some of the Bevin Boys found that the food was not adequate and they had to give out too much from their wages.

‘We have made numerous requests for a minimum of 3 meals a day without any success. The miners of this district are frankly amazed at anyone staying at this hostel at all, in view of the fact that we only receive 2 meals a day for 25/- per week, but of course owing to billeting difficulties most of us have no option. However, it is significant that a large percentage of the boys sent here have left as soon as they have been able to obtain lodgings.

Those boys have gone into private lodgings and are getting 4 meals a day and sandwiches to take along to the pit for a maximum of 30/- a week, with laundry included. ... We understand that this question of a minimum 3 meals a day is being looked into, but with the cold weather upon us we feel that action should be taken immediately.’<sup>52</sup>

In spite of this the criticism does not appear to be directed at the quality of meals but merely the number of meals served. David B. had no complaints about the food. In a letter to his parents he described his usual daily meals whilst training.

‘The hostel charge is 24/6d a week, two meals on weekdays and three on Sunday. For breakfast we have a bowl of porridge, bacon and fried bread or something similar and bread and marmalade to finish also tea of course and sometimes coffee. At five o’clock we get a hot meal consisting of soup, meat course, sweet course and tea. At mid-day we can either get a hot meal at the training centre canteen for 1/1d (these are the same as the hostel canteen) or get a snack at the colliery canteen, here you can buy as much milk as you can drink a half pint at a time. I generally have a mid-day meal at the canteen as the one hot meal at night is good enough and also I like the milk. If we want anything more in the evening after five we have to buy it at the hostel snack-bar.’<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> PRO LAB 26/188, Letter from E. Bevin, Foreign Office to G.A. Isaacs, Ministry of Labour

<sup>52</sup> PRO LAB 26/14

<sup>53</sup> IWM, Misc. 191, Item 2834, Letter from David B. in South Wales to his parents, (9.10.1944)

Towards the end of the war many of the hostels were closed soon after they had opened, for example Askern, opened 19.2.1945 and closed 2.6.1945.<sup>54</sup> *The Times* reported on a hostel built at Doncaster, which had cost £100,000 and was intended to hold 500 Bevin Boys. On completion it was handed over to the War Office as a demobilization centre.<sup>55</sup> This was undoubtedly due to the cessation of conscription into the mines with the end of war in Europe. Many of the hostels had been built as accommodation for Bevin Boys during their four-week training period and were therefore surplus to requirements.

### Billets

Although some of the Bevin Boys were content to stay in hostels once their initial training was completed, the majority went into billets. Some pits took the step of not building a hostel. A comment by the pit manager of Clifton, Nottingham demonstrates this.

‘We have always tried to do our best for you fellows. We deliberately did not set up a hostel because we did not want you to feel that you’re out of work hours were being regimented as well. I know that some of you have had some bad lodgings, but I think you are all fitted up OK now.’<sup>56</sup>

Billeting officers were usually volunteers and were appointed in each area.<sup>57</sup> Their job was to seek out those who were prepared to billet not only Bevin Boys but also others, such as those who were required in essential industries and those who were evacuated from the towns and cities thought to be at most danger from bombing. Thus the Bevin Boys were competing with others for available accommodation. This sometimes led to problems in finding suitable billets. The following comment was overheard in Nottingham:

‘I generally go to Lyons for a cup of tea in the afternoon, and I find most of the London evacuees get there. A lot of them are having great trouble with accommodation - the police say that over 50,000 have come here.’<sup>58</sup>

This shows just how many were searching for accommodation.

---

<sup>54</sup> PRO LAB 22/63, ‘List of industrial hostels’

<sup>55</sup> *The Times* (20.3.1945)

<sup>56</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Survey – Clifton Colliery Report, (29.5.1944)

<sup>57</sup> A. Calder, *The People’s War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969), p39

<sup>58</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (4.7.44)

Some billeting officers were no doubt conscientious but some were less so.<sup>59</sup> A Bevin Boy told to report to the Bestwood Colliery in Nottingham found that the registration of vacant accommodation was six months out of date and it took him over three weeks to find a suitable billet.<sup>60</sup> A letter from the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), who were often involved in finding billets,<sup>61</sup> comments on the need for billeting officers to be aware of the situation.

'I have found great interest in the way the work has been undertaken, and the reports that have come back to me have been that in every case where the billeting people were well briefed and told all the latest facts about pit-head baths and everything else, it was much easier to secure the billet than where they went with just the ordinary bare facts that every billeting officer always carries with him. ...'<sup>62</sup>

There appear to have been different types of landlady. Some were only interested in making a profit and then there were those who considered it their duty to the war effort to take in lodgers and help where they could.

'I believe that you know that our members (WVS) throughout the country have been doing the billeting of the 'Bevin Boys', and that they have delighted to do this work although at times it has been very difficult and very uphill, because they have felt that it was something really worth while.'<sup>63</sup>

'My house is quite a big one, on the Wilford Road, near the Clifton Colliery. There is another family besides mine living in it - 11 in all. My younger son works in the colliery himself. I consider it my war work to take in Bevin Boys and feed them and treat them as well as I can. To make them feel at home, because in many cases a lot of them are a long way away. When I hear that they are being badly treated in other houses I consider it my duty to take them in and feed them well. I was going out to do war work, but I think this is just as important - if not more so.'<sup>64</sup>

Bevin Boys could feel homesick when a long way from home.

'During the first week there was much open comment about how the men missed their home, but here again reference was made to the soldiers who had to live in barracks or rough it in the desert. Of late there has not been much talk about the subject, but it is obvious from scraps of overheard conversations that they missed their family and home life just as much.'<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Calder, p39

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Mine Survey – a special report on Clifton Colliery, Nottingham (24.7.1944)

<sup>61</sup> PRO, LAB 26/11, 'Conference on transfer and billeting of war workers'

<sup>62</sup> PRO LAB 26/14, Letter to Bevin from Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence 19.4.44

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (4.7.44)

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., A further report on the opinions and views expressed at the Training Centre, Swinton, Manchester, (1.6.44)

Some of the landladies realized that.

‘Of recently I have been noticing that a lot of the ladies won't take in the mining trainees. I have got enough on my hands with 3 little girls, and my husband in the forces, but I generally find room to put a couple up. Last week however I felt as if I had had enough, but when the lady came round with a couple more men I didn't have the heart in me to refuse. I try to make them as welcome and as happy as I can. But as you know there is no place like home, and it is understandable them getting miserable at times. I know I don't like it when I have to be away 2 days.’<sup>66</sup>

Others took advantage of the fact that unlike the child evacuees, where the government paid a fixed sum directly to the landlady, she could charge the war worker what she pleased, within reason.<sup>67</sup> A Londoner made the following comment: ‘Of course a lot of the old landladies are cashing in on the business. I think that it is disgusting - such things should never be allowed to happen.’<sup>68</sup> However, some landladies were losing supplementary pensions as a result of taking in evacuees and it sometimes became uneconomical for them to carry on offering accommodation.<sup>69</sup>

The cost of lodgings was usually similar to hostels although supper was often included in the price.

‘On the average the landladies seemed to charge 30 shillings a week which is inclusive of breakfast, high tea and supper. The majority are reasonably satisfied with this, but a certain number of the younger trainees (the 18s), find it rather a strain on their financial resources (wage for them is only about £2.10 shillings) [whilst training and after tax]. About 90 percent of the trainees are satisfied with their individual billets and as far as general living conditions are concerned anyway.’<sup>70</sup>

The Government reported on weekly billet costs in various parts of the country. In the mining areas of Northumberland and Durham the average weekly cost was 30/-, which included breakfast, packed lunch, evening meal and supper. Laundry was generally included. In the Nottingham area the costs were higher with an average of 35/- to 40/- without laundry. The charges made to the Bevin Boys for their accommodation did cause some animosity among other billetors. The *Times* printed a letter from a farmer.

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Opinions, (22.5.1944)

<sup>67</sup> Calder, p408

<sup>68</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (4.7.1944)

<sup>69</sup> Hansard, Vol. 401, (29.6.1944), col. 779

<sup>70</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further report on the opinions and views expressed at the Training Centre, Swinton, Manchester. (1.6.1944)

‘Sir – I see that it requires 25s to 35s a week to billet a potential collier. I have a ‘farmer’s boy’ age 15 years 11 months, whom I can guarantee to eat as much as any Bevin Boy and all I am allowed to charge for full board is 15s a week – and there is no canteen. Can any of your readers explain the discrepancy?’<sup>71</sup>

There were complaints by the Bevin Boys, especially about food. They were employed on hard manual work and felt that they needed three good meals a day.

‘My friend and I (investigator) have, compared to what some of the other fellows have got, landed in pretty rotten digs. There’s certain things about the landlady that I don’t like. We know for a fact that she has been through our cases searching to see what stuff we have got. Then there is the case of food. We really don’t get enough to live on. We haven’t seen any fresh milk yet only tinned. Well here is a typical menu for one day.

Breakfast – cup of tea, three pieces of toast.

‘Snap’ (lunch at work) - 1½ jam sandwiches.

Main meal 2.30 - salad mainly potato, bread and marg, cup of tea

No tea

Supper - plate of chips from fish shop, cup of cocoa

It is not good enough. We have to move.’<sup>72</sup>

‘First of all we started off very well. Everything was very fine and dandy. We got smashing grub and everything seemed to be all right. More than we could eat in fact. But slowly things started to go off. The food wasn’t so good, and then our laundry wasn’t done so well. Added to that, money started disappearing. We decided that it was time that we made our move. We’ve got good digs now right near the pit where a Czech and the Austrian used to live - smashing.’<sup>73</sup>

Food was a popular topic among the Bevin Boys. ‘Everyone reports that they have eaten much more in the last three weeks than ever before. They say that the job gives them an excellent appetite.’<sup>74</sup> In spite of meat being on ration the landladies found ways round the restrictions, sometimes with unusual ingredients.

‘I went home to dinner one day ... and I had a look at it and I thought where the hell he’s got steak from. So when he said ‘what do you think of that?’ I said ‘best bit of meat since we started this blooming war’ I said to him see. So he said ‘you like it?’ I said ‘yeah, yeah I’ll have that anytime.’ I said ‘you’d better get in with that butcher.’ So he said ‘well that’s horse meat.’ That’s all right’ I said, ‘I’ll have that every day.’<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> *The Times*, letter from W.M. Haslam, Derbyshire, (25.1.1944)

<sup>72</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (4.7.1944)

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Opinions, (1.11.1944)

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, A further report, (1.6.44)

<sup>75</sup> Interview with George R. (9.5.2001)

‘The people I stayed with, Cyril worked in another part of the pit at Chislet. He’d been in hotels and had mostly served as a waiter and doing other jobs as well and he’d married a Swiss wife, who was a genius at unusual cooking. I remember one night when we both arrived back from the afternoon shift she produced this white – well not white but cream looking dish on the table. We didn’t think it could be a chicken but it was very tasty and very nicely cooked and it turned out to be a cows udder, which she was quite used to in Switzerland but we weren’t in this country.’<sup>76</sup>

‘We had 10ozs of cheese a week instead of the standard 2ozs of cheese a week so that – that was the extent of the additional rations. But somehow or other this marvellous woman managed to cook me meals that I’ve never seen the like of before.’<sup>77</sup>

Extra meals were available at the mine canteen for a small charge.

‘Almost everyone praises the canteen dinner, and in the investigator’s personal opinion it is excellent, being the best of its sort that he has seen inside the services or outside. For 1/1d per meal consisting of soup, meat dish, sweet and a cup of tea can be bought. A very small minority however prefer the fish-and-chip shop some 50 yards up the road.’<sup>78</sup>

Although some of the Bevin Boys complained about their accommodation, landladies also had their share of problems with their lodgers.

‘When I first volunteered to have people in, I was never prepared to have in miners. But now I have got two Bevin Boys in, and they are proving a great trouble to me. They have got to get up at a quarter to 6 when I have to get breakfast – which I find very difficult to manage. I have given them very nice food. – but they are complaining that it is not enough. My husband has been a miner in his day, and he has been able to manage all right. Then another thing is that they come in with their dirty boots, and I have got to do all the cleaning up. Then they have got to have a bath every day. Of course they are a long way from the pit I realize that. I have taken in boarders before, and have had very good recommendations. It is not as if I was after the money.’<sup>79</sup>

‘I had a couple of new lads in the other week, and well I am very pleased with them. But on the Tuesday I went to the Coop with their ration books in order to get the food for the week. No one was more surprised than me when the lady behind the counter said that their wives had taken out all the tea for the month and in one man’s case for next month as well. I could have blessed them. It’s a rotten trick. I mean tea is the thing that we housewives are hardest up on. How can they expect us to manage without their coupons? One lady in the shop said that if anyone did a trick like that on her she’d give them water

---

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Ivor H., (2.10.2000)

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Peter H. (20.4.2000)

<sup>78</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further report, (1.6.44)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Opinions, (5.7.1944)

only with their meals. But I couldn't do a thing like that. It's a shame though. How can I manage?'<sup>80</sup>

Many of the landladies were miners' wives. Their lives were not always easy. Agnes I. described her most important job as looking after her husband. She also had two children of school age, a small holding with pigs and chickens to look after, a grocery store to run and a fish and chip shop, which was open in the evenings. There was also shopping and housework to do but she still thought it her duty to take in two Bevin Boys.<sup>81</sup>

Housing conditions in the mining districts were often poor. A report by a Mass-Observation investigator, who visited Blaina in South Wales, describes many houses as being damp, often with no indoor toilet, or even a sink. Some houses were occupied by more than one family. In some cases the cellars, intended to be kitchens, wash places or for stores, were home to a family.<sup>82</sup> The Medical Officer of Health noted that 'Housing conditions [in Blaina] are awful. People are worse off now because of the number of evacuees ... sometimes its really appalling, tiny, dark, damp houses.'<sup>83</sup> Another example was given of a landlady who had some of her family working at Clifton Colliery, Nottingham, who describes the local slum area.

'Of course you know all this district which is called The Meadows will have to come down after the war. It is condemned property. It is not pleasant living in squalid little back-to-back houses with continually hearing the noises and explosions from the gun factory. They want to take down all the lot, and build afresh. Of course I admit that this is only a small mining district - and that there are other places where things are much worse than this.'<sup>84</sup>

With such poverty and deprivation it is not surprising that the Bevin Boys sometimes had difficulty finding a billet, and when they did they were not always happy. The conditions may have been a shock, especially to those from middle class backgrounds. Certainly Fred C. thought that the billeting officer had mismatched him.

'It was dark, but on entering I could see that the house was filthy. The billeting officer noticed my look of anguish and promised to return the next day. That evening I must have been an incongruous sight - sitting there in my navy-blue suit and collar and tie, listening to the husband telling me that he never washed

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Opinions, (23.5.1944)

<sup>81</sup> BBC-WAC 'How do I manage?' talk by a miner's wife, (8.5.1944)

<sup>82</sup> M. Tarrant 'Homes in Blaina' in *Speak for yourself - A Mass-Observation anthology 1937 - 49*, Eds. A. Calder and D. Sheridan, (London, 1984), pp108-111

<sup>83</sup> M-O A: Report No. 1498 Blaina

<sup>84</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Opinions, (21.5.1944)



his back (there was a commonly held belief that to do so would lead to weakness). He was still wearing his working clothes, and when his wife appeared she also looked dirty. She had no elastic in the legs of her bloomers so that they drooped below the hem of her dress. That night I slept in my blue suit on top of the bed clothes and prayed for the return of the billeting officer.’<sup>85</sup>

Geoff B. was the son of a vicar and had been billeted on a landlady who had agreed to take 8 workers. ‘At first he slept on the settee, but found more rest with sharing a bed with another chap who was on night work, leaving the bed warm for him when he returned.’<sup>86</sup> The billeting officers did try, where possible, to match social classes but this was not always successful.

Social differences could cause problems, not only between landlady and Bevin Boy but also for the young men, who had to share a room. Edward W.’s parents took in Bevin Boy lodgers:

‘It must have been quite hard say for someone like Fred C., who had been brought up in a very good middle-class home to have to share a room with Morris K.’<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, most of the Bevin Boys and landladies got on very well together. ‘Only one or two complaints have been heard about the food that the landladies give them - and the general impression is that they are treated and fed very well indeed.’<sup>88</sup>

One landlady commented: ‘I must say that I have been very lucky considering. All the lads I have had billeted on me have been very nice and decent. I have never had any trouble with them.’<sup>89</sup>

‘Reg and I have got smashing billets. We have got nothing to complain about at all. It is only in a small working class house but she gives us wonderful food. A big breakfast bacon and eggs, plenty of snap (lunch break at work, generally sandwiches) and a hot meal when you get in at 2.30. Then no sooner have you finished that when it is tea time and you get more grub piled on to you - you can eat as much as you like. Then before we go to bed, we have got a large supper to come. She treats us really smashing - as one of the family. The other night she had a big jam tart in. I had three slices and could hardly move. She’s very generous with the cups of tea too – two or three at a time.’<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Fred C., Notes on his time as a Bevin Boy (undated)

<sup>86</sup> Geoff B. Typewritten notes (undated)

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Edward W., (30.10.2002)

<sup>88</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, A further report, (1.6.44)

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., Opinions, (21.5.1944)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., Opinions, (4.7.1944)

‘At the place I am staying in the landlady is quite a good old scout. It’s so much better when things are that way. It makes it more home like. Of course she has her own little ways you know but I keep my mouth shut. I don’t keep late hours, and I am generally out in the evening so she hasn’t got much to complain about. We get on quite well together. Some of these old landladies can be terrors though. They make your whole life a misery. It makes such a lot of difference if she is friendly and nice.’<sup>91</sup>

The interviewees also had various experiences in their billets. Ken P.’s first experience in lodgings whilst training was not very pleasant. ‘I didn’t like them. We only got chips and peas for dinner.’<sup>92</sup> He soon moved out. Once he had been allocated to a colliery things changed. ‘I was very fortunate. I went to live with a lady called Mrs Shaw ... Basically it was like home from home really, except that it was in the country.’<sup>93</sup> Peter H. considered himself lucky. He had forgotten his ration book and was left to the last, when the only accommodation remaining was in private houses. He was billeted with Mr and Mrs Parks. ‘Anyway these very nice people took me to their hearts ... and I kept in touch with them until they died, not many years ago.’<sup>94</sup> After the initial training period the landlord used his influence to get Peter H. sent to a local colliery.

‘He was friends with the local councillor and the local councillor was on the billeting committee. And I think somehow a few strings were pulled ... I think they had taken to me and they liked the idea of me continuing to live there.’<sup>95</sup>

Alan W. moved around in his lodgings. ‘The accommodation that we had up in Northumberland was with local miners and their families and they were very kind. We were well treated. None were affluent but they were very good to us.’<sup>96</sup> In his first billet Peter F. was in a house with no bathroom, which was a problem as there were no pit head-baths. This was not unusual as at that time there were over 900 collieries but only 362 had pithead baths.<sup>97</sup> It was necessary to use a tin bath in front of the living room fire.

‘(T)he most earliest back-to-back pit houses in the town had no bathrooms. But everybody had a fairly substantial range I think it was called, a grate where you could burn coal. On one side was an oven and the other side, if you

---

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., Opinions, (23.5.1944)

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>97</sup> Taylor, (1995), p73

were lucky was a back boiler. There were some back boilers had been installed. We had such a back boiler. But there was the tin bath, hung on a nail outside the kitchen door. And it only had one room and a kitchen. So the dining room was the bathroom, was the everything.<sup>98</sup>

Fred B. shared lodgings in a poor working class home with three other miners. He liked the family but was not used to the bathing facilities.

‘No pithead bath where I was at all. You bathed in front of the fire. The water was heated on a coal range and at one time as I say there was four of us at one time, all bathing in the kitchen, one after the other. The water got a bit mucky at times. ...you had to top it up like and you know, scoop the top off like because it got a bit mucky. But it depends who got home first.’<sup>99</sup>

When Peter F’s friend, also a Bevin Boy, complained that the three whippets in the house where he was billeted got better treatment than he, they decided to find new accommodation. By knocking on the door and being scrutinized by the rest of the family, they found lodgings with Aunt Florrie, whose husband was in the Forces. They stayed there until they left the pit. ‘We had this very cushy billet.’<sup>100</sup> Tony C. found he had been billeted ten miles away from the colliery, so together with three other Bevin Boys ‘we went round from house to house to see if anyone would take us in as lodgers.’<sup>101</sup> By this means he found accommodation. ‘The family were lovely ... she just took me in. It was so kind you know, you just couldn’t believe it.’<sup>102</sup> George R. also had a favourable experience. ‘I had a good lodging, excellent people in Gateshead. They couldn’t do enough for you. Sometimes when it was really cold, frosty and I came in at 2 o’clock in the morning the landlord would – there would be a bowl of soup on the table. He’d been up till 2 o’clock, possibly half past by the time I got there and there’d be the hot soup on the table.’<sup>103</sup>

### Conclusion

Bevin Boys were not alone in being directed away from home. Both men and women serving in the Forces or directed to war work were finding themselves in a similar situation when they were sent to barracks or hostels. The ‘people’s war’ provided a chance for classes and types of people to mix in a way never experienced before the

---

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Fred B., (29.9.2003)

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>103</sup> Interview with George R., (9.5.2001)

war. They were thrown together through necessity. Contact with social groups other than their own was not only through fellow workers but also the communities to which they were sent. Bevin Boys were generally satisfied with their situation and found it an interesting social experiment. It opened their eyes to how other people lived and broadened their understanding of society. The same can be said for many of those in industry and the Forces, sent to areas away from home. However, evacuees, women and children sent to rural areas from cities at risk from bombing, had a different story to tell. The *Our Towns* report of 1943, published by the Women's Group on Public Welfare, paints a picture of class conflict.<sup>104</sup> Poverty stricken people from inner cities were not used to country ways and their hosts did not always know how to deal with them. Whereas Bevin Boys often saw their experiences as a benefit in later life, it left the evacuees traumatised for a long time afterwards.

There were several types of hostel available apart from those used by the Bevin Boys. Industrial hostels were intended to house those working in wartime industries away from home. They were mainly prefabricated buildings with sleeping accommodation in either single or double cubicles. In London hostels for bomb damage repair workers were mainly in hotels and converted houses or flats, whilst outside London the accommodation was in camps.<sup>105</sup> The Government policy of evacuating war workers as well as those in risk areas led to a high demand on available lodgings in industrial areas. During the war the housing shortage became acute. Not only were houses bombed but also there was little in the way of materials and labour to rebuild or repair.<sup>106</sup> There was a reliance on volunteers, usually the billeting officers and the WVS, to help with finding accommodation for evacuees. The old Victorian ideal of self-help and voluntary aid was much in evidence. The Government realized early on that extra accommodation was required and were committed to building hostels to house workers. This was not always carried out with the speed necessary to cope with demand. The first miners' hostels were not ready until April 1944, although Bevin had been campaigning for optants throughout 1943, many of whom would need somewhere to live. The first ballot had taken place in December 1943 and the first Bevin Boy conscripts arrived at the training centres in January 1944. By 1945 there

---

<sup>104</sup> See J. Welshman, 'Evacuation, Hygiene and Social Policy: The *Our Towns* Report of 1943' in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 3, (September 1999)

<sup>105</sup> PRO, LAB 22/57, Accommodation provided by National Service Hostels Corporation

<sup>106</sup> Mass-Observation, *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, (London, 1943)

was a total of over 45,000 volunteers, optants and conscripts in the coalmining industry. In order to ease the accommodation situation 45 miners' hostels were completed with nearly 8,000 places, primarily intended for Bevin Boy trainees.<sup>107</sup> However, the Bevin Boy hostels were never full to capacity, even allowing for the use by regular miners and other industrial employees.<sup>108</sup> Some Bevin Boys were able to live at home but this still left a large number who required some form of other accommodation. Lodgings were often hard to find, especially in areas where the local volunteers failed to keep up to date lists of billets. However, for the lucky ones, given a sympathetic landlady, lodgings could provide a home from home and were usually preferable to the institutional life in a hostel.

Many Bevin Boys were disappointed at not being allowed to join the armed services and although they lived and worked in a semi-militarised regime and culture, they were in a better situation than had they been sent to the Forces. The soldier, for example, had a much harsher life. 'Ask any bachelor soldier what he most dislikes about army life and I think he will tell you that it is the lack of any home comfort, the dreariness and lack of colour.'<sup>109</sup> The Bevin Boy may have complained at times but, whether they were accommodated in hostels or billets, they were generally well looked after.

---

<sup>107</sup> PRO, LAB 22/57, 'Charges in hostels, 1941 – 1946'

<sup>108</sup> PRO WORK 22/188, Provision of hostels (1945-1959)

<sup>109</sup> J. Crang, *The British Army and the People's War 1939 – 1945*, (Manchester, 2000), p91

## Chapter 10

### Recreation and Social Activities

By tradition welfare facilities for miners and their families were always supplied by the Miners' Welfare Fund, which had existed since the Mining Industry Act of 1920. The fund was secured by an output levy on all coal mined in Great Britain and later by a levy on mining royalties. The fund was used to provide institutes, halls and recreation grounds in colliery villages, pithead baths and canteens as well as a miners' health service and education and safety research.

'The duty of allocating the fund is vested in the Miners' Welfare Commission, a statutory body appointed by the Minister of Fuel and Power, which maintains centrally an administrative and technical staff and a staff of welfare officers in the coal mining districts.'<sup>1</sup>

Because of the involvement of the Ministry of Fuel and Power it was expected that the Bevin Boys would be integrated into the welfare scheme of the industry.

The Government was aware of the lack of entertainment and pastimes in the services and that it led to low morale and efficiency. Consequently a welfare organisation was established creating a range of amenities and recreational facilities for the troops. Entertainment was supplied by ENSA and film shows were organised.<sup>2</sup> The Government had learnt from its experience with the Forces. It was concerned about recreational facilities for the Bevin Boys and in keeping them occupied in their leisure time. An inter-departmental committee on the 'Educational and Recreational Needs of Young Persons in the Coalmining Industry' gave a summary of their findings:

- i) In most mining districts the Miner's Welfare Recreation Scheme is the focal point of social life.
- ii) The recreation facilities available, with a few notable exceptions, are sufficient to absorb the new entrants – billetees and hostel dwellers – but this is largely attributable to their use and activity being much below potential.
- iii) Owing to diversion of caretakers and groundsmen from their work, restrictions on materials and difficulties in obtaining gear for playing, there has been a considerable lowering of the standard of maintenance of recreation schemes during the war years – especially outdoor schemes – with consequential deterioration of grounds, equipment and environment.
- iv) In general, there is an absence of organised effort or direction to use the existing facilities to the best advantage, which in the main is attributable to wartime preoccupation of voluntary workers.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Coalface', 'Miners' Welfare' in *Fabian Quarterly*, No. 50, (June 1946)

<sup>2</sup> J. Crang, *The British Army and the People's War 1939 – 1945*, (Manchester, 2000), p92

- v) There is a lack of suitable facilities for mixed recreation and accommodation (especially cafes) in existing recreation schemes where the youth of both sexes might congregate.
- vi) It is considered fundamental that so far as possible the social life of billetees and hostel dwellers should be integrated with that of the native community and segregation should be reduced to a minimum.
- vii) Some hostels are too remote from existing welfare facilities to permit the hostel dwellers to take full advantage of them.<sup>3</sup>

The Miners' Welfare Institutes were seen as the obvious way of providing entertainment and activities for the Bevin Boys. Nevertheless it was felt that the schemes run by the Miners' Welfare Commission were unable to offer much in the way of entertainment and where facilities were available they were not used as well as they should have been. This may have been as much to do with lack of funds as disinterest. For example, in the Durham area there was only one full-time District Officer, who had to rely on volunteers for help. The facilities for which he was responsible were considerable (see Appendix SOC-I) and it was felt that more full-time staff were required in order to develop the amenities further.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear from those answering the questionnaire (see Table 10.1) that the social and recreational activities of the Bevin Boys depended, to some extent, on where they lived. Those in lodgings were more likely to visit the Welfare Institute or the pub, whilst those in a hostel would make use of 'in house' entertainment. Boys living at home tended to go out less.

---

<sup>3</sup> PRO LAB 19/113, Educational and Recreational Needs of Young Persons in the Coalmining Industry, (1943-1944)

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Fuel and Power, Durham Coalfield Regional Survey Report (Northern 'B' Region), (London, 1945), p34

	Pub / Working Mens' club	Cinema	Dances	Girlfriends / courting	Other organized entertainment incl. Hostel	Hiking / cycling / outdoors	Sport	Education / classes	Invited to miners' homes	Other	None	No answer
Lodgings	14.47	14.47	6.58	3.95	5.26	3.95	11.84	3.95	2.63	11.84	2.63	2.63
Bevin Boy hostel	5.26	7.89	7.89	0.00	10.53	1.32	3.95	1.32	2.63	3.95	2.63	0.00
Both	5.26	3.95	5.26	3.95	5.26	1.32	1.32	0.00	2.63	2.63	2.63	1.32
At home	0.00	1.32	1.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.63	7.89	1.32
No answer	0.00	1.32	0.00	1.32	1.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	25.00	28.95	21.05	9.21	22.37	6.58	17.11	5.26	7.89	21.05	15.79	5.26

Table 10.1 Results of questionnaire: where lived in relation to social life<sup>5</sup>

The most popular form of entertainment during the war was the cinema.<sup>6</sup> The Bevin Boys were no exception in visiting the 'picture palaces', regardless of whether they lived in lodgings or a hostel (see table above). 'The cinema was cheap to go to.' The seats were 1/- or 9d.<sup>7</sup> Roland T. wrote of going to the cinema:

'We ventured into Chesterfield to the cinema where I was persuaded against my better judgement to queue for the evening performance of 'Fantasia'. Cinema queues were commonplace then and standing in the rain in the blackout was a fairly boring experience, but I suppose it was better than sitting around the tea bar at the camp.'<sup>8</sup>

Drinking was a major leisure time activity among the miners, either in the pub or the Miners' Welfare Institute. 'The mines are very thirst encouraging, and on first appearances it would seem as if it is the main topic of conversation down the pit.'<sup>9</sup> The Bevin Boys were encouraged to use the facilities at the Miners' Welfare.

<sup>5</sup> Figures shown in percent

<sup>6</sup> 'In 1939, 19 million people went to the cinema in Britain every week and by 1945 the figure had risen to 30 million.' P.M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, (Manchester, revised 1995), p217

<sup>7</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>8</sup> Roland T., *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on personal diaries (undated)

<sup>9</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 - 48, 64/2/B, Recreation and Social Activities, (1.8.1944)



'The miners would forever be saying, you know, "come down The Buffs, come down the Miners' Welfare and get your pint in". And so long as you went down and bought your round you were OK but anybody who was the slightest bit shy on that score, you got these remarks about these Londoners from the smoke.'<sup>10</sup>

'We got paid on Fridays and the Welfare opened at 10 o'clock on Friday. And we used to go up at 10 o'clock on Friday morning and I used to play snooker and this crowd would come in and I'd have to get their beer for them, but every time I got their beer I got one as well and that was my reward for the work I did for them during the week.'<sup>11</sup>

'One thing that it did for me was to make me break the habit of being a teetotaler. I was in my late twenties but I followed my father's footsteps and I didn't particularly bother about drinking alcohol but since I could only meet my mates either in the local Working Men's Club or the local pubs in the evening, I was joining them there. I got fed up with drinking ginger beer and progressed via shandys to bitter and so on. But I've always drunk half pints while other people are drinking full one-pint glasses.'<sup>12</sup>

The Welfare Club was a source not only of drinking but also of other activities including gambling.

'I couldn't believe my luck because in the club there was 3 dart boards, 2 snooker tables, endless packs of cards, dominoes. Everybody was gambling. And I thought God I've hit the jackpot here.'<sup>13</sup>

'They were all gamblers up there. That was the first topic. 'What you doing Dave?' they was good tipsters too. The only time I really made betting pay.'<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>14</sup> Interview with George R., (9.5.2001)

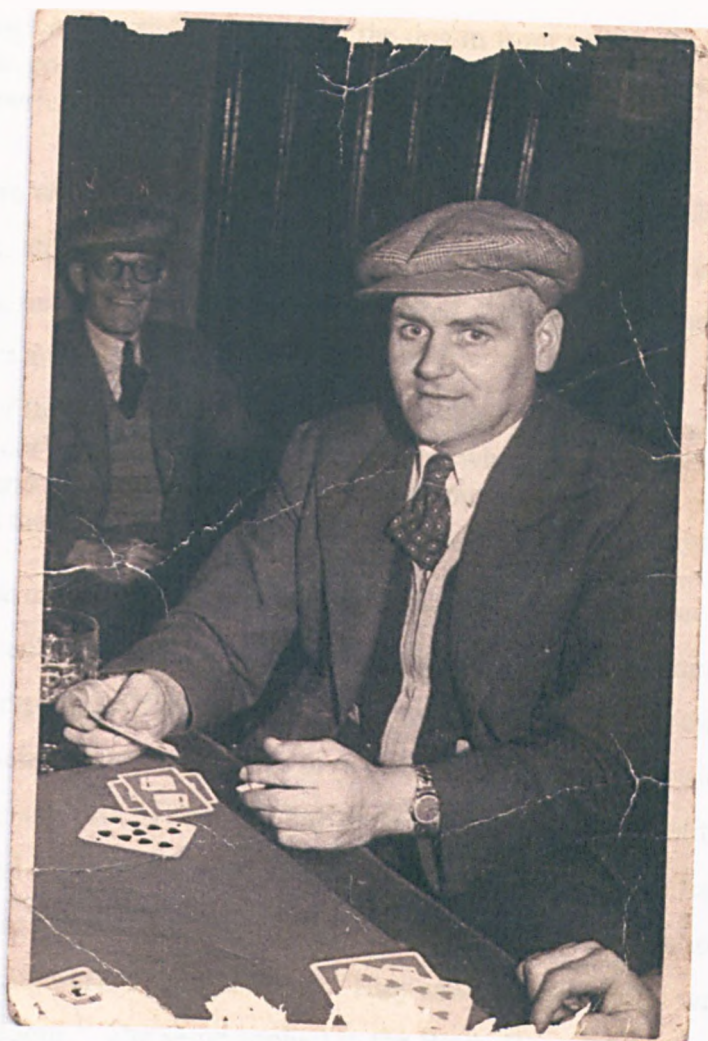


Figure 10.1 'Alby', a regular miner, playing cards, photo by Bevin Boy Geoff B.<sup>15</sup>

Gambling was very common among the miners and was a way the Bevin Boys could gain acceptance within the community.

'We were invited to go up on the moors behind the town and see the whippets, which meant you put some money on the outcomes. We never actually did that. You know you made your excuses kindly.'<sup>16</sup>

Dog racing was often illegal and Ken P. had an interesting story to tell of a fellow Bevin Boy from Wembley who wanted to become involved in the sport. He had a greyhound sent up to Mansfield by one of the Wembley trainers and entered it in a race.

'Got this black greyhound and we entered it for a race at Sharbrooke. It was only a flap and trap. It wasn't a registered track. ...And the traps went up and

<sup>15</sup> Photograph of 'Alby' kindly supplied by Geoff B.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

our dog came out about third, bit the dog in front and oh God it was such a – and we got warned off. We only had one race. Came back penniless but it was an experience.’<sup>17</sup>

However, there were other things to do in the Miners’ Welfare Institute. Eric G. noted that at Clifton, although the Institute was small, there were boxing tournaments held on a regular basis, which were very well attended. Libraries were there to help with self-betterment and education.

‘One of the things which impressed me about these mining villages was that the Miner’s Institutes weren’t only places where you could go and have a drink and play billiards, but were also libraries, which were paid for by the miners themselves and there was a great deal of self education going on.’<sup>18</sup>

Some made use of the educational facilities to advance their position within the mine. These were usually Bevin Boys who had decided on a career in mining once their service was completed. Others studied for qualifications other than mining that would help them in their chosen career once they were released. It was possible to attend classes in many subjects. ‘I attended one or two WEA classes on politics.’<sup>19</sup> The Government had again learnt from its experience with the forces. It had set up the Army Bureau for Current Affairs (ABCA) to encourage servicemen to become interested in current affairs and politics.<sup>20</sup> They saw this as a useful way of combating apathy and boredom.<sup>21</sup> The same applied to the Bevin Boys, who were encouraged to attend classes in order to divert their attention from any grievances they might have, especially their lack of choice when sent to the mines.

Although the Bevin Boys living in hostels were also encouraged to use the Miners’ Welfare Institutes, these were often some distance away. Because of the comradeship that had built up at the hostel, they were more likely to provide their own entertainment. Ken P. may have been right when he said:

‘If Bevin Boys lived in a hostel they didn’t give themselves a chance to know people. If you’re living in a hostel you go to work, come home and you’re in a hostel so you’re going to be with your own’<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>19</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>20</sup> Crang, p118

<sup>21</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *Politics and Military Morale: Current-Affairs and Citizenship, Education in the British Army 1914 – 1950*, (Oxford, 1992), p120

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

As has been noted in the chapter on 'accommodation', the social life of the hostel was mainly decided by a residents' committee elected to organize sports and entertainments. Some committees were obviously better than others.

'Outside the pit our social life was very good. We made our own entertainment at the hostel. We had a reception lounge used for band and dancing, games room and tea bar.'<sup>23</sup>

'A lot of the mining towns had an institute and they had one down where I was called the Oakdale Miners' Institute and they'd perhaps have a film show, there might be a dance there. Otherwise your entertainment or social life would really be based around the actual hostel. Games and that sort of thing. Sometimes you'd have some entertainment there actually at the hostel.'<sup>24</sup>

'We were not required on Saturday afternoon or Sundays, when we could do our own thing, which in a village like Cresswell was not much. The pub, or the local snooker hall was about all there was outside the camp. Football had been banned because the only boots we had were pit boots, and with the steel toecaps a number of injuries had occurred in the over competitive games.'<sup>25</sup>

Some of the Bevin Boys also enjoyed more energetic forms of leisure. Hiking was popular, especially for those who had only known town life before going down the pits. It had been a very popular leisure activity in the inter-war period. In spite of the industrial nature of their working environment there was often spectacular scenery in the neighbourhood and, if nothing else could be found, youth hostels supplied cheap overnight accommodation.

'Our other relaxation was youth hostelling. If I remember correctly, Youth Hostels cost about 1/- per night... And we explored much of the magnificent country... mainly using the local bus services.'<sup>26</sup>

'I would in fact get away on a Friday night and I would go youth hostelling. The far west side of Durham builds up into the Pennines so there was lovely moorland there. There were youth hostels and I discovered what I could do with the bus routes. The buses were excellent once you got to know the routes.'<sup>27</sup>

'Quite a number of us enjoyed hiking ... there were a lot of lead mines up in the Pennines and we used to bed down in an old disused mine cottage and spend the weekend there.'<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Warwick T. (18.4.2000)

<sup>25</sup> Roland T.

<sup>26</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Brian F., 'The Forgotten Army' (undated)

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

'Pete likes walking and is quite a good hiker. On Sunday Pete and I we left the hostel at about 10 and walked about 15 miles then bussed home. If you want to see it on the map we left Oakdale and walked up the Sirhowy Valley towards Tredegar. When we got to Mynydd Bedwellty we climbed up to where it is 1607 ft. The view from here was smashing I have never seen anything so terrific.'<sup>29</sup>

Sport was also popular, whether it was as spectator or player. Those answering the questionnaire mentioned various sports, such as all-in wrestling, snooker, darts and table tennis but surprisingly very few mentioned playing football, although one or two went to watch football matches.<sup>30</sup> Peter H. spent some of his spare time working for a local newspaper. The editor 'was desperate for someone to do some football matches for him on Saturday and he used to pay me five bob for every match I attended.'<sup>31</sup> Ken P. was kept well occupied. 'I joined in with everything, played football and we used to go catching rabbits. ... Didn't like my job but I was happy with my situation.'<sup>32</sup> Rabbit hunting was popular in the country as it meant extra meat in times when rationing often meant going without.

'There were certain country sports I'd never ever done before. For instance a chap, who lived a few doors away, Mr Barlow, ... he used to take me on afternoon trips round the local farm shooting rabbits. The local farmer – the farmer had died and his widow, she had three sons worked the farm and Norman was their friend. So he went around with his gun and I followed him and he'd go round shooting rabbits.'<sup>33</sup>

Dances were popular throughout the war years and many of the Bevin Boys mentioned going to dances in their free time.

'The Saturday night dances were a Mecca for all the local girls - for me and my two pals it was a watch only night - we found that together we had more fun with the lads - girls would have cramped our style!'<sup>34</sup>

'Several of us actually became very serious about the finer points of ballroom dancing and on Sunday afternoons the more proficient of us gave lessons to the two left foot brigade.'<sup>35</sup>

Some found that what they did in their leisure time was dictated by outside influences. If you wanted to get on you had to take note of the manager's interests.

---

<sup>29</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Letter from David B. in South Wales to his parents, (9.10.1944)

<sup>30</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2000)

<sup>34</sup> Norman B., *My story*, account of pit life, e-mails to Ann Kneif (September 2002)

<sup>35</sup> Roland T.

'Now in the village, the mining village, at least in the one I was in, I rather think that it was general, if you wanted to get on you joined in the hobby that the pit manager liked. If the pit manager was a cricketer, you played cricket. If he was a footballer, you played football. My pit manager ... he loved comic opera and Gilbert and Sullivan. So if you wanted to get anywhere at all you had to join the local Gilbert and Sullivan club, in which he was one of the leading lights. He had a good voice. But if you wanted to be anybody in the pit you joined the light opera company that functioned there. ... I never did join. I was busy with my youth club and my interest principally was youth club and my individual hobby was acting and I started a little drama group in the youth club. When Mr Davies heard of this he wanted me to join his opera. He thought I'd had a bit of experience in acting and of course I said to him I couldn't. I couldn't join your opera; I've got all my time's taken up with the youth club and with doing the drama class. And Mr Davies didn't like this. Nobody normally stood up to him and I can't swear that this was as a direct result, but within a few days of me telling him I couldn't join, I was moved over from day shift to night shift.'<sup>36</sup>

Geoff B. had been at a public school and had been very good at cricket. The colliery manager found out about this aptitude.

'And the manager of the pit, Mr Ernest Steel, suggested that I might go on the surveying staff and play cricket for Norton Colliery. I don't know whether it was an agreement but it seemed a very reasonable proposition to me. There again I had absolutely no qualification to go on any surveying staff at all. Anyway I was given a rather splendid tape measure in a leather case, which one rolled up and pulled out, and a ball of string and a lump of chalk and it was explained to me that one of my duties, in fact I think probably my only duty, was to measure where the supports would be on the coalface and obviously I had instruction in this and it wasn't too difficult to work out what one had to do. So I soon caught onto this and I got a rather splendid pair of overalls and I strutted about the place with this enormous equipment, string, chalk and a measure.'<sup>37</sup>

Social life could be a problem to young men who were working shifts. Many of the leisure time activities were only available in the evenings.

'We were on an awkward shift, which ran from 2pm till 10pm, which meant that we never got to go to the pictures of course and came home after 10pm, had a meal, went to bed in the early hours of the morning and when we woke up in the morning there was nothing, nothing to do except go to the Miners' Institute and play snooker and billiards. That's all there was, there was no recreational facilities at all.'<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>37</sup> Geoff B., own tape (undated)

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Barry G., (26.3.2002)

Even when they were working on day shifts tiredness and apathy were prevalent and there was a lack of self-motivation. A typical comment was: 'Most of the time I was quite worn out and glad of the rest.'<sup>39</sup>

'Regardless of whether or not you have a heavy day down the pit, you still come up the shaft at 2 o'clock and find coming up into daylight your head feels very heavy, and it is difficult to think clearly. When you have had a meal and a good bath you feel better, but even if you haven't had much work to do and you're not at all to it, your mind is in such a state in the evening that it is very difficult to concentrate on any other work for recreation. It is very hard to read a book, or even write a letter. One's natural desire is to just sit back and relax, and to have one's entertainment provided without any personal effort being required - e.g. to just wander along to the local cinema, to meet a girl or have a drink at the pub.'<sup>40</sup>

'This issue is obviously a very important one, and really everyone ... holds the same view that one's mind is always very tired in the evening. Constantly down the pit, even if the person hasn't got it all bad on the job such remarks as "I must have an hour or twos lie down before I go out" are held. .... but it is obvious that this tiredness factor partly caused by the atmosphere partly by the job itself is going to tell upon the miner's interests and activities within the space of a few years.'<sup>41</sup>

Many Bevin Boys complained that their social life was restricted due to lack of money.

'After buying food and clothes we had very little to spend on social. Perhaps pictures once a week and I joined the Port Vale supporters club.'<sup>42</sup>

'But don't forget in those days we really didn't have much money to spend anyway. We couldn't really afford - you didn't get much change out of your £3-10 shillings a week. By the time they deducted your hostel, income tax, which I think, was six old pence in the pound for that. Not a lot left.'<sup>43</sup>

Social life became most evident when the pits closed for a week for the annual holiday. In order to persuade people not to travel during the war the Government had campaigned for 'holidays at home', where local entertainment was encouraged. The Bevin Boys could find it difficult to go home and would be reliant on what the locality had to offer. Eric G. described the entertainment for the general public for the August Bank Holiday week in 1944, when the miners at Clifton Colliery, where he was working, had their annual week's holiday.

---

<sup>39</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>40</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 - 48, 64/2/B, Further Miners Opinions, (16.9.1944)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Mines Opinions, (24.9.1944)

<sup>42</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

'Holidays at home activities.

In its own way the City of Nottingham did much to entertain its local and visiting population during the August Bank Holiday period. Military band concerts, open air theatres (Shakespeare plays etc) organised in the public parks, and many industrial concerns organised sports fetes and such like (Basford Colliery had a sports day and a cricket match organised for Bank Holiday Monday, nothing done at Clifton however). A very large fair came to the town, and this together with the city council entertainments at Wollerton Park provided the major attractions for the weekend.

The fair: in a public park just outside the town a large fair and circus was organised. It was in fact the largest the investigator has seen anywhere in the country since the war began. On August Bank Holiday Monday the whole area was absolutely crushed with people, and EG found it impossible to make any estimate of the number at all (probably between 5000, and 10000 people...). Five dodgem car tracks, four roundabouts, ghost trains, shooting galleries for all in evidence, and although prices were high (1s. per person Ghost Train, 1s. bumper cars etc) people were queuing for the amusements.

Wollerton Park: At Wollerton Park the City Council organised a four-day programme for Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. To take one day: Sunday.

At 2.30 a drumhead service at which the ATS was in attendance. At 3.00 a parade of about 30 different types of army vehicles in the grass bound arena. At 4.00 a military concert by British Army and the US Army band. At 5.00 a variety show which consisted of diving feats into a tank of water, and acrobatics by a group of artists known as the young China troop. To open it dancing. The investigator estimates that on the average there were 3000 people at any time present. The council ran special buses to the show, and there were three tents at which refreshments could be bought until 6 o'clock (tea 3d, cake 3d). On the Monday similar events took place, although on this occasion there was also amateur racing and animal shows.<sup>44</sup>

Because Bevin Boys came from all walks of life their social and recreational activities were varied. For example, Geoff B, the parson's son, spent much of his free time playing cricket, a more middle-class sport. Tony C, also from a middle-class background, definitely thought that life as a Bevin Boy broadened his outlook.<sup>45</sup> Ken P. came from a working class area of South London. He enjoyed all the working class activities: dog racing, gambling, darts and snooker in the pub. However, with these one or two exceptions it is not possible to see if the class from which they came made any difference to their choice of activity. The impression is more of 'mucking in',

---

<sup>44</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B, 'August Bank Holiday Week – a special report, (15.8.1944)

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)



regardless of class, especially among those living in hostels. For many it was the first time away from home and parental discipline.

‘It was obviously my first time away from home as it was for a good many of us so I think in our spare time we did lead the high life a bit.’<sup>46</sup>

Calder remarks that, because there was little to buy in the way of consumer goods during the war, people had more money to spend on leisure activities. In addition radio was very popular and it was free.<sup>47</sup> Other popular pursuits for everyone were cinema, dances, spectator sports and the pub. Both the Bevin Boys and other wartime workers living in billets were more likely to go out, as it was often preferable to spending an evening with a landlady.<sup>48</sup> Many of those evacuated from the town to the country complained that there was nothing to do. The Bevin Boys, who often lived in mining villages, were in a better position as they had the use of the Miners’ Institute.

The social activities available to the average Bevin Boy is best summed up by the following:

‘The local dance in the Co-op Hall on a Saturday: the male voice choir: the youth club: an occasional visit to the Anglican Church: a dance on Saturday at Nottingham or a visit on Sunday to the girlfriend I made at West Bridgeford: frequent use of the public library: and in the summer walks by the canal side.’<sup>49</sup>

This was not dissimilar to entertainment available to other wartime workers. The following can be seen as an example of how leisure time was used across the country. There was a greater intensity of living for the moment as no one could see what the future held.

‘The war, by increasing employment, enlarging the spending possibilities of the district [Blaina] ... has had its effect on every kind of leisure activity. In effect there is now more dancing, cinema going, drinking, smoking, activities for women. Less musical activity of a high standard, less out doors, less interest in adult education, more reading, but less serious reading. There is also less chapel going and less active interest in local politics. The cultural activities, those costing least, and requiring more personal concentration, are in decline. ... The way in which a man spends his leisure time is in large measure the expression of his outlook on life.’<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Interview with John B., (18.9.2002)

<sup>47</sup> A. Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969), p366

<sup>48</sup> T. Harrisson (ed), *War Factory*, (London, 1943), p103

<sup>49</sup> IWM, 98/10/1, A.T. Gregory, typed manuscript (undated)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Most of the Bevin Boys found something to entertain them. Those who managed to integrate with the local population found it easier than those who did not. There was a social levelling when it came to entertainments. Everyone had to take what was on offer. Thus in spite of wartime austerity the majority of the Bevin Boys could find something to keep themselves occupied outside working hours.

## Chapter 11

### Relationship with Regular Miners

To understand the reception and treatment the miners gave to the Bevin Boys it is necessary to understand the mentality of the miners and how the mining community lived. This, of course, depended to some extent on the area in which the mines were situated, although there were certain common factors. A miner's whole life centred on his work. Nearly everyone in the village in which he lived would have been to some degree dependent on the mine. The mines were often in depressed, isolated areas, where, before the war, no other employment would have been available.

'And of course South Wales – you've got the coast and then you've got the valleys going up and the valleys are quite separated from each other by mountains so, although there was a valley a mile or two away from you, you had to virtually climb over a mountain to get to it or go right down the valley to Newport and then along and up the valley. So they tended to be isolated little communities and I felt so sorry for the men and women. The women in particular had a very limited life.'<sup>1</sup>

The constant fear of unemployment together with the daily proximity of danger, where accidents and even death were common, led to a great feeling of solidarity.<sup>2</sup> 'Your life is in the hands of your friends. Because they can protect you, you must protect them. There was always the unseen danger.'<sup>3</sup> The miners and their families formed a tight knit community, often going back over generations. Bevin Boys were not used to this way of living.

'Coming from anonymous London suburbia, where we hardly knew our neighbours names, it was quite a culture shock to go to a closely knit, ... gossipy village, where everybody knew everybody else. And I was told that if a boy went out with a girl more than twice they were engaged ... I went out with the same girl twice and in the eyes of the village was engaged.'<sup>4</sup>

Housewives had a constant struggle to make ends meet on the miners' meagre wage. There was also the battle to keep the house clean and tidy in the coal dust ridden environment, the constant heating of water for baths and washing and drying pit

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>2</sup> W.H.B. Court, *Coal*, (London, 1951), p324

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

clothes.<sup>5</sup> A mining engineer gave his opinion of the conditions in the Swinton (Manchester) area.

‘You have only got to go around Little Hulton and places like that to find how terrible miner’s cottages can be. You have got to walk about twenty yards down the road to your lavatory, which is communal. Of course the older miners have only got intelligence as far as horse racing is concerned, and as far as home comforts go their outlook does not extend any further than the old oil lamp on the table, and the zinc tub full of hot water in front of the fire.’<sup>6</sup>

Other than the Miners’ Welfare, where a pint of beer and a game of cards were on offer, there was little in the way of organised entertainment. Much of the miners’ free time was spent in the open-air, gardening, racing pigeons and dogs and walking.<sup>7</sup>

It was into these isolated communities that the Bevin Boy arrived. For many it was the first time away from home. ‘(I)n those days, during the war, we hadn’t travelled very far and for me to go from Winchester, across London and to catch the steam train from Paddington up to Chesterfield was quite an experience.’<sup>8</sup> Many were from large towns and it was the first time they were confronted with a colliery. ‘I suppose in those days a good many of us had never seen a colliery, never mind being down one.’<sup>9</sup>

A debate in the House of Commons on the mining industry brought reassurances from several MPs that their constituents would welcome the Bevin Boys.

‘I have no doubt, however, that wherever these lads come from they will be received kindly in the coalmining areas. They will be received courteously in the villages, they will get the best lodgings that can be obtained, and they will be treated kindly by their fellow workers underground. I know of no class of people who would treat these boys more generously than the miners.’<sup>10</sup>

‘I know miners very well ... and a more kind hearted and more sporting body of men it would be impossible to find, and we may be certain that these recruits will be treated with every reasonable consideration.’<sup>11</sup>

The answers to the questionnaire (Table 11.1) show that the majority of Bevin Boys thought they had a good relationship with the miners and the community and that in spite of the generation gap and differences in social class.

---

<sup>5</sup> Court, p323

<sup>6</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (22.5.1944)

<sup>7</sup> Court, p324

<sup>8</sup> Interview with John B., (18.9.2002)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (17.12.1943), col. 1847

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., col. 1850

	Very good	Good	Indifferent	Bad	No answer	Total
Scotland	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
North West*	80.00	20.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Durham	72.73	27.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Yorkshire	50.00	14.29	28.57	7.14	0.00	100.00
North Midland	60.00	30.00	10.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
North Western	50.00	0.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Cardiff	68.42	10.53	10.53	10.53	0.00	100.00
Swansea	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Midland & South	83.33	0.00	16.67	0.00	0.00	100.00
London & SE	28.57	42.86	28.57	0.00	0.00	100.00

\* Northumberland & Cumberland

**Table 11.1 Results of questionnaire: Relationship with the other miners by area**

The harshest comments came from those drafted to Wales. A typical comment was 'I think we were just accepted as a necessary evil.'<sup>12</sup> It appeared that the Welsh miners were more concerned about unemployment once the war was over than those from other areas. Wales had always had the most depressed areas in the coalmining industry.

'I found personally that down in South Wales ... there was a resentment from the public at large to the fact that we were down there in the mines. We got a lot of abuse in the streets and it's understandable because the people there thought - the wives thought that we'd come down there to take away the jobs from their own kith and kin, from their husbands, from their brothers, from their sons and so on. So there was a certain amount of resentment.'<sup>13</sup>

'Relationships with other miners was slow in developing in South Wales. The community generally were resentful of our presence in the pits due to their own kith and kin (ex-miners) who were called up into the Forces.'<sup>14</sup>

Bevin was keen to point out that the Bevin Boys would not be competing with the miners after the war.<sup>15</sup> In areas other than Wales this seems to have been accepted.

'We were not taking their jobs you see and there was no animosity at all.'<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Robert K., (28.3.2002)

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>14</sup> Questionnaire, September - November 2002

<sup>15</sup> Hansard, Vol. 395, (17.12.1943), col. 1855

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

'My relationship with the other miners was excellent. The community could not understand why inexperienced labour was being drafted into the mines when many miners were away in the Forces. However, there was no animosity towards me or my fellow draftees.'<sup>17</sup>

'I think I was fortunate in going to Nottinghamshire because they received us well with no animosity. I mean Bevin Boys who went to Wales for instance were criminalized really. They thought they were taking their boys' jobs but it didn't happen to us. We were made most welcome.'<sup>18</sup>

However, Welsh miners had long memories of past confrontations.

'To mention Winston Churchill's name here in Llay when talking to miners, was like a red rag to a bull. The mention of his name was tantamount to blasphemy. The miners never forgave him for what he said during the 1926 strike. "Shoot the miners, if they will not return to work." People have long memories in a mining community and twenty years was but a short time.'<sup>19</sup>

'Memories go back a long way in the Welsh ... coalmines. For instance to a man they hated Churchill because of his actions during the General Strike of '27 [meant 1926] and they all believed that he sent in troops. I believe that wasn't quite the case but that was the firm belief among the Welsh miners.'<sup>20</sup>

Churchill had, in fact, sent in the troops as reinforcements for the police after miners' riots at Tonypany in November 1910, following a strike by 15,000 men over piecework rates at the coalface imposed by the owners. The owners had attempted to bring in blackleg labour.<sup>21</sup>

Gerry G. was more pragmatic about the experience of being sent to the Welsh coalfields.

'It was a culture shock of course for us, middle class schoolboys from suburban London to be thrust into a Welsh coalmining community. A culture shock I suspect as much for them as for us. I expected a certain amount of hostility. ... We were really quite weaklings compared with the miners themselves. So I was expecting a somewhat hostile reception, but in fact we were warmly welcomed, the reason being that the Welsh coalminers felt, and I think with reason, that nobody in the outside world really understood them and their problems. ... And they looked upon us as it were as ambassadors, who would go back to the wide world and tell the wide world what coalmining was really like.'<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>18</sup> Interview with John B., (18.9.2002)

<sup>19</sup> M. and L. Wilson, *A Far Cry from a White Apron*, (Brighton, 2000), p66

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

<sup>21</sup> A. Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel*, (London, 1960), pp15-16

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

This opinion that the Bevin Boys were seen as ambassadors was borne out by a South Wales miner, who said: 'We welcomed you chaps into the mines. Because you will be able to tell people the facts in circles that we do not move.'<sup>23</sup> A view perhaps more associated with the older miners.

The miners were working class. The Bevin Boys came from all classes and class inevitably played a role in their acceptance. As Gerry G. has pointed out it was a culture shock but many were able to accept this. Others found it harder.

'I don't feel I was ever accepted into the working class as I would like to have been. I didn't sort of talk right or look right. I wasn't interested in the sort of things they were interested in. So maybe it's just as difficult to gate crash down below as it is to gate crash up.'<sup>24</sup>

When looking at the comments of the Bevin Boys it is necessary to take into account that this is a one-sided appraisal. We do not see the regular miners' point of view.

'Miners had a chip on their shoulders, as they had known great poverty between the wars and been treated very badly by society.'<sup>25</sup> 'Some Bevin Boys ... were met with hostility, as ex-miners were still in the Forces and Bevin Boys were seen as "draft dodgers".'<sup>26</sup> If a Bevin Boy was not pulling his weight at work it is understandable that the miner would feel less friendly towards him.

'To some extent we were a strange phenomenon and not sufficient to be a threat or even an inconvenience. If anyone stepped out of line, as happened, it was usually made a joke of and life continued, provided you pulled your weight. These were men who judged you as they found you.'<sup>27</sup>

'You had to do your job because if you shim shranked [sic] at all then you were beyond the pale, but that was because that was the ethos of the miner. Everyone pulled his weight. Everyone depended on everybody else. And once you understood that, that it was necessary to pull your weight otherwise you'd be a burden on everybody else, once you accepted that, and they saw you accepted that and you were ready to pull your weight, then you were in. You were part of the mining community.'<sup>28</sup>

'I don't know how they must have thought with the invasion of all these young men – as I say never got their hands dirty in their lives, suddenly descending upon them. I think they thought it must have been a bit of a joke. But you get

---

<sup>23</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (16.9.1944)

<sup>24</sup> IWM 11829/1, Transcript of an interview with David D., (1986)

<sup>25</sup> NSA C900/04566 C1, Millennium Memory Bank, David D., interview (1.2.1999)

<sup>26</sup> IWM MISC 191 Item 2834, Harold G. 'A Bevin Boy's Story or Why Me?', (typescript, undated)

<sup>27</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

into the way of things of course and eventually they get to accept you. They realize that, well perhaps they are not so bad after all these young lads.’<sup>29</sup>

‘The real colliers have been very kind to us Bevin Boys, they don’t expect us to do as well as them and sympathise with our having to go down below at all. But they are extraordinary pleased when one of us really does do a full job of work, equal to them.’<sup>30</sup>

The majority of Bevin Boys had not wanted to go to the mines, which had some bearing on their attitude.

‘Relations between Bevin Boys and miners were rather prickly, most [Bevin Boys] were furious that they were not allowed into the army and their manner was deliberately provocative.’<sup>31</sup>

Others found that if their attitude was positive they would be far more likely to be accepted by the miners. Ken P. was certainly of this opinion and he is still in touch with some of the people he met as a Bevin Boy.

‘It’s a question of yourself. ... I think I could have walked into any house in that village for a cup of tea. ... I never had a cross word with any of the guys – ever.’<sup>32</sup>

‘Well, I felt actually in spite of the stories that went around about the inapproachability of the Pottery folk and about their unreadiness to accept people into the community, I didn’t find that at all. I found that if one approached people in a friendly way and open way they’d respond in the same open and friendly fashion. As a result of that I was able to make not only new acquaintanceships but new friendships very quickly indeed. ... I found it a very compatible community. One that was easy to get drawn into because I thought the same way as they did, felt the same way as they did, had the same sort of aspirations for the long term objectives as well as the immediate “win the war” objective.’<sup>33</sup>

Acceptance by the miners was something that was often remembered later by the Bevin Boys. Knowing that they had been accepted took several forms.

‘My relationships with the miners with whom I worked were always good and the best compliment that I received was from one of the contract men with whom I had worked ... who told me of all the Bevin Boys he had worked with I was the only one who could handle a shovel as well as he could and that view was shared by the rest of them ... I felt that I had been accepted by the

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>30</sup> BBC-WAC, Geoffrey Davidson, ‘Calling East Africa, An East African Bevin Boy’, (18.11.1945)

<sup>31</sup> NSA C900/04566 C1, Millennium Memory Bank, David D., interview, (1.2.1999)

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)



men for whom I had the highest regard. Their loyalty to each other and sense of humour was an education and had a big influence in my later life.<sup>34</sup>

‘(B)oth Jim and I were invited to come up on Sunday and ‘get wer tee’, which was a sign of acceptance you could say.’<sup>35</sup>

Whilst for Norman B. his acceptance was in the form of an initiation ceremony normally reserved for regular miners.

‘While I was standing up I suddenly found myself surrounded - my trousers were pulled down around my ankles and I was forced to the floor. The cap of one of oil drums was removed and its thick black contents poured all over my genitals - the result was great hilarity. What a mess!! Then I was told - " Nah then Norman lad - tha's one of us". ... I had been accepted.’<sup>36</sup>

Many Bevin Boys found that the miners and the community showed kindness towards them and gave them a friendly welcome.

‘I found they were kindly, generous and very protective. Many times they were extremely sympathetic. ... And I must say they are the nicest people that, up to that time, that I had ever met in my life. London commercial life was not a bit like that and I never liked it very much but then I moved up ... into this kind of society and communities of this kind and it was a revelation to me. Here were people who were not thrown together because of wartime contingencies, but because this was their way of life. They lived for each other and each man’s safety was the responsibility of himself and every other man. So I never found any hostility. I never found anything but friendliness.’<sup>37</sup>

‘A thing that, looking back, impresses me is the way we were welcomed and received by the miners. ... I never worked with men for whom I’ve had a greater respect. They could not have been more helpful. They sympathised with us having to go and work in the pit and they did what they could to make it bearable. So it wasn’t a bad experience on the whole.’<sup>38</sup>

‘No difficulty was insurmountable; no situation was intolerable as the companionship of the North Staffordshire miner offered a Bevin Boy from London dignity, humour and a friendship, which is still meaningful today. The gift of a smoker’s cabinet “from his mates at Norton Colliery” on my departure was an accolade I never deserved, but possessively treasure.’<sup>39</sup>

Geoff B. was sent to the Potteries (Staffordshire). He felt a part of the community and enjoyed the friendship of the miners. He wrote a poem in honour of his miner mentor, Big Joe.

---

<sup>34</sup> Roland T., *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on personal diaries (undated)

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)

<sup>36</sup> Norman B. *My story*, account of pit life, e-mails to Ann Kneif (September 2002)

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Ivor H., (2.10.2002)

<sup>39</sup> Geoff B., typewritten notes (undated)

'I worked down a mine known as Norton,  
Where the miners were wonderfully kind.  
They were always concerned for my welfare  
And daily enlightened my mind.

...

I had many a laugh with the colliers,  
Who were always given to fun.  
They couldn't have been any kinder  
If I'd been their very own son.'<sup>40</sup>

Many of the regular miners had gone down the pits at 14 years old. They were often people with very little education but that did not necessarily mean that they were not intelligent. They often came from different cultural backgrounds.

'And the miners themselves are a great crowd of chaps. They're more friendly to one another than any other lot of men I've come across ... They are very clever and intelligent and they're homely and kindly too.'<sup>41</sup>

'I think one of the most interesting things for me in retrospect was to see the effect of these incoming town boys, comparatively sophisticated, civilised and you had these very isolated village communities of miners, with two different cults almost, coming together. I found that fascinating because what happened was, and this is only fair, a bit of each rubbed off to each other. For instance I noticed that some of the miners started to wear sort of better shirts or maybe even a tie coming ... off their shift and the boys started to chew tobacco and spit. ... so it was really a very good levelling process.'<sup>42</sup>

'At first I tended to think the miners were not as clever and well educated or cultured as I was. I quickly learned otherwise! They tolerated us, some teased us and played tricks on us, but by the end there was mutual respect.'<sup>43</sup>

The miners were often thought by the Bevin Boys to have a good sense of humour.

'They were full of jokes and they would pull your leg and if you took it in good part that was OK. If you didn't take it in good part, look out for yourself. But that's true everywhere, isn't it?'<sup>44</sup>

'(W)ell they reckon they are all comedians and I believe it. I don't reckon anyone would go to a job like that unless there was no work about. They were a happy crowd and they were real decent people. But without them the job wouldn't have been – well I wouldn't have stopped.'<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Geoff B., 'Ode to Joe' amongst typewritten notes (undated)

<sup>41</sup> BBC-WAC, Forces Educational Broadcast, interview with John Pierce, (24.1.1946)

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2000)

<sup>43</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>45</sup> Interview with George R., (9.5.2002)

The general public, including the Bevin Boys, who for the most part had no experience of mining life, had often thought of the miners as 'the scum of the earth'. This was especially true of the mines in Kent. One reason for this may have been that the Kentish miners came from all parts of the country.<sup>46</sup> As Harkell has shown the women were often very unhappy in their new surroundings and the community spirit was not as marked as in old established mining areas.<sup>47</sup>

'They came from all parts of the country. They'd come down to Chislet, to Kent in the thirties to get a job. Some of them had been black-listed in their home areas for strike action or things like that and they had a bad name. They were often referred to by those who didn't know them as the – not scum but the throw outs of the pits in other parts of the country.'<sup>48</sup>

'The cosmopolitan structure at Snowdown did not generate a real community spirit in the adjacent villages. The Kentish mines attracted miners from all the other coalfields in the British Isles and each community seemed to keep to themselves.'<sup>49</sup>

'The [Kent] miners themselves were – you could split them up. You had what I would term highly intellectual people ... that went because of Granddad and Dad, they followed them into the pits and you had the scum of the earth. Well really the dregs. So yes it was an experience and you met people from you know all over the country. ... and I met some very nice people there, yes and I met some horrible people.'<sup>50</sup>

It was not only the Kent coalfields where the miners had a bad reputation. A young woman speaking of the miners in the Nottingham area had this to say:

'I believe that these people are just as much attached as anyone else to their wives and families. It is snobbish to say they aren't. They are merely rough because the job is so rotten.'<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> G. Harkell 'The Migration of Mining Families to the Kent Coalfield Between the Wars', in *Oral History – The Journal of the Oral History Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Spring 1978), gives the origins of miners coming to Kent from 1920 – 1936 in a sample of 5.134 as follows:

South West	4%
Midlands	13%
North East	40%
North West	9%
Scotland	8%
Wales	26%

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Ivor H., (2.10.2002)

<sup>49</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Dave W., (2.10.2002)

<sup>51</sup> M-O A: TC Coalmining 1938-48, 64/2/B, Mines Opinions, (1.8.1944)

Where did you live? **X** What was your relationship with the other miners and the community generally?

	Very good	Good	Indifferent	Bad	No answer	Total
Lodgings	34.72	5.56	5.56	0.00	0.00	45.83
Bevin Boy hostel	16.67	0.00	2.78	4.17	0.00	23.61
Both	9.72	4.17	2.78	0.00	0.00	16.67
At home	2.78	8.33	1.39	0.00	0.00	12.50
No answer	0.00	0.00	1.39	0.00	0.00	1.39
Total	63.89	18.06	13.89	4.17	0.00	100.00

Table 11.2 Results of questionnaire: Where lived by relationship with miners and community<sup>52</sup>

Table 11.2, produced from the questionnaire answers, looks at the Bevin Boys accommodation and compares it to their relationship with the regular miners. It shows that Bevin Boys living in a hostel were less likely to get on well with the miners. Ken P. felt that it was because those living in a hostel would be more likely to create their own amusements and not participate in the village life. 'So you're going to be a little clique, you're probably going to walk around town and get yourself into trouble all the time.'<sup>53</sup> (See also chapter 10, 'Recreation and Social Activities'). He lived in lodgings in the village.

'I couldn't have stood hostel life. I'd have had to come home. .. I lived with the people, which was nice. Very basic, everything was basic – shared the same towel, food basic well that's how it was. I am proud to have known those people and I have no regrets.'<sup>54</sup>

His comment is interesting because he was brought up in a slum area of South London. He was used to deprivation, but after his demobilisation from the mines he secured a well-paid job and rose in the social scale.

An interesting comparison can be made between the Bevin Boys and those conscripted into the Army. By late 1940 the majority of the soldiers in the lower ranks were conscripts, and by the end of the war they felt that they were part of the Forces.

<sup>52</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

The Bevin Boys were only a very small percentage of the workforce in the mines. They had a slight inferiority complex and never felt that they really belonged.

There was often hostility by the local population towards women evacuated to work in factories, more so than towards billeted soldiers and Government officials.<sup>55</sup> Many factories had been built where there was no tradition of industry in the area. They had been specifically built for wartime production.<sup>56</sup> Within months of completion of a radar factory in Gloucestershire, it was employing nearly 1,000 people, mostly directed labour. 'The proportion of imported employees to original inhabitants over a five mile radius was approximately 30 percent.'<sup>57</sup> It is no wonder that relationships with the local population were strained. Relations with fellow workers were much better. There was a reliance on others, which led to a team spirit within the factories. 'I like my work... I'm lucky enough to be with a nice class of people, and that makes a great difference.'<sup>58</sup>

Generally the Bevin Boys found they had a good relationship both with the miners and with the mining community. As has been pointed out in the chapter on 'unions', the Bevin Boys who joined the union often felt that they were accepted more readily than those who did not. Those in lodgings were more likely to stay in contact with their landladies or others from the area, sometimes forming lifelong bonds.<sup>59</sup> Where problems arose it was often the fault of the Bevin Boy. One admitted that he was not very popular with the miners because he had refused to take part in a strike, which he felt was unjustified.<sup>60</sup> Others did not work as hard as they should and thereby caused problems for the regular miners, whose wages often depended on output and who saw them as shirkers. The miners usually realised that the Bevin Boys were not interested in the work and accepted this.

'We were all on good terms with the miners ... Good will, however, did not blind the professional miner at Chatterley Whitfield to the shortcomings of directed men. ... They often said that although we did our work, they could not really leave us to do a job without checking on us, because they knew our hearts were not in the mining industry. ... Coming to the mines from so many

---

<sup>55</sup> Harrison (ed.), (1943), p15

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p18

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p13

<sup>58</sup> M-O A, Report No. 1498

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000), Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>60</sup> Questionnaire

different regions and backgrounds it is little wonder that the mining abilities of Bevin Boys varied greatly.<sup>61</sup>

This was probably the crux of the matter. Bevin Boys were from all social backgrounds but they were moving into a working class environment. Many people were evacuated during the war. Regardless of whether they were children, young mothers or war workers, how they came to terms with their new surroundings often depended on their own attitude and the ability to adapt. This was also true for the Bevin Boys. The majority of miners had some sympathy with the Bevin Boys and felt sorry for them that they had been forced to do something against their will. In general it can be said that relationships with the regular miners were favourable.

---

<sup>61</sup> J. Hutchinson, 'The Unlikely Lads – the direction of men into the mines during World War 2' Chatterley Whitfield Mining Museum Trust, (1987)

## Chapter 12

### In Retrospect

Whereas previous chapters have mainly dealt with the facts of life as a Bevin Boy, this chapter looks at people's feelings and how they see their lives in retrospect. There is no complete objectivity in historical narrative. How the Bevin Boys feel now has been conditioned by what has happened both in their own lives and the world at large over the past 60 years.

'We must carry our work to its final conclusion. We shall not fail, and then some day, when children ask: "What did you do to win this inheritance for us, and to make our name respected among men?" one will say: "I was a fighter pilot;" another will say: "I was in the Submarine Service;" another: "I marched with the Eighth Army;" a fourth will say: "None of you could have lived without the convoys and the Merchant Seamen;" and you in your turn will say, with equal pride and with equal right: "We cut the coal."<sup>1</sup>

Although this speech was directed to the regular miners, it could equally well apply to the Bevin Boys. However, as can be seen in previous chapters, at the time the majority would have much rather gone into the Forces. Although many resented being sent into the coalmines, nevertheless, when looking back in time, they did not find the experience all that bad.

'I'm pleased I did it. When you're young you resent that you couldn't do what you want to do but I didn't regret doing it. I mean these people talk about going abroad but what could I do? I was over here and I did the best I could under the circumstances. I knuckled down to it. ... That's it, if you're of that disposition.'<sup>2</sup>

'I was quite happy. It was an experience that I don't think I shall go through again and maybe I missed something by not going into the Forces. I don't know.'<sup>3</sup>

As Warwick T. pointed out: 'We were all youngsters – 18. We all were thinking about getting home as soon as we can because all our interests, social life perhaps girl friends were back home.'<sup>4</sup> Alan W. has become pragmatic about his experiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Churchill's address to delegates of miners, managers and owners, Westminster Central Hall, (31.10.1942), quoted in Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913–1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p560

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Alan H., (17.7.2000)

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Robert K., (28.3.2002)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

'I always took the view that those on active service really did something that they sacrificed themselves for their country and I suppose, you know, in our service, lost their lives and injured themselves. So I didn't feel we had done very much. I wasn't angry. It was just a toss of the coin in my case, you know. I would have preferred the army. Rather two feet on the ground than under the ground, but no nothing like that.... I think there are other things I would have preferred to do but I have no axe to grind. I am very fortunate I suppose.'<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen from Table 12.1, the answers to the questionnaire on how they feel now about having been a Bevin Boy are varied. Generally they thought it had been an interesting experience and many now feel proud to have been a Bevin Boy.

<b>How do you feel now having been a Bevin Boy?</b>	
<b>Answers</b>	<b>%</b>
Proud	21.05
Got used to it	1.32
Would not have missed it	7.89
A necessary job	3.95
Experience	38.16
No recognition	19.74
Lucky as still alive	6.58
Mention of BB association.	11.84
Badly treated	17.11
Better understanding of miners	7.89
Other	26.32
No answer	2.63

**Table 12.1 Results of questionnaire: How do you feel now having been a Bevin Boy?**

Some were aware that they might not have survived if they had gone into the Forces. Typical responses were; 'quite happy – probably saved my life having volunteered for the Navy.' 'Suppose I could have been shot down in the RAF.'<sup>6</sup>

'It was probably the best thing for me as against – I could have been knocked off on D-Day, like so many others who thought they were going to join the tanks. There were so many who didn't come home and all I got was a couple of digs where the coal dust has never quite come out, so I've got some scars, if you know where to look.'<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Alan W., (29.3.2000)

<sup>6</sup> Questionnaire, September – November 2002

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Peter F., (6.6.2000)



Certainly their chance of returning home after the war was far greater and only two Bevin Boys lost their lives in the pits.<sup>8</sup>

One of the main comments from the Bevin Boys was that they were not treated the same as those in the Forces. They often had to endure abuse from the general public, as there was nothing to single them out from draft dodgers or conscientious objectors. 'Bitter about the way we were treated by the public who thought we were call-up dodgers.' 'Fed up by the ignorance of the public who are under the impression that we chose the pits to escape service in the Forces.'<sup>9</sup>

'We didn't have uniforms ... when you went home you were challenged frequently by the local police for the fact that you were not in uniform. During wartime everybody wore uniform but not us. We were in civilian clothes. This would also prompt members of the general public shouting abuse at you. They thought you were draught dodgers or deserters even and in the case of police you were often challenged because one was warned during wartime about enemy agents. So you'd be questioned by local Bobbies. There were certainly a lot of police about during wartime.'<sup>10</sup>

'Certain misconceptions held by the public and having not been dispelled by successive Governments and the media in general over the years, together with the time taken to get official recognition for our service to King and Country during that period, leaves a bitter taste for us – loss of self esteem.'<sup>11</sup>

Leslie W. had been handed a white feather, a sign of cowardice, by a lady in the shop [Sainsbury's], where he had been working before call-up. He found it grossly unfair because he was as ready as the next man to go into the Forces.<sup>12</sup>

There was a call for some form of recognition that they were gainfully employed during the war. A question to the Minister of Labour was raised in Parliament asking if he was prepared to issue a special badge for young men who were called up and directed to work in the coalmines. Bevin regretted that he could not give a badge to everyone who was affected by war work.<sup>13</sup> This meant that the Bevin Boys had no way of proving that they were engaged in war work.

---

<sup>8</sup> Phil Yates, *The Bevin Boy Story*, (Stoke-on-Trent, 1993), p13

<sup>9</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>11</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>12</sup> M. & L. Wilson, *A Far Cry from a White Apron*, (Brighton, 2000), p11

<sup>13</sup> Hansard, Vol. 400, (8.6.1944), cols. 1523-4

It was not just the attitude of the public during the war, as Peter M. explained.

'I also felt after leaving the coalmines that people would think that I had joined because I was a conscientious objector. I did have a slight inferiority complex when what one did in the war came up compared with those who went in the Forces.<sup>14</sup>

Today many people do not know about the Bevin Boy scheme or have only heard it second-hand, propagating myths and misconceptions. Thus Ken P. was faced with a misconception about Bevin Boys.

'Its very upsetting when – about a year ago, we were having a drink, my wife and I and there were six blokes sitting there and Bevin Boys were mentioned funnily enough and one guy said “oh they were the blokes that went down the pits to get out of going in the army” ... and when I went up to get a drink I just said politely I'd like to put you right. We didn't have a choice but I've got nothing to prove it that's the only thing.'<sup>15</sup>

Those interviewed often made a comment about not being given a demob suit. Flight Lieutenant Teeling, MP for Brighton, took up the Bevin Boys' cause after he had been a member of a delegation visiting various coalfields to look into the grievances of the Bevin Boys.<sup>16</sup> He put a question to the President of the Board of Trade, asking whether, on being released from their duties in the mines, the Bevin Boys could be given extra clothing coupons comparable to the amount given to ex-Servicemen. Whilst in the mines they had used up 37 from their 60 civilian coupons in addition to the ten extra coupons allowed them for essential mining clothes. The reply was that no extra coupons would be issued. Sir Stafford Cripps thought that the arrangements made for miners' clothing had been adequate.<sup>17</sup> There were complaints that the Bevin Boys had to supply their own clothing and their own tools.<sup>18</sup>

Many Bevin Boys felt that their treatment by the Government on demobilisation was unfair. The majority, 92 percent of those answering the questionnaire, were already in an occupation when they were called up.<sup>19</sup> When they went into the mines they were promised that they would be treated as if they had gone into the Forces. However, once the war ended it was decided that there would be no automatic reinstatement to

---

<sup>14</sup> Peter M., Interviewed by Oaten Hill and District Society, (17.8.1986)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2002)

<sup>16</sup> Griffiths, R.H. *"The Forgotten Army" The Bevin Boys in the South Wales Coalfield 1943 – 1948*, MA thesis for the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, (March, 1995)

<sup>17</sup> Hansard, Vol. 438, (5.6.1947), cols. 27-8

<sup>18</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>19</sup> Questionnaire

their pre call-up civilian jobs as opposed to those serving in the Armed Forces. 'If you were ex Army, Navy, Air Force your jobs had to be held open for you. Not if you were a Bevin Boy in the mines.'<sup>20</sup> The reason given was that if Bevin Boys were allowed this privilege, all those directed to other war employment would expect the same.<sup>21</sup> They were not granted the same facilities as ex Service personnel in regard to Civil Service examinations.<sup>22</sup> The same applied to pension rights.

'My service in the coalmines, unlike that in the Forces, does not count towards part of my pension. Despite statements by Ernest Bevin, our patron as it were, when the Bevin Boys' scheme was first set up, that we would be treated in exactly the same way as men who joined the Forces, this has not been true.'<sup>23</sup>

Recollections were not only negative. Many Bevin Boys mentioned the warmth of their billet families and the comradeship of their fellow workers. Some made life-long friends. 'I made several life-long friendships and still meet two surviving former Bevin Boy colleagues every year.' 'The friendships I made were for a lifetime and I valued them deeply.'<sup>24</sup>

'And so, even after all this time, I can feel quite vividly, think back and muse on it and think of the colour, about the changes in my own life. I suppose it taught me a great deal. Certainly taught one that hard work never killed anybody or at least not many, and the friendship, the comradeship, the warmth.'<sup>25</sup>

'It had its plus side – put it that way round. Like most things in life with the topside and the flipside. On the plus side was certainly the friendship and the wealth of experience that I gained.'<sup>26</sup>

Several met and married women they had met whilst in the pits. 'The one good thing that came out of all this, I brought home a miner's daughter.'<sup>27</sup>

'I opted to go to a Durham pit as I had an uncle and aunt living in Durham whom I visited regularly and through these visits met my wife – a miner's daughter and gained a number of mining relatives with whom I have always had very close relations – and still do.'<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>21</sup> Hansard, Vol. 414, (23.10.1945), col. 1938

<sup>22</sup> Hansard, Vol. 415, (8.11.1945), col. 1569

<sup>23</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Philip C., (1.10.2002)

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)

<sup>27</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Although they probably would not have felt so at the time, many now say they feel proud to have been a Bevin Boy.

'Proud and it has taught me to have every respect for the regular coal miner who risks his life on a daily basis for the benefit of the nation, with little reward.'<sup>29</sup>

'Proud that I was able to make my contribution to the war effort. The Bevin Boys played a vital part during the war.'<sup>30</sup>

'Being an only child mixing with an unknown group of people was beneficial. One learned to give and take and think of others. In fact looking back I feel quite proud to be associated with Bevin Boys and the Durham miners.'<sup>31</sup>

The majority of those questioned mentioned the experience of being in the coalmines. A typical answer to the questionnaire was: 'Working with miners was a great experience and one I shall never forget.'<sup>32</sup> Others saw it as an experience that changed their outlook on life.

'My time in the coalmines remains a very vivid period in my life. It was certainly a very sharp introduction from sheltered boyhood into the big wide world of men and I think that was something of an advantage.'<sup>33</sup>

'All experience is valuable and I have a better understanding of a part of society that would have been completely strange to me.'<sup>34</sup>

'If I said that I would not have missed it for the world, I would be lying. However, my experiences taught me about the hardships, the hazardous working conditions and the intense comradeship that existed in the mining villages when mining was a great industry.'<sup>35</sup>

The physical work was hard for those who had never done any manual labour but, although it could be a problem, some Bevin Boys found it an advantage and there were no negative comments on this aspect of work in the pits.

'It's good things in a way. I was a scrawny young man but by doing hard physical work I think it made me a better man. Whether it made me a better person or not I don't know.'<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Peter M.

<sup>34</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>35</sup> Fred C., letter to Ann Kneif, (October 2002)

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Dave W., (2.10.2002)

'The experience of having to work physically hard in unpleasant conditions is not one I would want to repeat, but it did me good in that it opened my eyes to the fact that some people have very restrictive lives (and not much hope of things getting better).'<sup>37</sup>

Some found the work in the pits something they wanted to leave as soon as possible but others realised that it was a job that they could feel had something to offer them after demobilisation.<sup>38</sup> They saw it as an opportunity to enter a satisfying, well-paid, technical career.<sup>39</sup>

'I am glad – or should I say content, that my number came out of the hat. I eventually went to night classes and day release to college and was able to obtain mining certificates of management and moved up the ladder.'<sup>40</sup>

Peter H. was very enthusiastic about his time in the mines and thought it was the best thing that could have happened to him.

'I sometimes wonder what would have happened to me. I would probably have ended up as manager of a shop or something and I would have been very disgruntled with life, I think. No, this gave me a career; it gave me friends, contacts. As chief press officer with the Coal Board, I got to know dozens and dozens of journalists throughout the country and I am still in touch with a lot of them. Many of them, of course, are retired as I am now and we have little get-togethers up in town.'<sup>41</sup>

However, a satisfying career was not the only reason for staying in the mines. Dave W. remained in the pits as a collier all his working life because he wanted to be able to earn enough to give his children a good education.<sup>42</sup> Others had no choice. As has been explained earlier in this chapter, a Bevin Boy had no right to his old job after demobilisation. If he had not found a job within 56 days he would not be entitled to unemployment benefit and would therefore be forced to return to the mine (see Appendix RET-I).

The first encounter of many Bevin Boys with trade unions in the mines paved the way for their future political aspirations. Two of the Bevin Boys interviewed ended their careers as General Secretary of a union. Several of those interviewed left the pits with a new respect for unions and politics.

---

<sup>37</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>38</sup> J. Hutchinson, 'The Unlikely Lads (the direction of men into the mines during WW2)' from the Chatterley Whitfield Mining Museum Trust, (1987)

<sup>39</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Dave W., (2.10.2002)

Although Peter H. enjoyed his time as a Bevin Boy he could appreciate that it did not suit everybody.

'To me it was the best thing that ever happened but I can quite understand that there were people who hated every minute of it. Felt that they were regarded as second-class citizens. Never got a medal, never got any kind of recognition for what they'd done. And there are a lot of them who bear that resentment to this day. ... We never ceased to be civilians you see. That was the point. ... I don't think [recognition] matters. At least it didn't matter to me. What mattered to me was that I had a career that I shouldn't have had otherwise.'<sup>43</sup>

A drive to get some sort of recognition was only started many years after they had left the pits. The formation of the Bevin Boys' Association in 1989 came at a time when many were retiring from work and had more time to reflect on their past. The aim of the Bevin Boys' Association was not only to give the members a chance of meeting on a social level but also to press for some form of recognition that many felt they were due. As one Bevin Boy said: 'We ought to have been worthy enough to have received a victory medal of some sort to pass on to grandchildren who do not understand our role in the war.'<sup>44</sup> As many of the Bevin Boys approached for information for this thesis were members of the Bevin Boys' Association, it is difficult to know how much their involvement in the Association has influenced their responses. They had many chances at their regular meetings to talk over old times. Typical answers in the questionnaire were: 'It would be nice to have recognition nationwide that we were conscripted civilians and not cowards.' 'Medals are of no use to me but a letter of thanks would have been nice.'<sup>45</sup> Others felt that some sort of recognition would make the public aware of the role they had played during the war. 'There are a great number of the public who have never heard of the Bevin Boys.' 'Very surprised that many people never even heard of us!'<sup>46</sup>

Through the efforts of the Bevin Boys' Association the Bevin Boys finally received some form of recognition in 1995 when they were specifically mentioned in

---

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>44</sup> Questionnaire

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

broadcasts during the VJ commemorations.<sup>47</sup> Since 1998 they have been allowed to take part in the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph in November.<sup>48</sup>

‘And, of course as you know, the Bevin Boy’s Association managed at last, two years ago, to be sufficiently recognized by the British Legion to be included in the Armistice celebrations on November 11<sup>th</sup> in Whitehall. And they wore their helmets and marched with pride and jolly good luck to them.’<sup>49</sup>

There are still some who would like to see the Bevin Boys receive a medal or some other form of official recognition. However, in the 1950s a decision was made to keep only a small sample of many wartime documents in order to save on space. As a result most of the records pertaining to the Bevin Boys were destroyed and so it is unlikely that any form of individual recognition could ever be given. The Association continues to lobby the British Legion for individual membership for Bevin Boys but so far this has not been granted, in spite of concerted efforts. Peter Shaw, Conservative MP for Dover, approached Peter Lloyd, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in February 1991 on behalf of Geoff B. about entitlement to war medals. The reply was that the Defence Medal could only be awarded for civilian service in Civil Defence, Fire, Nursing, Police and Coast Guard Services but not for work in the coalmines. Bevin Boys also do not qualify for the War Victory Medal.<sup>50</sup>

Not all were interested in medals but would have liked something that said that they played a part in the war.

‘The thing I would have liked was a piece of paper to say I was conscripted into the coalmines and I spent my whole time just the same as the guy in the army. I got my discharge just the same as in the army but I served my time in the pits instead. But it wasn’t a choice. I had to go and end of story. ... And as for Bevin Boy medals and all that old crap– I don’t know – it annoys me.’<sup>51</sup>

Others neither wanted nor expected any recognition. ‘I can’t say that I lost any sleep over that. Never occurred to me that I’d get recognition. No, no it didn’t bother me at all.’<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Warwick T., (18.4.2002)

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, (11.11.1998)

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)

<sup>50</sup> Correspondence between David Shaw MP for Dover and Peter Lloyd, Home Office, February 1991, copies supplied by Geoff B.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Ken P., (11.7.2000)

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Gerry G., (26.3.2002)

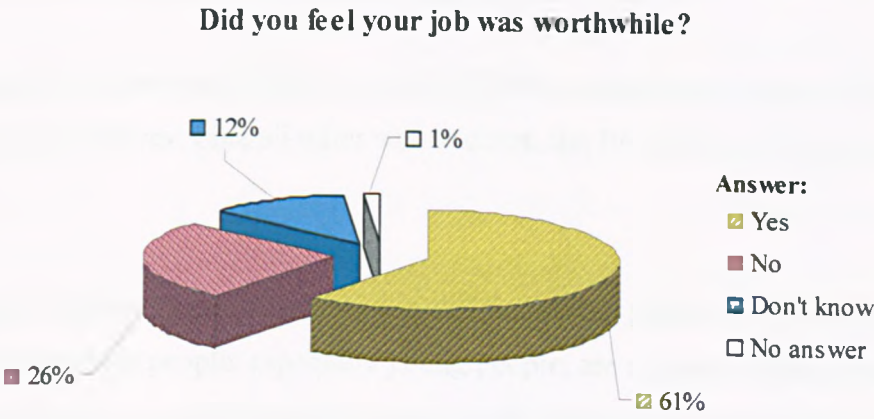
There were, of course, negative reactions and some still feel resentful at having to do a job they did not want to do. ‘No, it was slavery. Well there was German prisoners was cutting hedges on top and we were going down for coal.’<sup>53</sup> There were also problems with accidents and illness.

‘But on the other side there was the fact that one recognized that one’s body was being almost misused by the demands made upon it and a feeling of even those of us who didn’t get caught up with lung diseases we did recognize that our bodies had been assaulted.’<sup>54</sup>

However, generally the Bevin Boys felt that it was an experience and they now feel proud to have served their country in this way. It could have been worse and as Peter H. pointed out:

‘ We went home to our beds every night. Once we’d finished our shift we were free to do whatever we wished. We had a normal life. We chased after girls, we went to the pictures, we went to dances. We did all – some of us even studied.’<sup>55</sup>

When asked if they thought the job they had done in the mines was worthwhile it is interesting to note that from those answering the questionnaire the majority were in the affirmative (Table 12.2).<sup>56</sup> Had they been asked at the time they were in the mines the answer certainly would have been different.



**Table 12.2 Results from questionnaire: Did you feel your job was worthwhile?**

<sup>53</sup> Interview with George R., (9.5.2001)  
<sup>54</sup> Interview with Jack M., (25.5.2002)  
<sup>55</sup> Interview with Peter H., (20.4.2000)  
<sup>56</sup> Questionnaire



When asked if he thought he was doing his bit for the country with the war on, David D. replied:

‘That was the motivation really. We all wanted to do our bit. We felt resentful at first because we weren’t doing it in the way that we wanted ... in uniform out there fighting. ... We always wanted to do our best for our country. There was a terrific spirit of patriotism in the country in those days.’<sup>57</sup>

Many of the Bevin Boys’ memories have been influenced by later experiences and knowledge. Some were able to continue with their education. Others found good jobs after demobilisation from the mines and were able to climb the social ladder. Their view of their billets and working environment is conditioned by their life today: by modern amenities and customs. The respect the majority showed for miners may be based on hindsight: their attitude to the bad deal received by the miners after the 1984 strike and the subsequent closure of the majority of the pits.

The comment of one Bevin Boy sums up the attitude of not just those directed to coalmining but those of many other workers who were expected to do their bit for the war effort on the Home Front. At the time there was resentment at not being able to choose their part in the war effort.

‘I felt hard done by at the time but others had worse experiences. I know I feel that it was a distant and unrecognised part of my life.’<sup>58</sup>

For many it is in the long distant past and difficult to record their present feelings on this part of their lives. Like all other war workers, the Bevin Boys just got on with the job.

The main criticism by the Bevin Boys is still the lack of proper recognition and the fact that nowadays people, especially young people, are unaware of the scheme that sent over 40,000 men into the coalmines. Hopefully this will be addressed in part by this thesis and the interviews given by Bevin Boys, which have been deposited at the Imperial War Museum.

---

<sup>57</sup> IWM 11829/1, Transcript of an interview with David D., (1986)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 13

### Conclusion

This thesis has set out to redress a gap left by historians looking at the Home Front, who have largely failed to take into account the part played by young men directed to the mines, the Bevin Boys, during and just after the Second World War. Even definitive books on the role of the Home Front in the Second World War, for example, Calder 'The People's War', make only brief references and have failed to acknowledge the part played by the Bevin Boys in helping to maintain urgently needed coal supplies. The Bevin Boys were one component of manpower in a Britain fully mobilised by the end of 1943. This thesis looks at the background of manpower direction. It identifies the Bevin Boys within the history of labour supply in the Second World War. It places the role of Bevin Boys more firmly in the history of the coalmining industry and shows how the use of Bevin Boys was a fundamental shift of manpower direction. It looks at various aspects of the Bevin Boys' life, how their experiences fitted into the specific context of the coalmining industry and into the wider context of wartime service, work and society. It discusses the historiography of the Second World War in respect of 'total war' and the 'war and society' debate.

The Bevin Boy scheme was just one aspect of Bevin's plan as Minister of Labour to increase or at least maintain production in all major wartime industries, including shipbuilding, aircraft manufacture, munitions and coalmining. He had already conscripted women and some men into wartime industries other than coalmining. The men who were conscripted were those not required for the Forces because of age or for health reasons. In doing this he was more radical than any other British minister.<sup>1</sup> Donnelly sees this as imposing the will of the state on its citizens and therefore an infringement of civil liberties.<sup>2</sup> There appeared to be no complaints of this at the time. Propaganda had ensured it was an accepted fact that everyone was needed to do their best to help win the war. However, the coalmining industry caused Bevin the biggest headache. The problems of recruiting 50,000 men into the mines far outnumbered those of finding 5 million workers for munitions factories.<sup>3</sup> Coalmining was hard,

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War*, (London, 1999), p45

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p49

<sup>3</sup> A. Calder, *The People's War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969), p234

dirty and labour intensive work. Few chose to do it willingly. Bevin used every means possible to try and encourage young men to join the industry but when all else failed he had no choice but to use the force of the ballot.

By looking at the history of the industry this thesis has discussed the problems faced by coalmining generally and analyses the reasons behind the necessity of directing young men into the mines. It was not the only industry where direction had been thought expedient. Bevin's attempt to conscript women into the Royal Ordnance Factories (ROFs) had largely been seen as successful. It is with this in mind that he may well have tried the same approach when faced with an inadequate workforce in the coalmining industry. He gave men conscripted to the Forces the chance of working in the coalmines, just as he had offered conscripted women the choice of industry or the auxiliary Services. However, unlike the women who had accepted working in wartime industries, few chose to enter the mines. Coalmining was an industry with a bad reputation. In order to get the necessary recruits, and to do it as fairly as possible, he decided to use a ballot system. He left the conscription decision until the last possible moment. As with many problems faced by the Government during the war it was reacting at the last minute rather than foreseeing and planning. Part of the consequences of democracy is that the Government can never plan too far ahead. The Bevin Boys were no different from millions of other people forced to leave their homes and work in industries in which they had no interest and often no aptitude. There was, however, one difference: they were the only group of people whose fate rested on the lottery of a number drawn from a hat.

Using mainly oral evidence but comparing this with Mass-Observation material and other primary and secondary sources, a picture has been built up of the reason the Government needed to send young men to work in the coalmining industry. There is a twofold advantage in looking at various aspects of their lives in the pits: to tell their story as only they can recount it before time runs out and to ascertain what influence their time in the mines had on the industry, not only during the war but also afterwards. The Bevin Boys experiences were not dissimilar from many others taking on different work than what they had been used to and moving away from home, often for the first time. By looking at how the Bevin Boys lived and worked during wartime, how they coped with evacuation and how they interacted with people from

different social backgrounds, it is possible to gain insight into the wider context of life on the Home Front. Their political and social attitudes during the war give us an understanding of how the country as a whole was thinking and reacting to the 'people's war'. This thesis has attempted to give an idea of what life was like as a directed worker in Britain in the Second World War, in particular the situations encountered as a Bevin Boy.

Coal was essential to the war effort. It was required both for domestic use and in all industries. Without it the country would come to a stop. The Government was noncommittal about the coal industry both before and during the early stages of the war. It reacted slowly to the employment situation and only imposed an Essential Work Order when it was too late and there was an exodus of miners into other industries and into the Forces. Bevin's reaction was to use every means possible to persuade miners to return and young men to enter the mines. When this did not produce the desired result he gave those due for conscription into the Forces the chance to opt for the mines instead. Towards the end of 1943, with full mobilisation, it was obvious that there was still a shortfall in the workforce. When extra workers were needed in an industry Bevin had been able to call upon women as well as men who for one reason or another were not expected to join the services. However, the coalmines needed fit, young men, and he saw no alternative to conscription.

Industrial training before the war was usually a matter for the individual companies. By 1940 the Government had set up training centres for the engineering industry, offering a 16-week training course. The employers felt this was too long and too general and had often preferred to carry out their own in-house training. The coal industry had no specific training programme. Many pits were too small to offer even basic training. In any case it was normal for the new recruits, the majority of whom came from a mining background, to learn on the job. The first directed Bevin Boys, the volunteers and optants, were also expected to learn in this fashion. With the introduction of the ballot the Government decided on a comprehensive 6-week initial training for all new entrants. It was to be the same programme for all Bevin Boys. For the first four weeks they were to be schooled in the theoretical aspects of coalmining and safety. Fitness was also part of the training in order to develop their bodies for the hard strenuous work they would be expected to undertake. The next two weeks were

to be spent working underground under the auspices of a regular miner. It was soon realised that if the industry were to keep pace with technical development a comprehensive training would be necessary in the future. This paved the way not only to basic training for all miners entering the industry after the war but also further intensive courses aimed at giving those interested the chance of gaining qualifications and thereby furthering their career in coalmining. This in turn provided an example of a successful scheme that could be adopted and adapted by other industries in post-war Britain.

Accidents were nothing new in industry. However, the number of fatalities and injuries at work greatly increased once inexperienced workers had been directed to war work. New technology, poor training, long hours, wartime stress and exhaustion were all attributed to the cause of accidents, especially among directed women workers.<sup>4</sup> Accidents had always been common in the pits, more so than in any other industry. Basic safety training was seen as a must for those entering a pit for the first time. The nationalisation of the coalmining industry in 1947 resulted in the use of more modern equipment designed to make the miners' life safer. The supply of suitable personal equipment and clothing was also seen as a necessity.

The hardest, most skilled work in a mine was on the coalface. Bevin Boys worked mainly on haulage. The aim was that they should release regular miners who could then be transferred to the coalface. Unlike other wartime workers, who could take tea and meal breaks and use the toilet, once a miner was underground he had to stay there until his shift had finished. This meant taking food and drink into the dusty, vermin-ridden pit. They endured far worse conditions than other industrial workers. They worked underground in a dirty, unhygienic, cramped environment.

Absenteeism was rife in all war industries. Women workers were often the worst offenders as they were often trying to juggle two jobs: factory work and running a household. Younger people generally took more voluntary time off than older workers. Absenteeism was attributed to long hours, lack of holidays and war weariness. The miners were more prone to accidents and therefore had a high level of

---

<sup>4</sup> L. Jackson, 'Working in Wartime: health and safety at work', in *BBC History*, Volume 6, No. 1, (January 2005), p22

involuntary absenteeism. Bevin Boys had the highest absenteeism rate in the mines. The majority never felt themselves to be proper miners. It was a job they would be doing for the duration of the war and then they would be returning home. When they realised that the end of war did not mean the end of work in the mines and that release would only be on the same terms as conscription into the Army there was discontentment. The Government had to admit that absenteeism was causing such a problem that in the five weeks up to 16<sup>th</sup> October 1946 it had to release 5,000 men. 'Many of them have been dismissed because of the modification of the Essential Work Order, as incorrigibles, that is to say, regular absentees.'<sup>5</sup> However, those drafted into the Forces were also forced to stay until the end of National Service.

Miners' wages gradually improved throughout the war years, putting them higher up in the league table for pay. The miners' contribution to the economy of the country was at last appreciated. The Bevin Boys had added to this call for a better deal by soliciting press coverage for the grievances within days of the first conscripts entering the training centres. It could be argued that there would have been no need for direction to the mines if a decent living wage had been paid at the outset but it was still difficult to find men to enter the industry, even when the industry had offered a satisfactory wage for the workers. Other heavy industries might pay less but working conditions were more agreeable.

In all industries the unions were responsible for negotiations with the management over wages, which had to rise to cover the increase in the cost of living.<sup>6</sup> Before he was appointed Minister of Labour and National Service in the coalition Government, Bevin had been General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), one of the most powerful unions in the country. He was a committed union man and was, therefore, able to enlist some support from the unions when dealing with workforce policies. Thus he was able to implement the Bevin Boy scheme with little opposition from the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), whose individual local unions often had a closed shop policy. Trade union membership increased during the war, mainly due to the large numbers directed into engineering work. The Bevin Boys often found that they were forced to join a union, although

---

<sup>5</sup> Hansard, Vol. 427, (16.10.1946), col. 921

<sup>6</sup> Calder, p238

other war workers were given more freedom of choice. Just as many Bevin Boys, women war workers, who were also not expecting to stay in the industry after the end of the war, saw few benefits in trade union membership.

A few Bevin Boys were able to live at home. The rest had the option of purpose built hostels or billets. This was a situation shared with most war workers as well as with those called up for National Service. The Government had supplied several types of hostel accommodation according to the workers' needs. Those for the Bevin Boys were in hutted accommodation with dormitories. The facilities offered were usually of a lower standard than for other war workers and may well have been a result of the speed at which they were erected. As with other war workers, there was a general reluctance to stay in hostels. They were thought of as too institutionalised and were underutilised. Many Bevin Boys preferred to find accommodation in billets, although they often found that there was competition for billets with other evacuees. However, those who found an understanding landlady could enjoy the atmosphere of a home from home. Some even stayed in contact with their billet families after demobilisation.

In the mining areas the people were very poor and had little to offer in the way of home comforts, nevertheless the Bevin Boys usually found that they were well treated by the miners, who had some sympathy with their plight. This was not always the case for other directed war workers, who were often given a less than enthusiastic welcome. Unlike the mining villages, which often went back over generations, the wartime factories tended to be constructed in outlying districts where there was no industrial tradition. As a result the factory workers were more likely to have a better relationship with other new recruits with whom they worked than with the local community.

The main forms of entertainment offered to all during the war were cinema, dances and sporting events, whether as participant or spectator. In addition the Bevin Boys benefited from the Miners' Welfare, which was the focal point in every mining village and offered a place to relax. They had time at their disposal as, for the most part, they were young and unmarried. Wartime workers with other obligations, such as a family

to feed or household duties to see to, found less time for social and recreational activities.

This thesis has shown that the experiences of the Bevin Boys can be seen as a microcosm of life and work in wartime Britain. It sets them into the wider context of life on the Home Front. They were exposed to similar conditions and experiences as millions of others, whether wartime workers or evacuees. They were moving away from home to an unknown environment. They had the same experiences with accommodation, recreational and social activities and contact with a different community from that which they were used to. They were directed to work that they neither liked nor were suited to. However, unlike many wartime workers, the Bevin Boys received adequate basic training in both work and health and safety procedures.

In this thesis oral evidence has been used extensively to tell a story that might otherwise have been lost. No one source is likely to give a completely true picture. Attitudes and memories are influenced by class, education, background and later experiences. As has been pointed out in the introduction, there is always an element of myth associated with looking back over time. Smith describes this myth to mean a widely held view of the past, which has helped to shape and explain the present.<sup>7</sup> The Bevin Boys have been conditioned over time as much as any other group of people during the war, but the oral testimonies given were generally consistent. The resentment at not being allowed to fight for King and Country, the appalling working conditions, the drudgery of work in the mines were recalled in spite of the assumption that it is the more unsavoury points that are either forgotten or not spoken about. It is often possible to look at the evidence from other points of view. In the case of the Bevin Boys a verification of information obtained from them was achieved by looking at various primary and secondary sources: the Mass-Observation archive, the Bevin Boy file at the Imperial War Museum and books and documents written by Bevin Boys both during the war and later. Oral history has had its critics. Especially in the 1970s it was felt 'that memory was distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age.'<sup>8</sup> Oral testimonies do suffer from embellishment, especially when the

---

<sup>7</sup> M. Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory*, (London, 2000), p2

<sup>8</sup> A. Thomson, 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History', in *The Journal of American History*, Volume 85, No. 2, (September 1998), p584



interviewee is speaking of a long distant past, but this thesis has shown it is only the finer points that are often forgotten. The general story is not far from the truth.

Past historiography tells us that the Home Front consisted of a patriotic civilian population, working for the common good and making sacrifices. This ideal is derived from collective memory. It even permeates into popular children's literature, Richmal Compton's *Just William* books and *Carrie's War* by Nina Bowden being just two examples. It also found expression in the 1960s and 1970s in television programmes, *Dad's Army* about the Home Guard being a prime exponent. It was a nostalgic view. The reality, were we able to go back in time, was almost certainly different. It is the good points: the comradeship, the perseverance and cheerfulness in the face of adversity that are remembered. The bad points are often, although not always, forgotten. As one elderly man mentioned: if there is a television drama about the war years all the props are perfect and in the right place, the dress cannot be faulted but the atmosphere is missing.<sup>9</sup> As Smith points out: 'Most people learn much of their history from popular culture and specifically from the mass media.'<sup>10</sup> Rose maintains: 'The idea that the British were one people fighting a people's war dominated popular culture, and it is this vision that continues to inform post-war nostalgia.'<sup>11</sup>

Accredited histories, for example, the Government commissioned *History of the Second World War* series, tend to look at the official side in the debate. They were published at a time when the Labour Party held power and reflect the general mood of the time. Other books and articles written specifically about the coalmining industry tend to regard the situation from the miners' perspective. Both Heinemann and Wilson are prime examples. Heinemann's book was written when she was a member of staff of the Labour Research Department, which was funded by the trade unions, the Labour Party and Co-operative bodies. She saw the main problem as low production. This was the fault of the coalmine owners, who ran a technically backward industry and failed to spend on research and development. Wilson put some blame on the miners for not cooperating fully to secure maximum production, although he also

---

<sup>9</sup> Conversation with a stranger

<sup>10</sup> M. Smith, p3

<sup>11</sup> S.O. Rose, *Which People's War? National identity and citizenship in wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, 2003), p21

mentioned the inefficient layout and organisation of the industry.<sup>12</sup> Even into the 1960s war propaganda had dictated the content of literature on the Home Front, as can be seen in Angus Calder's *The People's War*, which propagates national identity. He sees the war producing a 'radical popular spirit' where everyone had a part to play.<sup>13</sup> In spite of the Labour win in the 1945 election he felt that it was the middle-class that benefited from improved education and the welfare state, thus increasing social inequality.<sup>14</sup> For many the end of the war was seen as a turning point, the start of a bright new future. By the 1980s, in the new age of Thatcherism, historians like Correlli Barnett, author of *The Audit of War*, were attempting to reinterpret the past in order to explain the present. He concludes the chapter discussing the coalmining industry with the assertion that nationalisation was responsible for the downfall of the industry because it was subsidising less productive pits.<sup>15</sup> He does not take into account the problems that would have been caused if nationalisation had not taken place. There would have been an exodus from the pits at a time when coal was still urgently required. On the other hand Supple argues that there never was a coal crisis during the war.<sup>16</sup> 'The official control of consumption and the rationalisation of allocation were much more effective than Government policy towards production.'<sup>17</sup> Both Barnett and Supple were writing in the 1980s at a time of confrontation between the right and left wing revolutionaries, a battle that the miners were eventually to lose. Now, in 2004, 14 pits and 6000 miners are all that is left of a once thriving industry.<sup>18</sup> Today we are far enough removed from the war to stand back and hopefully look at what history has to tell us in a more critical manner. Certainly modern historians are more used to criticising past historiography.<sup>19</sup> Today there is a different perspective. Visions of the past are continually evolving. In the future, when living memory of the war years is no more, we may again need to reappraise the evidence of the various groups that made up the 'people's war'.

---

<sup>12</sup> H. Wilson, *New Deal for Coal*, (London, 1945), p127

<sup>13</sup> Calder, p18

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p585

<sup>15</sup> C. Barnett, *The Audit of War: the illusion and reality of Britain as a great nation*, (London, 1986), p86

<sup>16</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913–1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p538

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p540

<sup>18</sup> *Strike: when Britain went to war*, Channel 4 TV, broadcast 24.1.2004

<sup>19</sup> See the introduction to M. Smith for a good example of this.

The Bevin Boy scheme adds to the historiography of the Second World War. As has been discussed in chapter 2, 'manpower and mobilisation', by the end of 1943 Britain was in a state of 'total war'. All industries were competing for manpower but coalmining was the one industry on which all other industries relied. Without coal they could not function. The industry's employment history had left it bereft of an adequate labour force. However, Bevin's strategy to compel men into the mines compounded the problems of manpower in other war industries and in the Forces. Any men taken from the lists of those due to be conscripted to the Forces, and sent instead to the mines, left a gap in the requirements for the military. The Bevin Boys became part of the overall problem of juggling manpower to make the best possible use of the labour available.

As part of his wartime welfare measures Bevin had made a commitment to direct manpower only into industries that had adequate facilities for the workforce. He would apply the Essential Works Order only to firms that complied with his conditions. He had campaigned for better toilets and cloakrooms, canteens and adequate lighting in the factories, suitable facilities outside such as better transport to and from work, for recreation facilities and for accommodation in either billets or hostels.<sup>20</sup> As part of this commitment it also meant better conditions in the mines. This included higher wages, shorter hours, increased mechanisation, improved lighting underground, improved welfare, efforts to reduce industrial disease, proper training and ways of gaining promotion.<sup>21</sup> The conditions in the mines were gradually improved, in part spurred on by the Bevin Boys' entry to the mines. Economically non-viable mines were taken over by the Government. An example was Clifton Colliery, where the Mass-Observation investigator was working. It was the start of Government capital investment in the industry, which was to help industries expand after the war. The pre-war Government thought that the state should not interfere in market economy but the war changed this view.<sup>22</sup> Other changes were happening. The Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), which had representatives from all the local unions, was consolidated into the National Mineworkers' Union (NUM).

---

<sup>20</sup> M. Gowing, 'The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2, (January – April 1972), p163

<sup>21</sup> PRO CAB 102/399, E.V. Newbegin, *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 – 1945*, (October 1946), p41

<sup>22</sup> K. Jeffreys, 'British politics and social policy during the Second World War', in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 30, No. 1, (March, 1987), p137

This led in turn to a concerted effort by the union for nationalisation after the war. Nationalisation brought heavy investment of new equipment in the coal industry.

The repercussions of the Bevin Boy programme on training changed manpower expectations after the war. They had shown that any fit young man was capable of doing the job. It was no longer accepted that new recruits entering the industry had to come from mining families or even from coalmining areas.

‘In the past the maintenance of the industry’s manpower has come mainly from the ranks of mineworkers’ sons. The mining community, however, is not willing to accept a special responsibility for the supply of new mining labour.’<sup>23</sup>

This was part of the legacy of the Bevin Boy scheme to the coalmining industry. The labour force generally had become more mobile as a result of the war. The Bevin Boy scheme had shown that men with no previous knowledge of the industry could, if given the proper training, be put to work as miners. It also meant that miners, who wanted, could take advantage of training programmes to gain qualifications, thus enhancing their chances of promotion within the industry.

The general consensus, when looking back to the war, is that everyone, regardless of social class, was subjected to the same restrictions and the same direction procedures when it came to working for the war effort. Fielding maintained that the working classes welcomed Government intervention because they had guaranteed work and food, which improved their quality of life. It was a levelling out process between the classes.<sup>24</sup> People were generally better off but it did not mean that class differences disappeared. Accounts written about the Home Front are peppered with stories of poorly clad and badly behaved children evacuated to the country. Often the working-class people from cities at risk from bombing were sent to middle-class rural areas, causing resentment. Rose sees cross-class unity as a fantasy.<sup>25</sup> She regards it in the same light as the Victorian conception of a nation divided, except that it was no longer the industrial north versus the agricultural south but the urban poor against the country people. As in Victorian times, the upper classes regarded poverty as each

---

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, (11.1.1946)

<sup>24</sup> S. Fielding, ‘What Did “The People” Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election’, in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 1992), p633

<sup>25</sup> Rose, p29

person's own doing.<sup>26</sup> It is this attitude that was still prevalent during the war. Evacuation continued to underscore social class divisions throughout the war.<sup>27</sup> This applied regardless of whether it was children evacuated because of the Blitz or directed workers to wartime industries, including coalmining.

The Bevin Boys came from all social classes. Those from the middle and upper classes had often applied, and been accepted as officer material in the Forces. They would have become the elite in the military, still mixing with their own class. It must have been a great shock to find that they were suddenly sent into what had always been thought of as a working-class job. Even the Government realised that it could cause difficulties. Sir Godfrey Ince, Minister of Manpower, was present at the first ballot and was obviously not happy at the prospect of directing those from higher social classes into the mines.

‘There were a number of boys (seven were identified with certainty), who were attending or had lately been attending public schools among those selected.’<sup>28</sup>

The conscripts to the factories could also be from different social classes, although they were more likely to be from a working-class background because they had some choice in what work they did. If they went into billets they could more easily be partnered with people from their own background. That was the responsibility of the billeting officers. However, Bevin Boys were different. Regardless of class, they were sent to working-class pit villages. Some went into hostels but many were billeted with miners' families. Housing conditions were often bad with no proper facilities. It was those from better class homes who must have faced more problems and a greater adjustment to their circumstances. However, there were few complaints from those Bevin Boys interviewed. They all found a warm welcome and although it was not always the conditions they were used to, many mentioned that they were pleased to be given a glimpse of life they would not have otherwise seen. Tony C., for example, knocked on doors in the village and eventually found a billet.

‘The family were lovely. A family called Kirk. There were four actually – I'm forgetting. There were three girls and a boy. The boy was a bit younger than me and he was already working in the colliery. ... – she just took me in. It was

---

<sup>26</sup> Rose, p58

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p62

<sup>28</sup> PRO LAB 25/196, Letter to Mr de Villiers, Ministry of Labour, from Sir G. Ince, Minister of Manpower, (17.12.1943)

kind you know. You just couldn't believe it really. I think the three girls shared one room and I shared another with the son.'<sup>29</sup>

The situation many found themselves in was, perhaps, an eye-opener. The poverty of the pit villages was a completely new experience, even for those from poor families. For many it changed their attitude forever. They gained a respect for the miners, whom they saw as having a tough life. Many said that they became politically aware as a result of their experiences in the mines.

The Bevin Boys' political attitudes during the war give us an idea of how the country as a whole was thinking. Some of those Bevin Boys interviewed were already politically motivated before going into the mines. They tended to be middle-class but with socialist leanings. It was part of the political mood of the time. They had their beliefs strengthened by seeing first hand how the miners lived and worked. It was part of the general acceptance of socialist policy, a new and better welfare state after the war, which led to increased trade union membership in all industries.

The direction and ultimately conscription of young men to civilian work in the coalmines could only have occurred in wartime. It was a last ditch attempt to increase the manpower in the industry to a satisfactory level. Conscription came at a time when it was already considered that the war was won. 'By the beginning of this year [1944], the question was not whether the war would be won but when it would be won.'<sup>30</sup> Less than 18 months after the first conscripts arrived at the training centres the war in Europe came to an end. Within days conscription to the mines had also ceased, although optants and volunteers were still encouraged to enter the mines. It was a wartime measure and once the war was over it would not be acceptable to the public. A survey conducted by Mass-Observation into people's attitude to the post-war continuation of conscription is shown in Table 13.1.

---

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Tony C., (4.5.2000)

<sup>30</sup> R.J. Wybrow, *Britain Speaks Out 1937 – 1987. A social history as seen through the Gallup data*, (London 1989), p15

	Men	Women
<b><u>Industrial Conscription</u></b>	%	%
Approve	8	15
Disapprove	66	67
<b><u>Forces</u></b>		
Approve	27	18
Disapprove	47	51

**Table 13.1 Do you approve or disapprove of industrial conscription?<sup>31</sup>**

It was seen by the public as much more acceptable to continue conscription to the Forces than industry.

This thesis is important in that it gives a record of a small group of men, who were conscripted into civil work instead of the Forces. It shows that they, as much as any other directed workers, played their part in helping to win the war. They were all the product of the Government's immense powers that allowed it to bring the country to 'total war'. It shows that the Bevin Boy scheme did have an effect on the coalmining industry, both during and after the war. The historiography of the war stresses the 'levelling of the classes' but this work agrees with Summerfield and Rose, who claim that it was merely an economic levelling and that class issues were still apparent. However, for many directed workers, including Bevin Boys, their wartime work changed their lives by making them aware of how other people lived.

If we were to ask people born after the war about the Bevin Boys they would answer that they have never heard of them. It is hoped that this situation will be redressed. In using oral testimonies it gives the reader a chance to hear something of their life during the war in their own words. Modern technology allows us to keep records other than pieces of paper, which can be used by historians in the future. Transcripts of interviews can be found on a CD at the back of this book. The taped interviews and typed transcripts can be found at the Imperial War Museum, and they are a lasting memorial to the directed men who worked in the coalmines during the Second World War.

<sup>31</sup> Mass-Observation, *The Journey Home*, (London, 1944), p99

## Appendices

### Appendix INT-I

#### Questions to interviewees

In order to place the interview in context, can you start by giving me some background information – where and when you were born, a little about your family, growing up, schooling.

Had you already started work when you were called up? What did you do or what had you thought about doing as a career?

What would you have liked to do if there hadn't been a war?

Were you an optant or a ballotee? When did you hear that your number had been drawn in the ballot and what were your reactions/feelings to the news?

How did friends and family react to the news?

Did you appeal against going down the mines?

To which colliery were you sent for a) training and b) after training?

Can you give me some details of the training given? Was it the same as for professional miners?

Accommodation – if billeted some information about the family.

Wages, work in the mines.

Type of work, first impressions, pit ponies, accidents.

Did you feel your job was worthwhile?

Unions – were you forced to join and reaction? Were you granted union recognition and did you get the same pay and benefits as the other miners?

Relationship with other Bevin Boys.

Relationship with other miners.

Relationship within the community generally – were you accepted?

Was absenteeism/desertion rife?

Get to visit own family?

Social life.

Anecdotes.

Kept in touch with anyone – other Bevin Boys, billet family?

Were you aware of a war going on – experience of war?

After war – thoughts on nationalization – were you affected?

When were you demobbed?

Recognition?

What job did you do after demob?

Was it influenced by war experiences as a Bevin Boy?

How do you feel now about having been a Bevin Boy – resentment, hard done by?

What was your view of the coal industry prior to call-up and did it change as a result of having been a Bevin Boy?

Contact with Bevin Boys Association – if yes active?



**Appendix INT-II**

**Questionnaire**

**1. Personal Details**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Place of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Schooling \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Had you already started work when you were called up?**

a) Yes

b) No

**3. What did you do or what had you thought about doing as a career?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4. What would you have liked to do if there had not been a war?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Were you an optant or ballottee?**

a) Optant (go to question 7.)

b) Ballottee

**6. If ballottee what were your reactions and those of your family when you heard that your number had been drawn in the ballot? Did you appeal against going into the mines?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. To which colliery were you sent?**

- a) For training \_\_\_\_\_
- b) After training \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What was the nature of the training given?**

---

---

---

---

---

**9. After training what type of work did you do in the mine?**

---

---

---

---

---

**10. Did you feel your job was worthwhile?**

---

---

**11. Did you join a Trade Union?**

- a) Yes
- b) No (go to question 14.)

**12. If you joined a Trade Union was this forced on you?**

- a) Yes (give details) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b) No

**13. Give any benefits of Trade Union membership that you encountered.**

---

---

14. Were you aware of absenteeism in the pit in which you worked?

a) Yes (give details) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) No

15. Did you make any attempt to leave the pit after having sampled pit life?

a) Yes (give details)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) No

16. Did you live in lodgings or a Bevin Boy Hostel?

a) Lodgings

b) Bevin Boy hostel

17. Give details of your relationship with the other miners and the community generally.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. Give details of any social life.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. What job did you do after demobilization?

---

20. Was the job you did after demobilization affected by your experiences as a Bevin Boy? Give details.

---

---

---

21. How do you feel now about having been a Bevin Boy?

---

---

---

---

Any other comments that you feel are relevant.

---

---

---

---

---

## Appendix MAN-I

### Distribution of Labour Force

Distribution of Labour Force of Working Age 000's

	June 1939	June 1940	June 1943	June 1945
<b>Working population:</b>				
Total .....	19,750	20,676	22,286	21,649
Men .....	14,656	15,104	15,032	14,881
Women .....	5,094	5,572	7,254	6,768
<b>Armed Forces:</b>				
Total .....	480	2,273	4,762	5,090
Men .....	480	2,218	4,300	4,653
Women .....	—	55	462	437
<b>Civil Defence, Fire Service, Police:</b>				
Total .....	80	345	323	127
Men .....	80	292	253	112
Women .....	—	53	70	15
<b>Group I Industries:</b>				
Total .....	3,106	3,559	5,233	4,346
Men .....	2,600	2,885	3,305	2,891
Women .....	506	674	1,928	1,455
<b>Group II Industries:</b>				
Total .....	4,683	4,618	5,027	5,191
Men .....	4,096	3,902	3,686	3,762
Women .....	587	716	1,341	1,429
<b>Group III Industries:</b>				
Total .....	10,131	9,236	6,861	6,752
Men .....	6,387	5,373	3,430	3,368
Women .....	3,744	3,863	3,431	3,384
<b>Registered insured unemployed:</b>				
Total .....	1,270	645	60	103
Men .....	1,013	484	44	58
Women .....	257	211	16	35
<b>Ex-Service men and women not yet in employment:</b>				
Total .....	—	—	20	40
Men .....	—	—	13	27
Women .....	—	—	7	13

#### Notes to table

The figures include men aged 16-64 and women aged 14-59, excluding those in private domestic service. Part-time women workers are included, two being counted as one unit.

Group I covers metal manufacture, engineering, motors, aircraft and other vehicles, shipbuilding and ship-repairing, metal-goods manufacture, chemicals, explosives, oil, etc., i.e. broadly the *munitions industries*.

Group II covers agriculture, mining, national and local government services, gas, water, and electricity supply, transport and shipping, i.e. broadly the *basic industries*.

Group III covers food, drink and tobacco, textiles, clothing and other manufactures, building and civil engineering, distributive trades, commerce, banking and other services.

<sup>1</sup> M. Gowing, 'The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2, (January - April 1972), p150

**Appendix MAN-II**

Map of the British Coalfields in the early 1940s<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> B. Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913 – 1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987), p4

Appendix CU-I

Letter of direction to the coalminers<sup>3</sup>

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE  
SOUTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE,  
MINISTRY OF LABOUR & NAT. SERVICE,  
27, CRESSINGHAM ROAD,

READING.....  
3 FEB 1944 (Date).

DEAR SIR,

The vital importance of maintaining an adequate labour force in the coalmining industry has been recognised by making underground coalmining employment an alternative to service in the armed forces.

Not nearly enough men are, however, choosing this alternative to satisfy the essential man power requirements of the industry and the Government has decided that the deficiency is to be made good by directing the necessary number of men to underground coalmining employment.

The method of selecting men for direction to this employment has been made public. It is by ballot and is strictly impartial. Your name is amongst those selected.

Men are mainly required for coalmining employment in Durham, Lancashire, Midlands, Northumberland, Notts. and Derby, Yorkshire, Scotland and Wales.

No guarantee can be given of employment in any of these areas, but individual preferences will be taken into account as far as possible.

If you have a preference for employment in any of the areas indicated you should write to this office at once stating your preference and stating the address of any relatives or friends in a coalmining district with whom you could live. If no statement of preference is received within a week of the date of this letter, it will be assumed that you do not wish to express any preference.

Men selected for coalmining who have had no previous experience of the industry will be given four weeks preliminary training on both surface and underground work at special Training Centres organised by the Ministry of Labour and National Service for the purpose. Men will then be directed to working collieries for employment and will there receive (subject to special conditions in South Wales) a further fortnight's training before being employed on work below ground.

You will receive a further communication informing you of the Training Centre to which you have been allocated and the circumstances in which you may appeal.

Yours faithfully,

*T. M. Cean*  
for Regional Controller.

Mr. *G. E. Reynolds*  
*H. J. Second Street*  
*Gloucester Ave.*

E.D.696.

(12578) Wt. 49527-8152 50m 12/43 D.L. G. 273

<sup>3</sup> Kindly supplied by George Reynolds



Appendix CU-II

Rejection of appeal<sup>4</sup>

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE.

Tel. Midlands Regional Office,  
281-289, Corporation Street,  
Birmingham, 4.  
ASTON Cross  
3081  
Telegrams: HONEY  
BIRMINGHAM.  
Ref: R.O.6.  
Your Ref.

10. 7. 44

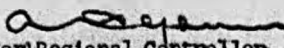
Dear Sir,

Coalmining.

I have to inform you that your appeal against allocation to coalmining was heard by the Local Appeal Board on 5th July, 1944 and that after considering the recommendation of the Board it has been decided that you should be directed to training for underground coalmining employment.

You will in due course receive a formal direction under Defence (General) Regulations 53A (1) to employment as a trainee against which there will be no appeal.

Yours faithfully,

  
for Regional Controller.

Mr. P. W. Reynolds,  
94, Budge St,  
Wednesbury,  
Staffs.

H.S. 869-250 F.N.

<sup>4</sup> IWM, Misc. 191, Bevin Boy file, item 2834



## Appendix TR-I

### Training for and employment in coalmining<sup>5</sup>

#### **MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE**

#### **Training for and employment in Coalmining**

#### **CONDITIONS OF TRAINING AT MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE COALMINING TRAINING CENTRES**

#### **WAGES AND ALLOWANCES**

1. Weekly Rates. Trainees will be paid wages at the following rates:—

s.	d.		s.	d.	
45	0	p.w. at 17 years of age	65	0	p.w. at 19 years of age
47	6	17½	70	0	20
60	0	18	90	0	21

2. Deductions for unauthorised absence, including absence on Saturday, will be made at one-sixth of the weekly wage for each day of absence. Deductions for unauthorised absences for half a day will be one half of the appropriate daily rate.

#### **3. Travelling Expenses.**

(1) Fares will be paid from their homes to the centre area for men who have to leave home for training.

(2) Men who are able to live at home whilst in training, or have to be lodged at some distance from the Training Centre, will be paid any excess by which their daily travelling expenses exceed 6d. a day.

#### **4. Lodging Allowances and Settling-in Grants.**

(1) Men who have to leave home for training and who continue to maintain a household in their home area will be eligible for the normal transferred war-workers' living-away-from-home allowance of 3s. 6d. per night.

(2) Those who leave home for training but do not qualify for the allowance in (1) above will be paid a single settling-in grant of 24s. 6d.

#### **STATUS OF TRAINEES**

5. Trainees will be regarded as employed by and under contract of service to the Ministry of Labour and National Service and are insurable under the National Health and Unemployment Insurance Acts.

#### **RULES IN FORCE AT MINISTRY OF LABOUR COALMINING TRAINING CENTRES**

6. **Discipline.** For the proper efficiency of the Training Establishments, discipline must be maintained and the rules as set out herein complied with.

7. **Attendance.** Attendance must be punctual and regular, and work properly and diligently performed.

8. **Method of Payment.** Trainees should attend at the appointed pay station for weekly payments, but if they are unable to attend on account of sickness or other unavoidable absence, application should be made to the Training Establishment, in writing for payment either to a deputy, or through the nearest Local Office of the Ministry, or by post. Payment by post should be requested only if the trainee is neither able to send a deputy nor to call at the nearest Local Office.

9. **Behaviour.** Gambling, betting, lending or borrowing money, drunkenness or any unseemly or disorderly conduct is forbidden.

<sup>5</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834

10. **Tools, etc.** Tools, stores, equipment, clothing, and material for training exercises are provided for the purposes of training. These must not be taken away from the Establishment or left lying about and trainees may be held liable for lost tools.

11. **Property.** Government or other property must not be destroyed or damaged.

12. **Directions.** All directions from time to time issued by or on behalf of the Manager must be complied with.

13. **Baths.** Where Pithead baths are available trainees will be required to make payment by deduction from wages at the rate applicable to workers at the colliery to which the baths are attached. Trainees are required to provide their own towels and soap. (Workers in the mining industry are eligible for a supplementary soap ration.)

14. **Clothing.** Trainees should provide themselves with old but serviceable clothing to wear during training. This should include two pairs of thick woollen socks, two shirts (if possible, flannel), an old suit, two towels and an old mackintosh. Each trainee will be provided, free of charge, with a safety helmet and safety boots which he will be permitted to retain on the satisfactory completion of training. The surrender of 6 clothing coupons will be required in respect of the safety boots and these will be deducted from the 30 additional clothing coupons for which a trainee becomes eligible to provide himself with suitable working clothes on being directed to a colliery for further underground training. Protective overalls will be loaned to trainees for use during training.

15. **Trainees living away from home.** Trainees living away from home must take with them their ration books (including clothing book), gas masks, Health and Unemployment Insurance Books, and Form 3 D.S. (Part II) relating to Income Tax, if in possession of the trainee.

#### SICKNESS PAYMENTS AND REGULATIONS

16. Subject to the production of medical evidence of sickness (see paras. 18 and 19) and application as in para. 8, sick pay at the following rates is payable in addition to any National Health Insurance benefit to which trainees may be entitled whether they are sick at home, in lodgings or in hospital.

(1) **Trainees living in lodgings away from their homes.** Trainees living in lodgings away from their homes will be paid at the rate of 3s. 4d. a day (£1 os. od. a week) from and including the first day of sickness.

(2) **Locals.** For absences of six working days or less local trainees will be paid as follows:—

Days absence	Sick Pay	Days absence	Sick Pay
	s. d.		s. d.
1	Nil	4	10 0
2	Nil	5	15 0
3	5 0	6	20 0

For absences of more than six working days sick pay will be paid at the rate of 3s. 4d. a day (£1 os. od. a week).

17. Sick pay will be paid for the first three weeks of any period of continued absence certified in accordance with paras. 18 and 19 unless one week's notice in

writing, to terminate the payment of any such allowances on a date before the end of the period of three weeks, has been given to the trainee by the Manager of the Centre. Sick pay is not payable after training has been terminated.

18. A medical certificate should be provided on the first day of sick absence but if this is not possible a written declaration, on a form obtainable from the Centre Manager, will be accepted to cover absence up to two days.

19. A medical certificate must be produced after an absence of two working days and this certificate should include the doctor's opinion as to the probable further period of absence from training. A further medical certificate will be required after an absence of six working days.

20. A declaring-off note must be produced at the end of the period of sickness.

21. All trainees who fall sick whilst living in lodgings away from home and require hospital treatment may be admitted to hospitals included in the Ministry of Health Emergency Hospitals Scheme. Such trainees may be required by the hospital to make a contribution towards the cost of their treatment.

### ACCIDENTS DURING TRAINING

22. The provisions of the Workmen's Compensation Acts will apply to trainees who are incapacitated as a result of an accident during training.

23. Any trainee who sustains an accident, however slight, in the course of training, should report it at once to his instructor, or the First Aid Attendant. Failure to make a full report may lead to non-payment of workmen's compensation in respect of any absence which may result from the accident.

### EMERGENCY ALLOWANCES

24. In addition to the payments described in paras. 16, 22 and 23 certain other allowances may be granted, at the Department's discretion, to trainees who are sick or incapacitated whilst living in lodgings away from their homes. In order to determine the amount of such emergency allowances it will be necessary for the Centre to be notified of the amount, if any, of National Health Insurance benefit to which a trainee is eligible. Accordingly trainees who are eligible should make a claim for National Health Insurance benefit as soon as they fall sick.

### INCAPACITY ARISING FROM INJURIES SUSTAINED BY ENEMY ACTION

25. The provisions of the Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme will apply to trainees who are incapacitated as a result of enemy action.

### SAFETY RULES FOR NEW ENTRANTS TO COAL MINES

26. The following safety rules should be carefully noted by all trainees:—

(1) Before going underground in a safety lamp mine search your clothes for matches or forbidden articles.

(2) When riding in the cage hold on to the handrail and do not interfere with the gates.

(3) Behave in an orderly manner and observe instructions given by the colliery officials.

(4) Take care of your lamp.

- (5) Walk at a safe distance behind or in front of moving tubs and keep on the *outside* of curves.
- (6) Do not pass across the shaft bottom or through a fence.
- (7) Keep *behind* tubs when taking them down a gradient.
- (8) Do not place your hands and elbows between tubs—other tubs may bump in behind and break your wrist or arm.
- (9) Avoid loose clothing or scarves with loose ends which may be gripped by moving machinery, ropes or chains.
- (10) Do not ride on ponies, nor on tubs unless authorised and instructed to do so.
- (11) Do not couple or uncouple tubs in motion.
- (12) Leave doors and brattice sheets exactly as you found them before passing through.
- (13) Make yourself familiar with the codes of haulage signals in use.
- (14) Keep your place of work tidy and free from obstruction.
- (15) Never oil or grease machinery whilst in action.
- (16) Always use the safety devices provided.
- (17) Report at once any damage to safety devices or machinery fencing.
- (18) Do not interfere with electrical or other apparatus.
- (19) Regulations are made for your safety—observe them.
- (20) Small injuries if neglected may turn septic—report all injuries and have them properly dressed.
- (21) Keep yourself fit and alert.

#### EMPLOYMENT AFTER TRAINING

27 On completion of training at the Ministry of Labour Training Centre trainees will be directed to a colliery for further training and employment.

28. Trainees will be paid wages at the rate appropriate to the district for the occupation in which they are engaged.

29. The national minimum weekly rates of pay are as follows:

	<i>Underground</i>		<i>Surface</i>	
	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>	<i>s.</i>	<i>d.</i>
<i>At 17 years of age</i>	...	...	54	0
<i>17½</i>	...	...	57	6
<i>18</i>	...	...	70	0
<i>19</i>	...	...	75	0
<i>20</i>	...	...	80	0
<i>21</i>	...	...	100	0

30. Fares will be paid for the initial journey from the Training Establishment to the colliery.

31. Lodging allowances or settling-in grants will be payable on the conditions set out in para. 4.

## Appendix TR-II

### Training arrangements for one particular pit<sup>6</sup>

The Tunnel Pit, Government Training Centre, Ilkeston.

F.T.492 - 1944.

#### TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

Your Identification Number is No: 111 Group B Class 2

TRAINING PERIOD Four weeks.

TRAINING HOURS 8. <sup>15</sup> a.m. to 4. <sup>15</sup> p.m. Monday to Friday.  
Luncheon Interval, two groups, 11.30 - 12.30, after Lectures and P.T. 12.30 - 1.30 after underground and Surface Training.  
8. <sup>15</sup> a.m. to 12. <sup>15</sup> p.m. Saturday.

TRAINING Normal training will be apportioned as follows:-  
Physical Training - one session per day.

Lecture - one session per day. Underground work and surface work one session per day on alternate days, except last Monday in training, when full day will be spent underground.  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour allowed for meal-time underground. Trainee to bring packed meal and supply of water in Tin bottle, for this day only. See copy of time table exhibited in Lecture Room.

LEAVE While at the Centre leave can only be granted in exceptional circumstances of which proof will be required.

RATE OF WAGES A Notice is posted in the Hall and Lecture Rooms at the Centre showing rates of wages payable and deductions normally made each week.

PAYMENT OF WAGES Wages are paid on Wednesday up to the previous Saturday. If you are a boarder you will receive an advance of £1. 4s. 6d. on Wednesday in the first week of training, which will be recovered when settling-in grant or the first week's lodging allowance is paid on the following Wednesday. Other recoverable advances up to the maximum of three days earning may also be made in special circumstances to any trainee on application during the first week of training. Pay queries will be dealt with at the Accounts Office on Mondays and Thursdays at 10.30 - 12.30 and 2.30 - 4 p.m.

P.A.Y.E. You are advised to make sure that your Code Number for tax purposes is correct in order to avoid queries about tax deduction. If you have not already done so, hand form P.45 (tax form which should have been given to you by your previous employer) to the Reception Counter. If not in possession of this form a form P.1 will be given to you for completion. This form should be left at the Accountant's Office as soon as possible. It is important that you should answer all the questions, as, otherwise, excessive deduction of tax may be made.

BATHS A charge of sixpence per week is made for the use of the Baths.

BUSES To and from Hostel. A charge of three shillings per week is made from Kerosley Miners' Hostel to the Training Centre. This is paid by you to the Accountant after receipt of wages.

UNCLAIMED WAGES AND QUERIES OTHER THAN P.Y. Apply at the Centre Office any day.

KIT Your Kit consists of Safety Helmet, Overalls, Safety Boots, Gym shoes, Vests, Shorts, Padlock and Key. The Overalls, Gym shoes, Vest, Shorts, Padlock and Key must be returned at the end of the training period. Safety Helmet and Boots must be returned if you are permitted to terminate training prematurely.

<sup>6</sup> IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834

Gym shoes, Vest and Shorts may be worn only in the P.T. Class.  
LOST Kit must be paid for.

TIME-KEEPING

Good Time-keeping is essential for efficient training.

ALLOCATION

You have already been given an opportunity to express a preference for employment in a particular area, and if it were possible to do so that preference has been observed in allocating you to this Centre. Trainees are usually placed in the Region in which they are trained, or in accordance with special arrangements made by the Ministry of Fuel and Power by whom all allocations to work in Collieries are made.

Requests to be placed in other Regions cannot, therefore, be entertained, but if you wish to be placed in a particular pit or district in this Region you should state your circumstances to the Placing Officer during the allocation panel. No guarantee can, however, be given that it will be possible to arrange for you to go to the pit or district of your choice.

ALLOCATION PANEL

Representatives of the Ministry of Fuel and Power attend the Centre on Wednesday afternoon to interview Trainees in their second week of training, when the allocations to the various pits are made.

GENERAL ENQUIRIES

If in doubt on any point ask at the Centre Office.

CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence by post should be addressed:-

The Manager,  
Government Training Centre,  
The Tunnel Pit,  
MURKELTON,  
WARWICKSHIRE.

J.M. ERICGS,

Manager.

## Appendix NEW-I

### Newspaper readership and political allegiance

Newspaper	1937 (approx.) <sup>7</sup>	1946/47 <sup>8</sup>	Political allegiance
Daily Telegraph	637,000	1,015,940	Conservative
Daily Express	2,329,000	3,856,963	Conservative
News Chronicle	1,324,000	1,623,475	left wing Lib.
Star (evening paper)		1,073,866	Liberal
Daily Worker		121,509	Communist
Liverpool Daily Post		76,122	Conservative
Manchester Guardian		not pub.	Liberal
Daily Mirror	1,367,000	3,600,000 +	Labour
Glasgow Herald		91,317	Conservative
Evening News		1,649,934	Conservative
Yorkshire Post		160,597	Conservative
Daily Herald	2,000,000 +	2,143,556	Labour
The Times	192,000	269,779	Conservative
Daily Mail	1,580,000	2,007,542	Conservative
Daily Sketch	850,000	761,668	Conservative

<sup>7</sup> figures from PEP, *Report on the British Press*, (London, 1946), pp67-74

<sup>8</sup> figures from Viscount Camrose, *British Newspapers and their Controllers*, (London, 1947), pp 160/1



## Appendix NEW-II

### Newspaper reports on the first day of training for Bevin Boys

**Bold type gives the actual headlines used by the newspaper.**

Lower case gives a summary of the newspaper reports.

Direct quotations from the newspapers are in quotes.

#### 1. Midlands, Tunnel Pit, Nuneaton

##### Daily Telegraph

###### **Training with the first ballot miners**

###### **Students, clerks, engineers among the 600<sup>9</sup>**

The *Daily Telegraph* installed a junior member of the staff in a training centre for one week in order to report on the first batch of Bevin Boys and 'their pit life, their impressions and how they react to this big change in their circumstances.' He travelled by train from London with a party of 30 other young men who, he was keen to point out, came from a cross section of society and included a university student, a pupil teacher, a clerk, a lorry driver, a shop assistant, a paper mill worker, a postman, a welder, a laboratory assistant, an armature winder and a constructional engineer. The welfare officer, a young lady, who was responsible for their accommodation, entertainment and general welfare, met them at Coventry. She took them to the hostel in Coventry where they were to stay during their training period. This was a 13<sup>th</sup> century monastery that had been converted into a Salvation Army hostel. The first meal was mentioned: roast pork, baked potatoes, cabbage and tea. Although there were staff shortages in the hostel no specific complaints were made. However, fears were raised on income tax payments, especially among those who had been earning more money before being directed to the mines. The welfare officer, who told them that an adjustment would be made in the amount of tax they would have to pay, allayed these fears. The report ended by giving details of the training that was to follow.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 18.1.1944



### **Boy miners shown round coalface<sup>10</sup>**

The second report, a day later, was on the first full day of training. 'Most of the young men agree that the mine itself is better than they had expected.' They were shown round the coalface, given a preliminary talk and then a lesson on safety measures. Because of a mistake by the Ministry of Labour 25 Bevin Boys had been sent to the training centre a week early and so they were able to give the others tips. The main grievance was about money. A charge of 5s was made for transport between the hostel and the training centre. When this was added to the cost of the hostel, meals, laundry and insurance they were left with only 3s 6d pocket money. A ringleader, John Holland, was soon busy organising a petition demanding a minimum subsistence allowance of 24s.

### **Second chance for absentees. Only few missing**

Some of those directed to the mines had not arrived at the training centre and would be given a second chance to report before more drastic measures were taken.

### **Settling down. Pay rates the only complaint<sup>11</sup>**

By the third day the Bevin Boys were threatening to strike if their grievances were not dealt with. The Ministry of Labour was reported as showing surprise and the transport charge was suspended whilst the matter was looked into. Two representatives of the Miners' Federation met with John Holland and agreed to support the boys' demands as far as possible. Apart from the money, there were no major complaints and the Bevin Boys were reasonably satisfied with their conditions.

### **80 boys sign manifesto<sup>12</sup>**

The charge for laundry, about 2s a week, was dropped giving the Bevin Boys 7s a week more than they had expected at the beginning of the week. The remaining grievances were set out in a protest manifesto and sent off to Bevin. More staff had been found for the hostel and a recreation room and two snack bars staffed by the WVS were being installed for the exclusive use of the Bevin Boys.

---

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19.1.1944

<sup>11</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 20.1.1944

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 21.1.1944

### **Pit boys satisfied**<sup>13</sup>

Just one week after starting their training the Porter Tribunal awarded minimum wages to all miners, including the Bevin Boys. They felt their grievances had been settled and they could get on with the job.

### *Daily Express*

### **Off to the coalmines today ---**<sup>14</sup>

The Daily Express started its report by following one Bevin Boy as he packed ready to leave for the training centre. 'Helped by his mother, Eddy did his packing yesterday: two old suits, the suit he wore at the job he left on Saturday – salesman at a Palmers Green outfitters – an overcoat, a raincoat, two new shirts with collars attached, socks, underwear and boxing shorts.'

### **They also Serve –**

### **Record of the first train journey of the young men who will dig coal for victory**<sup>15</sup>

Similarly to the *Daily Telegraph* the *Daily Express* reporter travelled with the first batch of Bevin Boys in the train from London to Coventry. He too mentioned the different backgrounds and occupations of the boys but went into a lot more detail on their conversations and banter during the journey. Some of the boys' mothers had been upset at their sons' departure and some relied on money taken home by them in their previous occupation to help supporting the family. Many of the boys had extra packages with them containing football or cricket kits, books or even fishing rods. One of the boys was not keen on going underground, as he had been buried for nine hours after a Blitz.

### **Down the mine on second day**

### **Bevin Boys sum up first week**

Many of the boys from London and the South East were at Nuneaton for training as they were allocated to work in the Kent pits and the training centre at Chislet was not ready. The *Daily Express* also mentioned the Bevin Boys who had been sent to the

---

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 24.1.1944

<sup>14</sup> *Daily Express*, 17.1.1944

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Express*, 18.1.1944

training centre a week early. They had expected to have classroom and surface work training but they were taken underground on the second day. The question of inadequate pay was reported. 'They have already fitted into the traditional critical attitude of mining folk towards current wage rates and allowances.' Each week boys of 18 paid 25s for hostel accommodation, 5s travelling costs from hostel to mine, 5s for canteen meals, 2s 6d for snacks, leaving them with 3s to 4s pocket money. The boys had great admiration for the miners and were very appreciative of the leisure facilities provided. The welfare officer is described as one of the best. 'She is in her mid twenties and is obviously going to be the best pal to hundreds of mine conscripts.'

### News Chronicle

#### **'Ballot Boys' first hours in pit, pay is their worry**

#### **Girl companions will have far more money<sup>16</sup>**

Most of the boys were not enthusiastic about working in the pit. The welfare officer, 'a young live wire who has certainly prepared a great reception for them', met them on their arrival. At the end of the first week they were to be entertained by an American Army concert party. Great stress was made in this report on the inequality of the wages compared to girls working in the local engineering factory, who were earning some of the highest engineering wages in the country, thereby giving them financial domination. 'It is quite common ... to see the girls standing the boys drinks and paying for them at the pictures.'

### Star

#### **Many London youths will go to Kent pits**

#### **First batch in Midlands<sup>17</sup>**

The *Star* filed several reports from different reporters. The first met the 30 Bevin Boys from London at the training centre. He reported on the proposed training centre at Chislet for those going to the Kent pits from London and the South-East. The Tunnel Pit training centre in the Midlands was the nearest for these boys. Mr Frank

---

<sup>16</sup> *News Chronicle*, 18.1.1944

<sup>17</sup> *Star*, 17.1.1944

Bowles, the local MP as well as the mayor and officials from the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Fuel and Power welcomed the Bevin Boys. The following day they were to start their training and although they were not expected to work underground at the training centre, they would be taken down to introduce them to pit conditions and give them a sense of the pit atmosphere.

### **Would prefer the services**

The reporter spoke to a number of Bevin Boys leaving Euston Station but it is not clear if he travelled with them. He reported verbatim on what was said and mentioned that none were pleased to be going to the mines and would have preferred the Forces.

A third report in the same issue looked at the mining industry in general. The reporter, once a miner himself, travelled to South Wales, which had been a depressed area between the wars. He met miners who explained why the industry had so little appeal to the youth and why they would not like to see their own sons as miners. 'Even before this became a depressed area I made up my mind that my boy was not going to follow me underground. ... Since then hundreds of thousands have agreed with me. The work is hard and the pay is small.'

### **'More pay' demand by Bevin Pit Boys<sup>18</sup>**

The main grievance of the boys was that they were forced to pay 5s a week for travel between the hostel and the pit. The reporter went with the conscripts on their first visit down the mine.

### **Dodgers to be rounded up**

Those who had not arrived for the start of training were to be given two days in which to appear 'before the Ministry of Labour starts asking questions which may lead to the police court.'

---

<sup>18</sup> *Star*, 18.1.1944

## Daily Worker

### **First batch of pit ballot boys arrive<sup>19</sup>**

The *Daily Worker* appears to be the only national daily newspaper granted access to two training centres. Originally it was allocated to Doncaster and Pontefract. One journalist went to Pontefract and followed the training course through, reporting on a daily basis (see section 4, North East), another went to Coventry.

The *Daily Worker* journalist, who described the Bevin Boy trainees as ‘a virile and direct speaking crowd,’ interviewed several of the Bevin Boys to discover their attitude. The first, a postman from London had the following to say: ‘It was a shock at first to learn that I had to work in the pits but when I got used to the idea things did not seem so bad. After all the country is in great need of coal.’ The majority would have preferred the Forces but realised that the country needed coal. Peter Wakely, studying for his BSc, hoped to carry on with his studies during his time in the pit.

### **With a good heart**

Several working class boys were interviewed and, other than expressing a preference for the Forces, none was rebellious about having to work in the pits. The only grumble was about wages.

## 2. North West, Clifton, near Manchester

### Liverpool Daily Post

#### **Ready for work at the mines**

#### **Merseyside youths in the first batch<sup>20</sup>**

The *Liverpool Daily Post* mentioned the different classes of boys conscripted to the mines: ‘the public schoolboys, university students, clerks, salesmen, plumbers, apprentices etc.’ Some of those interviewed did not like the idea of working in a coalmine but others took a more optimistic view and accepted it.

---

<sup>19</sup> *Daily Worker*, (18.1.1944)

<sup>20</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, (18.1.1944)

### **Landladies welcome**

The WVS took the Bevin Boys to their billets. The paper praised the merits of the Lancashire landladies and wrote of the motherly welcome the boys received. They were then taken to the training centre at Swinton, where they were issued with their mining kit.

### **Methods of training**

360 trainees could be accommodated for instruction at any one time in the training centre at Swinton. Details were given of the training the Bevin Boys were to receive. Extra rations of soap and cheese were to be provided. The Miners' Welfare was at their disposal, where they could play billiards, darts and other games and at weekends they could attend a dance at a reduced rate for 6d.

### **Men's impressions**

The journalist spoke with some of the local Merseyside youths. One was John Hewetson, who had been a public schoolboy. He said: 'Of course I am not going to be a miner all my life, but I intend to make the best of mining while I am here.' Another Bevin Boy, Frederick Middleditch, who had been a plumber's apprentice, said: 'You can always make the best of a job.'

### **A new opening on life**

Other local youths interviewed were equally enthusiastic. There were also five Jewish boys, including two from the locality. They had volunteered for the mines.

### **Manchester Guardian**

#### **National Service in the pits**

#### **The first of the "Ballot" youths reach the Training Centres<sup>21</sup>**

The report starts by giving details of the training centre, set up at the Swinton Football Club's ground and the training that would be given there.

---

<sup>21</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, (18.1.1944)

Half of the first intake of 110 Bevin Boys had arrived by lunchtime. The rest were travelling from southern England. They were not very enthusiastic but more philosophic about the life ahead of them. The article mentions the various occupations of boys: sawmill labourer, thresher attendant, accountant's clerk, glasscutter, tailor's cutter, stereotyper, milk roundsman and market porter. It also mentioned John Hewetson, a former public schoolboy. Another, Michael Benson, a grammar schoolboy, had worked as a bank clerk. His attitude was; 'If it is helping the war effort I really don't mind.'

### **Billeting difficulties**

The *Manchester Guardian* had been given facilities to report on the Manchester area. However, when mentioning the billeting difficulties, it reported on those in Co. Durham. Only 23 out of the 93 new recruits were able to live at home. The WVS had tried to find billets for the rest of the trainees but it had proved difficult. It was therefore decided to build a hostel to accommodate 500 boys. The cost for billets ranged between 27s 6d and 32s 6d.

### *Daily Mirror*

#### **Public school to the pit: my duty**

#### **600 boys from all parts of Britain settling in 6 Training Centres<sup>22</sup>**

The *Daily Mirror* also interviewed John Hewetson, the public schoolboy, who repeated what he had said to the *Liverpool Daily Post*. They also interviewed working class boys but the report is confusing as, although the *Daily Mirror* had been given facilities in the North West, those interviewed appear to have been sent to South Moor in Co. Durham. They gave positive interviews. 'I'm like a lot more who wanted to join the Services but I have been put here to do something just as important. It's a great change for me, [labourer] but I'm not scared of going down the pit.'

#### **He was first**

This particular Bevin Boy was the first to arrive at the training centre after a 300 mile, eight-hour train journey, where he had been forced to stand all the way. The

---

<sup>22</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (18.1.1944)

journalist then goes on to report on a boy arriving at Pontefract, yet another training centre.

### **An outsize meal**

The description of the meal is probably also referring to Pontefract. After a meal at the pit canteen the boys were taken to their billets. One of the landladies was described as 'motherly' and there is a photograph of a Bevin Boy having a cup of tea with the landlady.

### **Mine ballot boys tell Bevin: More "exes" or we stop work<sup>23</sup>**

The Bevin Boys in Coventry demanded a subsistence allowance of an extra 24s a week as they had very little left from their pay packet once expenses had been met.

### **Settlement likely**

After all deductions they had only 3s 6d a week for pocket money. The leader of the Salvation Army hostel where the Bevin Boys were staying felt that they would not strike for a settlement would be reached by the weekend.

### **25s a week 'digs'**

Full board costs 25s a week. The authorities were doing all they could to try and stop some of the charges, for example, transport charges.

### **Bevin to act on pit ballot boys' pay: More strike talk<sup>24</sup>**

Following Coventry's lead Bevin Boys at Pontefract and Askern Main, near Doncaster, were also threatening to strike.

### **130 of Bevin's boys walk out after protest over pay: Many get concession<sup>25</sup>**

130 had walked out of Askern Main Training Centre.

---

<sup>23</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (19.1.1944)

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (20.1.1944)

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (21.1.1944)



### **15 Bevin Boys hadn't enough money for canteen dinners<sup>26</sup>**

Three groups of Bevin Boys gave Bevin an ultimatum. He was given until the following Wednesday to grant an increase in the billeting allowance, otherwise they would stop work. The report also mentioned problems at Swinton, where one of the boys complained that they had been promised that they would be sent to a pit near their home. Although there were two pits within walking distance of his home, he was being sent to one that would cost him 12s a week in travelling expenses. His pay was not enough to cover this so he would not be reporting for work.

### **Union chief: Bevin Boys pampered<sup>27</sup>**

The union chief described the Bevin Boys' behaviour as 'a ridiculous circus' and felt it was high time they stopped causing trouble.

### 3. North East, Askern Main, Doncaster

#### *Glasgow Herald*

There were no training centres in Scotland at this time and this article looks very similar to that of the *Yorkshire Post*.

### **600 pit ballotees 'settle down' Training Centres welcome<sup>28</sup>**

The first ballotees from all parts of Britain had their first introduction to mining. The report then gave details on what was involved in the training. The six training centres were named. The trainees were given their mining kit and taken to their billets. They were given an extra ration of soap and cheese and would have the use of pithead baths at a cost of 5d per week. They would also be able to use the facilities of the Miners' Welfare Institute.

---

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (22.1.1944)

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Mirror*, (25.1.1944)

<sup>28</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, (18.1.1944)

## **Strike threatened**

### **Young men directed to the pits<sup>29</sup>**

The report discusses the unrest at Coventry. The Bevin Boys were disgruntled because they were left with only 3s 6d per week in their pay packet after deductions. They wanted a subsistence allowance of 24s a week.

Most of those at Pontefract were trying to make the best of things but there were protests from some who had been earning a lot more in skilled trades.

### *Evening News*

### **The ballot boys got turkey for tea and egg for breakfast<sup>30</sup>**

The Bevin Boys were shown to their billets on arrival in Doncaster. The following day they were collected from their billets and taken to the Miners' Welfare Institute, where they discussed their billets. The 30 boys from the South-East were 'unanimously loud in their praise for Yorkshire.'

### **Meal packed up**

They were all given a packed lunch by their landlady and spoke to the journalist about the meal they had been given the evening before. They had all been hungry after a days travelling but had been given as much as they could eat. As an example two Bevin Boys billeted together with a widow gave their experience.

### **And eggs**

They were taken to her house by car and made to feel welcome with turkey sandwiches, mince pies and tea. During the evening the landlady had invited round two old miners to explain life in a mine and to impress on them the need for discipline and safety. For breakfast they were each given a boiled egg and a packet of sandwiches to take to work.

---

<sup>29</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, (19.1.1944)

<sup>30</sup> *Evening News*, (18.1.1944)

### **Pit 'secrets'**

The regular miners taught them how to ride in the cage with their knees bent to avoid discomfort.

### *Yorkshire Post*

The *Yorkshire Post* were, like the *Daily Worker*, invited to two training centres

#### **Six hundred pit ballotees report for training**

#### **How Yorkshire welcomes the Bevin Boys<sup>31</sup>**

The report seems to be based on Pontefract (see 4. North East, Pontefract).

### *Daily Herald*

#### **Miners promise trainees a square deal**

#### **Today is Bevin Pit Boys' zero hour<sup>32</sup>**

The report starts with a Yorkshire landlady, a retired miner's wife, welcoming two Bevin Boys from London. She has tea ready for them, omelettes, jam tarts and mince pies. During the evening they were given mining advice by an ex-miner. They would have to get up at 6.15am in order to be at the Miners' Welfare Centre at 8am the next morning.

#### **Drew their kit**

Miners, WVS and local authority officials were at the Welfare to help with kitting the Bevin Boys out with safety helmet, overalls, boots, gym shoes and lamp 'checks'. Pencils and notebooks were distributed for use in the classroom. Billets had been found for all the recruits. The training centre was new and purpose built.

#### **A square deal**

A deputy at the pit had been chosen as the chief instructor and he had 20 assistants to help him. The instructor told the journalist: 'The lads will get a square deal from the men. We'll do our level best for them.' The capacity at the Centre is 480 trainees. 150

---

<sup>31</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, (18.1.1944)

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Herald*, (18.1.1944)

arrived in the first intake and 120 a week were expected in the future. A timetable of work followed.

### **Their first lesson**

The first thing to be learnt was how to behave in a pit cage: to take a deep breath, swallow hard, to bend the knees and to relax. No pithead baths were available so 18 showers had been built at the Miners' Welfare Centre. The story of Don Forster was recounted, a jockey, who had been racing at Pontefract.

### **Boys like pit but not pay<sup>33</sup>**

Grumbles about pay and having very little pocket money.

### **First impressions**

Some of the Bevin Boys were interviewed and asked what they thought of the first day. They all thought it was better than they had expected. The meal in the canteen was described, 'great plates of mince, potatoes, beans and gravy, washed down with mugs of scalding tea.'

### **"Herald" investigators tell of training ballotees' problems**

#### **Bevin's prompt act for pit boys<sup>34</sup>**

Bevin had called for a full investigation of the complaints about allowances given by the Bevin Boys. There was talk of a general subsistence allowance for all Bevin Boys. An ultimatum had been sent from Askern to Bevin, signed by 142 recruits, threatening to stop work if their demands were not met. They wanted a full billeting allowance, half the money needed for meals in the canteen and no bus fares to and from pits.

### **Five-mile march**

40 Bevin Boys had decided to meet up near their billets, which were five miles from the pit, and march to the pit as a protest. They had no money for they were not paid until the following Wednesday.

---

<sup>33</sup> *Daily Herald*, (19.1.1944)

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Herald*, (20.1.1944)

### **Landladies' loans**

123 of the 142 Bevin Boys at Askern borrowed money from their parents and many borrowed from their landladies to keep them going. Some were going hungry because they did not have the money for a canteen meal, whilst others had sandwiches made up for them by miner's wives, free of charge.

### **But they will not shirk their jobs**

They were also rationing or going without cigarettes. They still carried on with their work, because they did not want anyone to think they were shirking. One boy had only 9½d. Before he was conscripted he had been earning £5 a week.

### **Nothing for home**

As a ballotee the same Bevin Boy would earn 50s 6d a week and would have to budget carefully. He then goes on to give details of expenditure. He had promised to send money home to his mother as he had previously been supporting her. There followed reports from several other boys, who had no money and had to borrow.

## 4. North East, Pontefract

### *The Times*

### **Lads for the pits**

### **A cheery welcome at Pontefract**

### **Helpful miners<sup>35</sup>**

93 boys arrived at Pontefract to begin their training. Many of those arriving early came from the surrounding district and would be able to live at home. Those from further away would arrive later and would be met by women officers of the Ministry of Labour Welfare Department.

### **Preference for Forces**

The journalist spoke with many of the boys and did not find one who was pleased to be there, although one said he did not mind, as he wanted to do something to help the

---

<sup>35</sup> *The Times*, (18.1.1944)

war. They were all disappointed that serving in the Forces had been denied them. Many had set their minds on one of the Services. In spite of their disappointment they intended to make the most of their new life and as they were there they would do their best. Tribute was paid to the regular miners.

### **Difficulties of Bevin Boys**

#### **Training Centres barely ready**

#### **Arrival problems<sup>36</sup>**

The training centres were in some cases barely ready and in others not at all ready. A canteen at Swinton was still under construction and therefore trainees had to eat in the local British Restaurant.

#### *Daily Mail*

#### **Ten Bevin Boys miss the first draft**

#### **Bill Smith the Cockney reports for pits**

#### **'Hullo Luv' said his landlady<sup>37</sup>**

Ten Bevin Boys had not arrived at the station in London and nothing had been heard from them. If they were not going to arrive soon they would be classed as deserters. The Cockneys with their particular humour were singled out for mention.

#### **Eyes lit up**

Several of the regular miners have been explaining procedures to the conscripts. Four of the Cockneys, all working class boys, found a billet together. One of them was pleased to see that boxing was on offer at the training centre and Bill Smith had his football gear with him. A local boy, who was taken there by his father, was also in the same billet.

#### **Hilarious**

The landlady had offered to put up eight Bevin Boys in three bedrooms. She greeted them all with 'hullo luv' and asked their names. One of the jolliest boys arriving on the bus from the station to the colliery was a public schoolboy, who had been working

---

<sup>36</sup> *The Times*, (19.1.1944)

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Mail*, (18.1.1944)

in an insurance office. Another two had been working on the land and the journalist felt that they would be most likely to feel the effects of working in a confined space.

### **Jockey**

One conscript, Don Forster, hailed from Chester and had been a jockey at Pontefract the previous year. The different classes and trades were remarked on.

### **Muscling-in for pits**

#### **Sgt.-Major touch**

26 of the Army's top physical training instructors were being sent to the pits to give PT courses, planned by experts, to the trainees. The exercises had been designed to tone up the muscles they would need for working in the pit.

### *Yorkshire Post*

#### **Six hundred pit ballotees report for training**

#### **How Yorkshire welcomed the Bevin Boys<sup>38</sup>**

Some of the boys had to pay 5d a week for pithead baths

#### **First arrivals at Pontefract**

Apart from some good natured banter about what their new life had in store for them the Bevin Boys were determined to make the best of things. The majority had never visited a pit before. Some of those from the surrounding area would be able to live at home. The boys were mostly between 18 and 25 years old, although there were a few exceptions. An example was given of a 37 year old, who had worked for many years in the Cooperative Society and had been directed to mining. His father had been a miner all his working life and had prevented him and his two brothers from going into the pits. There were grumbles about pay. The training centre manager reported that there were not many refusals by the locals to billet the Bevin Boys. Especially women who had husbands or sons serving in the Forces had been ready to offer accommodation.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, (18.1.1944)

## Daily Worker

The following report comes under the title:

### **First batch of pit boys arrive**

Although the first part of the report refers to the training centre at Nuneaton, the second part contains the report of a second journalist, who undertook the training programme at Pontefract in order to report on how the Bevin Boys coped.

### **Old hand gives them advice<sup>39</sup>**

One of the new arrivals was talking with a young volunteer, who had started training three weeks previously. He was told to listen to his instructor and that way he would not be involved in an accident. When asked by the new conscript if he liked mining the volunteer said that he did.

### **Pit recruits spend first two hours underground<sup>40</sup>**

90 Bevin Boys were taken down the mine for the first time by a regular miner, who was to be their instructor. He started by making sure they had no cigarettes, matches or lighters with them.

### **'Classy' isn't it?**

The cage for their descent had two compartments so it was thought of as being a 'classy' double-decker. The speed of the descent left some of the boys slightly deaf but the Londoners joked that it was like the tube. Once at the bottom they were shown how the pit worked.

### **The 'Manhole'**

It was explained that if one of the 'trams' got out of control it was possible to duck into the 'manhole' to avoid it. They were shown the haulage system and how to lash a chain round the moving haulage line.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Daily Worker*, (18.1.1944)

<sup>40</sup> *Daily Worker*, (19.1.1944)



### **Time to return**

After two hours at the pit bottom they made the ascent to the surface. Asked what he thought of the new recruits the instructor said that they looked like good lads and it was his job to break down any prejudices they had about the mining industry. The Bevin Boys thought it was hard work but expected to get used to it. The report ended with; 'The nation can well be proud of its so-called 'Bevin Boys'.'

### **Meet our demands<sup>41</sup>**

A temporary agreement had been reached on billet costs but the Bevin Boys were still not satisfied and claimed they had insufficient pocket money. They would, however, continue with their training.

### **No prejudice**

Negotiations were still taking place and the Assistant Regional Controller said he would make an unprejudiced report. The authorities were confident that an agreement could be reached, a view not shared by the Bevin Boys.

### **Short next week**

One of the boys told how he had taken out a 10s sub, which would have to be paid back on the next pay day, leaving him again with no money once he had paid his expenses. Another had refused a sub. His reaction was: 'Bevin got me here. Let him keep me.' 'Conscripts are fed up to the teeth with the "raw deal" they are getting.'

### **Pit-boys, with wages settled, 'go to it'<sup>42</sup>**

Morale had been boosted by Bevin's decision to improve wages. A new batch of Bevin Boys had arrived at the training centre. The journalist met two of the new arrivals at their billet. They were both working class boys, earning about £2 a week in their previous jobs. They were prepared to make the best of their situation.

### **'Old-stagers'**

The old-stagers were the boys who had arrived the week before. Some were already engaged on responsible jobs in the mine.

---

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Worker*, (21.1.1944)

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Worker*, (25.1.1944)

### **'Wages good'**

One recruit still did not like the work but said that he could not grumble now the wages were good. The manager of the training centre told the boys of the new wage deal, where at 18 they would earn £3 a week and that they would also get a settling-in allowance of 24s 6d. He hoped they were now satisfied and that there would be no more trouble during the training period.

### 5. North, Co. Durham, South Moor

#### Daily Sketch

#### **600 Bevin Pit Boys have housewarming<sup>43</sup>**

The Durham housewives had scorned the term 'landladies' and wanted to be known as 'mothers' instead. Some of these 'mothers' had been to the local Labour Exchange to express their concerns at the 'narrow spending margin left to the youngest boys out of their allowance'.

#### **Do best I can**

They were of the opinion that it did not even leave the boys cigarette money. They had refused to charge laundry money and had given the boys 5s rebate. One of the trainees said that in spite of not being allowed to go into the Navy as he had wished, he would do the best he could in the pit. The journalist mentioned two boys. One had never seen a pit before.

#### **Mr Bevin's Minors<sup>44</sup>**

At the end of their first day of work the Bevin Boys had threatened strike action because they felt they were not paid enough. If this was the case then the matter should be remedied as quickly as possible. However, the boys should not have threatened such drastic action as a form of protest so early on as strike action is not available to those in the Forces even when they do have a legitimate grievance.

---

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Sketch*, (18.1.1944)

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Sketch*, (20.1.1944)

The *Economist* and *British Colonial* were also given access to South Moor but as they were not daily newspapers they were not used in this thesis.

#### 6. Co. Durham, Horden

The *Economist*, *Life* and *Associated Press* were given access to Horden but as they were not daily newspapers they were not used in this thesis.

## Appendix ACD-I

### Coalmining: Persons killed and injured<sup>45</sup>

#### FUEL AND POWER

#### Coal-mining: Persons killed and Injured<sup>(1)</sup>

Great Britain

TABLE 157

Number

	Total: underground and surface	Underground					Surface: all causes	
		Total	By explosions of fire-damp or coal dust	By falls of ground	Shaft accidents	Haulage accidents ( <sup>2</sup> )		Miscellaneous accidents ( <sup>3</sup> )
<b>Persons killed:</b>								
1935.....	861	774	37	458	16	186	77	87
1936.....	790	732	71	380	20	165	96	58
1937.....	859	789	63	436	30	178	82	70
1938.....	858	782	90	408	15	194	75	76
1939.....	783	722	51	406	24	172	69	61
1940.....	923	836	31	513	21	193	78	87
1941.....	925	838	72	502	19	190	55	87
1942.....	877	799	99	446	22	168	64	78
1943.....	713	655	21	380	27	159	68	58
1944.....	623	573	19	335	19	146	54	50
1945.....	550	506	13	305	21	116	51	44
1946.....	543	492	24	277	11	136	45	50
<b>Persons seriously injured<sup>(2)</sup>:</b>								
1935.....	3,257	2,969	67	1,442	74	763	623	288
1936.....	3,117	2,806	63	1,349	60	742	592	311
1937.....	3,363	3,049	59	1,516	41	804	629	314
1938.....	3,157	2,877	105	1,389	37	824	522	280
1939.....	3,155	2,851	66	1,311	113	890	471	304
1940.....	3,237	2,873	64	1,477	32	829	471	364
1941.....	2,990	2,681	90	1,364	42	729	456	309
1942.....	2,809	2,531	91	1,252	36	687	465	278
1943.....	2,596	2,357	71	1,204	43	612	427	239
1944.....	2,553	2,318	74	1,096	43	615	490	235
1945.....	2,353	2,144	52	1,018	33	572	469	209
1946.....	2,335	2,124	46	1,016	24	524	514	211
<b>Persons injured and disabled for more than three days:</b>								
1935.....	133,756	123,124	59	47,156	196	34,352	41,361	10,632
1936.....	135,968	125,034	56	47,535	238	33,649	43,556	10,934
1937.....	140,645	128,922	55	48,269	337	33,668	46,593	11,723
1938.....	131,776	120,366	101	45,301	312	36,776	37,876	11,410
1939.....	134,072	121,702	62	46,121	353	34,102	41,064	12,370
1940.....	146,388	131,653	55	52,027	263	34,106	45,202	14,735
1941.....	158,445	142,555	74	55,423	213	35,322	51,523	15,890
1942.....	166,639	150,008	84	56,985	227	37,003	55,709	16,631
1943.....	173,716	157,177	51	59,626	232	36,858	60,410	16,539
1944.....	176,847	159,880	68	57,120	283	39,293	63,116	16,967
1945.....	181,059	163,101	47	56,617	238	40,243	65,956	17,958
1946.....	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..

(1) The particulars relate to all mines under the Coal Mines Act.

(2) From 1938 onwards figures in respect of haulage and miscellaneous accidents underground are compiled on a different basis from earlier years and if taken separately are not strictly comparable. If, however, these two main categories of accidents are combined, comparability is maintained.

(3) Injuries which, because of their nature or severity are, under the terms of Section 80 of the Coal Mines Act, 1911, required to be reported to His Majesty's Divisional Inspectors of Mines at the time of their occurrence. In practically every case these accidents involve a period of disablement of more than three days and such accidents are included under the sub-heading immediately following.

Source: Ministry of Fuel and Power

<sup>45</sup> 'Table 157 - Coalmining: Persons killed and injured' in *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, No. 84, (London, 1947), p134

**Appendix ACD-II**

**Coalmining: Death and injury rates per 1000,000 manshifts<sup>46</sup>**

**FUEL AND POWER**  
**Coal-mining: Death and Injury rates per 100,000 manshifts<sup>(1)(2)</sup>**  
**Great Britain**

TABLE 158

	Total: underground and surface	Underground					Surface: all causes	
		Total	By explosions of fire-damp or coal dust	By falls of ground	Shaft accidents	Haulage accidents (*)		Miscellaneous accidents (*)
<b>Death rates:</b>								
1935	0.43	0.51	0.02	0.30	0.01	0.13	0.05	0.18
1936	0.39	0.48	0.05	0.25	0.01	0.11	0.06	0.11
1937	0.40	0.48	0.04	0.26	0.02	0.11	0.05	0.13
1938	0.41	0.50	0.06	0.26	0.01	0.12	0.05	0.15
1939	0.37	0.46	0.03	0.26	0.02	0.11	0.04	0.11
1940	0.43	0.53	0.02	0.33	0.01	0.12	0.05	0.16
1941	0.46	0.57	0.05	0.34	0.01	0.13	0.04	0.16
1942	0.43	0.54	0.07	0.30	0.02	0.11	0.04	0.14
1943	0.36	0.45	0.01	0.26	0.02	0.11	0.05	0.11
1944	0.33	0.41	0.01	0.24	0.01	0.11	0.04	0.10
1945	0.30	0.38	0.01	0.23	0.01	0.09	0.04	0.09
1946	0.30	0.37	0.02	0.21	0.01	0.10	0.03	0.10
<b>Serious injury rates:</b>								
1935	1.63	1.97	0.04	0.96	0.05	0.51	0.41	0.58
1936	1.52	1.82	0.04	0.68	0.04	0.48	0.38	0.61
1937	1.56	1.88	0.04	0.93	0.02	0.50	0.39	0.59
1938	1.52	1.85	0.07	0.89	0.02	0.53	0.34	0.54
1939	1.49	1.81	0.04	0.83	0.07	0.57	0.30	0.56
1940	1.52	1.84	0.04	0.95	0.02	0.53	0.30	0.65
1941	1.49	1.84	0.06	0.94	0.03	0.50	0.31	0.57
1942	1.38	1.71	0.06	0.85	0.02	0.47	0.31	0.51
1943	1.31	1.63	0.05	0.83	0.03	0.43	0.29	0.44
1944	1.34	1.67	0.05	0.79	0.03	0.45	0.35	0.46
1945	1.30	1.62	0.04	0.77	0.03	0.43	0.35	0.43
1946	1.28	1.61	0.03	0.77	0.02	0.40	0.39	0.43
<b>Total injury rates:</b>								
1935	67.06	81.99	0.04	31.40	0.13	22.89	27.53	21.57
1936	66.64	81.58	0.04	31.03	0.16	21.97	28.38	21.53
1937	65.25	79.33	0.03	29.72	0.21	20.74	28.63	22.14
1938	63.60	77.50	0.06	29.17	0.20	23.69	24.38	22.01
1939	63.34	77.13	0.04	29.20	0.22	21.64	26.03	22.96
1940	69.05	84.33	0.04	33.33	0.17	21.88	28.91	26.36
1941	79.18	97.73	0.05	38.02	0.15	24.24	35.27	29.33
1942	82.30	101.57	0.06	38.61	0.15	25.09	37.66	30.39
1943	88.12	109.37	0.04	41.55	0.16	25.67	41.95	30.98
1944	92.53	114.66	0.05	41.03	0.20	28.25	45.13	32.84
1945	100.17	123.25	0.04	42.80	0.18	30.46	49.77	37.13
1946	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
<b>Death and injury rates:</b>								
1935	67.49	82.50	0.06	31.70	0.14	23.02	27.58	21.75
1936	67.03	82.06	0.09	31.28	0.17	22.08	28.44	21.64
1937	65.65	79.81	0.07	29.98	0.23	20.85	28.68	22.27
1938	64.01	78.00	0.12	29.43	0.21	23.81	24.43	22.16
1939	63.71	77.59	0.07	29.46	0.24	21.75	26.07	23.07
1940	69.48	84.86	0.06	33.66	0.18	22.00	28.96	26.52
1941	79.64	98.30	0.10	38.36	0.16	24.37	35.31	29.49
1942	82.73	102.11	0.13	38.91	0.17	25.20	37.70	30.53
1943	88.48	109.82	0.05	41.81	0.18	25.78	42.00	31.09
1944	92.86	115.07	0.06	41.27	0.21	28.36	45.17	32.94
1945	100.47	123.63	0.05	43.03	0.19	30.55	49.81	37.22
1946	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**

(1) The rates for underground and surface accidents are based upon the number of manshifts worked below and above-ground, respectively.  
 (2) The particulars relate to mines under the Coal Mines Act (excluding the stratified ironstone mines in Cleveland, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire).  
 (3) From 1938 onwards figures in respect of haulage and miscellaneous accidents underground are compiled on a different basis from earlier years and if taken separately are not strictly comparable. If, however, these two main categories of accidents are combined, comparability is maintained.

Source: Ministry of Fuel and Power

<sup>46</sup> 'Table 158 - Coalmining: Persons killed and injured' in *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, No. 84, (London, 1947), p135

**Appendix WAG-I**

Contract form for a Kent colliery company<sup>47</sup>

**THE CHISLET COLLIERY LIMITED,  
STURRY, NR. CANTERBURY.**

**CONTRACT FORM.**

In consideration of the Owners of Chislet Colliery employing me and paying me wages according to work done and at the rates ruling at the colliery from time to time, I, the undersigned, agree to serve the said Owners from the date set opposite my name, subject to any general agreement from time to time in force between the Company and the representatives of the workmen employed, to obey all lawful orders of the Company or its Agents, and to keep all the rules established for the regulation of this colliery, subject to the right of the Colliery Company or me to determine the said employment by the giving or receiving of FOURTEEN DAYS notice except for lawful cause. Provided that in the case of breakdowns, accidents, or other unforeseen or unavoidable causes, lack of Trade, the Company shall be entitled to suspend the employment forthwith.

It is understood that I make no claim on the Company at any time for payment on account of any travelling expenses I may incur for the purpose of such employment and that the price to be paid for any Home Coal to which I may be entitled shall include any rail charges incurred by the Company for the conveyance of such coal between the pit and the nearest station to my address.

**TRUCK ACTS, 1831—1898.**

I also agree that the Chislet Colliery Limited shall deduct from my Wages or Earnings such amounts as shall represent the fair and reasonable cost of any materials, tools or other articles supplied to me at my request and/or for which I am responsible, it being understood that under such heading shall be included also any House rent, Rates, Light or any deductions which the Company agrees to make upon a request representing a vote of the workmen employed from time to time, e.g., Checkweigher, Benevolent Fund, Doctor, Levies, etc.

Date <sup>18 NOV '43</sup> ..... Signature .....

Witness .....  
*[Handwritten Signature]*

Reg. No. *M. 468* .....

<sup>47</sup> Kindly supplied by Jenny Maynard

## Appendix UNI-I

Bevin Boy Special Bulletin from R. Condon, General Secretary and Agent, NUM.  
(undated)<sup>48</sup>

Comrades

We address this appeal to you with the authority of the NUM behind us; a union embracing 600,000 men: - men who have fought battle after battle in the interests of all sections of workers.

The Bevin Boy who works in the pit alongside our miners is not a separate entity as unscrupulous individuals would infer. He suffers the same conditions below ground as the miner – an improvement of the miners' standard is an improvement of the Bevin Boys' standard. The Bevin Boys have been conscripted to the pits by state law; the miners have been conscripted to the pits by HUNGER, by an economic law, their only way to live under the present system.

The Bevin Boy's demands apart from the general demands of the miner, viz: Nationalisation of the mines under workers control etc. can be reduced to the following: -

1. Travel arrangements on Bank Holidays
2. Increased sick pay
3. Release from the pits after the war

Mr Hughes, petty capitalist and Scout master has started an organisation called: - The National Bevin Boys' Association to take up points one and two whilst his lieutenants in the hostel claim that point three is also included. Surplus funds of this Association (?) go to war savings i.e. back to the Government, which has conscripted the Bevin Boys to the pits.

....

The Bevin Boys would be isolated, into a separate body, having no support from their class brothers, the miners, and this would have their militancy and revolutionary aspirations crushed by the reactionary capitalist government in power, and by tyrannical coal owners.

Comrades: - we repeat; we are ready to fight your case but every Bevin Boy should join the Miners' Union, become active in its life so that we can go forward to fight for common interests of Bevin Boys and miners.

....

Do not alienate yourselves from your allies the miners by falling into the trap of a separate Bevin Boys' Association.

Comrades: - The NUM is your union

The miners' fight is your fight.

Your fight is the miners' fight ...

---

<sup>48</sup> IWM 191/1

## Appendix ABS-I

Table showing statistics by year for absenteeism, output of coal, average number of mine workers and output per manshift of all employees.<sup>49</sup>

Year	Absenteeism - % of possible shifts*	Output million tons	Average no. of wage earners	Output per manshift overall (tons)
1939	6.9%	231.3	766,300	1.14
1940	8.3%	224.3	749,200	1.10
1941	9.0%	206.3	697,600	1.07
1942	10.4%	203.6	709,300	1.05
1943	12.4%	194.5	707,800	1.03
1944	13.6%	184.1	710,200	1.0
1945	16.3%	174.6	708,900	1.0

\* The figures for absenteeism include both voluntary and involuntary.

---

<sup>49</sup> Statistics from the Ministry of Fuel and Power Statistical Digest. Quoted in M.W. Kirby, *The British Coalmining Industry 1870-1946*, (London, 1977), p172



## Appendix ABS-II

### Record of Investigation. Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943<sup>50</sup>

Period 45 weeks, 17 <sup>th</sup> Sept. '42 to 31 <sup>st</sup> July '43 Description	Total number	% of total	Av. number Per week
Total no. of cases reported	4771		106
Total no. of cases dealt with	4658		103
<b>A. Classes</b>			
Hewers	948	20.3	21
Putters	1239	26.6	28
Datal hands	703	15.1	15
Other underground workers	1611	34.6	36
Surface	157	3.4	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>B. Age Group</b>			
16 to 20 years of age	976	20.9	21
20 to 30 years of age	1644	36.3	36
30 to 40 years of age	1088	23.4	24
40 to 50 years of age	581	12.5	13
50 and over	369	7.9	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>C. Offence</b>			
Absenteeism	3720	79.9	83
Persistent lateness	92	1.9	2
Failure to comply with a lawful and reasonable order	259	5.5	5
Impeding the work of the undertaking	587	12.7	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>D. Reasons given by workmen</b>			
"Sleeping in"	544	11.7	13
Domestic troubles	157	3.3	3
Illness without submitting medical evidence	1788	38.3	39
House shortage and travelling difficulties	54	1.7	1
Miscellaneous reasons	2115	45.6	47
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>E. Action taken</b>			
Warnings issued	2759	59.2	61
Recommended for prosecution	1130	24.3	25
Recommended for juvenile procedure	108	2.3	2
No action taken for lack of evidence or other reasons	661	14.2	15
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4658</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>103</b>

Prosecutions	
Imprisonment	25
Fines	548
Bound over	53
Dismissed	52
Withdrawn	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>682</b>

<sup>50</sup> PRO POWE 16/77, Ministry of Fuel and Power Northern 'B' Region

### Appendix ABS-III

#### Record of Investigation. Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943<sup>51</sup>

Agreed new procedure

Period 19 weeks, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Aug. '43 to 11 <sup>th</sup> Dec. '43	Total number	% of total	Av. number Per week
Description			
Total no. of cases reported	3723		196
Total no. of cases dealt with	3331		175
<b>A. Classes</b>			
Hewers	598	17.9	32
Putters	709	21.2	38
Datal hands	390	11.7	20
Other underground workers	1453	43.6	76
Surface	181	5.6	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3331</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>B. Age Group</b>			
16 to 20 years of age	776	23.2	42
20 to 30 years of age	1166	35.0	62
30 to 40 years of age	708	21.2	37
40 to 50 years of age	370	11.1	18
50 and over	311	9.5	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3331</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>C. Offence</b>			
Absenteeism	3213	96.4	169
Persistent lateness	2	-	-
Failure to comply with a lawful and reasonable order	14	0.4	1
Impeding the work of the undertaking	102	3.2	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3331</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>D. Reasons given by workmen</b>			
"Sleeping in"	502	15.0	26
Domestic troubles	91	2.7	5
Illness without submitting medical evidence	1581	47.4	83
House shortage and travelling difficulties	7	0.2	-
Miscellaneous reasons	1150	34.7	61
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3331</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>E. Action taken</b>			
Fine of £1	1795	53.8	94
Probation	987	23.6	52
Warnings issued	228	6.8	12
No action taken for lack of evidence or other reasons	321	15.8	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3331</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>175</b>

#### Disposal of fines

No. of fines refunded	522	60.9
No. of fines forfeited	335	39.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>51</sup> PRO POWE 16/77, Ministry of Fuel and Power Northern 'B' Region

## Appendix ABS-IV

### Kent Coal Owners Association survey of the Kent coalfields.

Possible working time lost by coalgetters due to:

Sickness and accident	7.6%
Voluntary absenteeism	16.5%
TOTAL	24.1%

Average percentage of coalgetters losing time each week\*

Losing one shift each week	30.1%
Losing two shifts each week	13.4%
Losing three or more shifts each week	7.8%

Average time lost each day by coalgetters\*

Monday	24.7%
Tuesday	14.1%
Wednesday	12.0%
Thursday	15.1%
Friday	16.3%
Saturday	17.4%

Average percentage of absenteeism by age groups\*

Up to and including 30 years of age	18.9%
31 to 40 years of age (inclusive)	16.9%
Over 40 years of age	15.0%

\*excluding time lost due to sickness and accident<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 30.9.1942

Appendix ABS-V

Court summons for absenteeism<sup>53</sup>

In the County of Northumberland.

PETTY SESSIONAL DIVISION OF WEST CASTLE WARD.

To Raymond Wakeley

18 Mitford Drive

of Westerhope in the County of Northumberland

Information has been laid this day by S. Pearson, Ministry of Labour &c.

for that you on the 2nd day of January 1945.

at North Walbottle in the Parish of Newburn

in the said County, being a person employed in a scheduled undertaking with the meaning of the Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943 unlawfully did without reasonable excuse absent yourself from work with the North Walbottle Coal Co. Ltd. at North Walbottle Colliery, contrary to Regulation 58A of the Defence (General) Regulations 1939 and the above mentioned Order.

No. 1.

No. 2. A similar offence in respect to the 3rd day of January 1945 and

No. 3. A similar offence in respect of the 5th day of January 1945.

~~contrary to the Statute.~~

You are therefore hereby summoned to appear before the Court of Summary Jurisdiction sitting at the Moot Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on WEDNESDAY, the 4th day of April 1945, at the hour of Ten-thirty of the clock in the forenoon, to answer to the said Information. Herein fail you not.

Dated the 21st day of March 1945 .

*Henry A. Westmacott*

LS

Justice of the Peace for the County aforesaid.

<sup>53</sup> IWM Misc 191, Item 2834

## Appendix ABS-VI

Comparison between absenteeism of Bevin Boys\* and by other wage earners in England and Wales during the week ending 25<sup>th</sup> November 1944.<sup>54</sup>

	Bevin Boys		Other Workers	
	Voluntary %	Involuntary %	Voluntary %	Involuntary %
At the face	13.42	14.49	6.93	10.77
Elsewhere below ground	12.89	14.78	5.71	9.20
On the surface	9.03	10.77	3.38	6.37
Overall	13.76	14.53	5.62	9.13

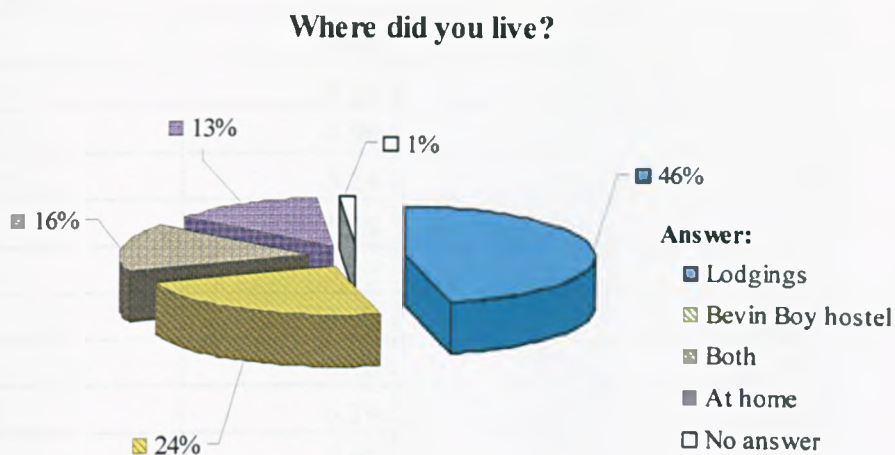
\*includes all men passing through training centres.

---

<sup>54</sup> PRO POWE 26/441 Statistical information in respect of absenteeism by Bevin Boys and other wage earners in the coal industry, 1944-1945, Extract of letter from Ministry of Fuel and Power to H.S. Houldsworth, The National Conciliation Board for the Coalmining Industry, (30.1.1945)

**Appendix ABS-VII**

**Results from questionnaire: Where did you live?<sup>55</sup>**



<sup>55</sup> Questionnaire, September – November 2002

## Appendix ABS-VIII

Weekly average of absenteeism as percentage of possible shifts.<sup>56</sup>

	All Workers		TOTAL
	Voluntary Absentees	Involuntary absentees	
1944			
January	4.66	7.78	12.44
February	4.55	7.45	12.00
March	4.90	7.78	12.68
April	5.14	7.30	12.44
May	5.28	7.39	12.67
June	5.43	7.46	12.89
July	5.57	7.57	13.14
August	6.98	8.23	15.21
September	6.19	8.95	15.14
October	5.85	9.01	14.86
November	5.76	8.79	14.55
December	6.58	8.46	15.04
1945			
January	6.73	9.87	16.60
February	6.17	10.23	16.40
March	6.05	9.50	15.55
April	6.44	9.02	15.46
May	6.73	8.37	15.10
June	6.22	8.47	14.69
July	6.78	9.00	15.78
August	8.71	9.29	18.00
September	7.72	9.66	17.38
October	7.73	9.34	17.07
November	7.75	8.94	16.69
December	8.78	8.54	17.32

<sup>56</sup> Figures from *Ministry of Fuel and Power Statistical Digest*, quoted in W.H.B. Court, *Coal*, (London, 1951), p311

## Appendix ABS-IX

Percentage of shifts lost through absenteeism expressed as percentages of the total numbers of shifts that could have been worked.<sup>57</sup>

	October 1945	September 1946	October 1946
<b>Coalface workers:</b>	percent	percent	percent
Voluntary	9.45	11.38	10.56
Involuntary*	10.63	8.51	8.25
<b>All workers:</b>			
Voluntary	7.73	9.02	8.15
Involuntary*	9.34	7.37	7.04

\* time lost due to sickness and accident

---

<sup>57</sup> 'Employment in October' in *The Ministry of Labour Gazette*, (London, December 1946), p368



## Appendix ACC-I

Daily Worker, Friday March 17, 1944

### **'Pit Recruits' Billet 'Filthy'**

#### **280 Share a bath – beds used by tramps at week-ends**

From Don Carmody, Coventry, Thursday

There is only one bath for the 200 Bevin Boys stationed at a Salvation Army Hostel in Coventry. I saw the bath when I stayed the night with some of the boys living there. It was in fairly good condition, having hot and cold running water, but even assuming that five boys manage to bath each night, it still means that they can only bath every eight weeks.

While those boys who work down the pit can obtain baths at the pit-head the majority of these lads are engaged on surface work and are not allowed to use them. [Whilst training Bevin Boys worked at the surface.]

Looking out of the bathroom window I saw less than two feet away a huge dump of rubbish at least five feet in height. Tin cans, ashes, old furniture and other kinds of junk were piled there, making it a perfect refuge for rats.

On the other side near the wall of the boys' bedroom was a heap of rotten scraps of food, which had been presumably left for the chickens nearby. The stench was sickening.

Food bad

'But you haven't seen anything yet' said Ellis, a volunteer for the mines ... 'Wait until you see the food.'

The majority of the boys had a mediocre dinner of roast meat, greens and potatoes. But 75 of the boys had sausage and mash because there was not enough of the roast to go round.

The sausages were uneatable, and I saw stacks of plates piled high with their leavings. Many of the boys I spoke to told me that the food was often much worse than this. More often than not, they said they go to work without breakfast.

‘The place is filthy,’ Alf Potts, of London, said. ‘And just think we pay 25s for our board here.’

Once a workhouse

Many boys who go home for the weekend prefer to lose three days’ pay by coming back on the Wednesday instead of Monday.

The hostel, once a monastery, was a workhouse before the war. Tramps still come in and have free meals. When the boys go home for the weekend, these men are allowed to sleep in their beds.

‘Drunks’ and soldiers are tramping throughout the place at all hours of the night, depriving the boys of their sleep.

Mr Bill Baynham, a member of the Council of the Warwickshire Miners’ Association, told me in an interview that he had already visited the hostel. ‘I have never witnessed a more disquieting scene’ he said. ‘The atmosphere alone in the place is enough to discourage the lads.’

‘The irony of the whole thing is that in Coventry there are very good hostels for factory workers, some with room available to take the pit lads.’

## Appendix ACC-II

### Memorandum on running industrial hostels.<sup>58</sup>

1. The grants paid by the Ministry to the Corporation (National Services Hostels Corp Ltd) in respect of industrial hostels are necessitated by the differences between: -
  - a) The income, which is mainly in respect of the charges paid by the residents (viz. transferred workers) for board and lodgings, and
    - (i) Salaries and wages
    - (ii) Food
    - (iii) Coal and coke
    - (iv) Gas and electricity
    - (v) Local rates (i.e., 'contributions in lieu of rate') and water charges
    - (vi) Laundry charges

Capital costs of the hostels (including equipment) and the principal maintenance charges are borne on the votes of the Ministry of Works and do not affect the grants required by the Corporation from the Ministry of Labour and National Service.

2. In regard to a) of the preceding paragraph it should be noted that the Corporation has no control of any kind over the scale of charges payable by residents. These charges, as fixed by the Ministry are:

Men – 25/- a week (for 2 main meals a day, plus an additional meal on Sundays)

Women – 20/- a week ditto

The above charges are subject to rebates – fixed by the Ministry – for absences of 24 hours or more. The result of the rebates system is that the net income of the Corporation is substantially less than 25/- and 20/- for the men and women, respectively, for whom the accommodation and amenities of the hostels are provided.

---

<sup>58</sup> PRO LAB 22/65 'Comparative costs of hostels'

Appendix ACC-III

Letter from E. Bevin, Foreign Office to G.A. Isaacs, Ministry of Labour,

(27.3.1946)<sup>59</sup>

Foreign Office  
S.W. 1

Dear George

I have read your paper L.P.(46) 66 about the charges of the National Service Hostels and feel that there is one point which you have perhaps overlooked. This is with regard to the reason for the low charges. The first was that we wanted to keep down, by using these hostels, the prices charged by other private citizens taking in lodgers during the war, and although private people charged more than the State yet the effect of these hostels was very marked. But the second reason was that when people are away from home and the cost of lodgings is high, then it always leads to a demand for increased wages and if a solution is found under that head then you have to pay all the people who are living at home as well as the people who are living in the hostels. And the policy that was followed during the war had a very marked effect on the problem as well. The third reason was that it made for mobility of labour having this reserve accommodation in as many places as we could and I should have thought that this would be of vital importance when building and other schemes get going, if people are to be moved for temporary periods and for special contracts.

Another problem which we had to consider was the mobility of women. The question of accommodation for women presents many special difficulties. The hostels with their special equipment were a great asset. To what extent mobility of women will be affected in the future, I do not know, but it is a matter that ought not to be left out of account.

Perhaps the last and most important point was that the charges that we made at the hostels really determined the lodging allowance, because if lodging prices go up, there is immediately a demand for an increase in the allotted allowance to cover them and so the state pays anyway. And while I was responsible for these hostels I regarded it as an indirect contribution to the State which really was an asset and not a liability and I think it is always a mistake to treat this problem on a watertight-compartment basis.

I shall be grateful if you will take these points into account when considering this subject.

Yours sincerely  
Ernest Bevin

The Right Honourable  
G.A. Isaacs, M.P.

---

<sup>59</sup> PRO LAB 26/188

## Appendix SOC-I

### Durham Coalfield Regional Survey Report (Northern 'B' Region) - Miners' Welfare Facilities<sup>60</sup>

#### MINERS' WELFARE FACILITIES

AREA	INDOOR				OUTDOOR			
	Games Room	Library and Reading Rooms	Billiard Tables	Halls	Football Pitches	Cricket Pitches	Tennis Courts	Bowling Greens
Ryton/Chopwell Area (N.W. Durham)	4	3	7	7	3	2	12	3
Consett Area (N.W. Durham)	7	7	12	2	3	2	13	3
Stanley Area (N.W. Durham)	4	4	8	3	5	2	6	5
Chester-le-Street, Birtley Area (Mid-North Durham)	14	12	21	9	5	4	15	4
Washington/Houghton-le-Spring (Mid-North Durham)	13	10	19	9	6	3	29	8
South Shields and Seaham Areas (N.E. Durham)	5	3	9	3	8	5	20	14
Brandon/Crook Area (S.W. Durham)	9	7	14	8	11	8	14	9
Bowburn/Ferryhill Area (Mid-South Durham)	10	10	18	8	4	3	16	6
Easington/Horden Area	3	3	10	3	7	6	29	10
	69	59	118	52	52	33	154	62

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Fuel and Power, Durham Coalfield Regional Survey Report (Northern 'B' Region), (London, 1945), p34

Appendix RET-I

Ministry of Labour letter addressed to Bevin Boys on their demobilisation<sup>61</sup>

Group No. <u>59</u>	Ministry of Labour and National Service, Employment Exchange, Saddler Street, DUBLIN.
	Date <u>26 SEP 1947</u>

Dear Sir,

The date of the release of the above Group Number  
~~has now been reached~~  
\* will be 7 10 47 and

(a) if you wish to obtain your release from the industry, you should apply to the National Service Officer for the withdrawal of the direction which is still in force in your case, attaching the form previously sent to you

(b) ~~if you leave~~ your present employment, if, after that date, you leave the Department will not require you to take other employment in the Coalmining Industry.

You may, if you wish, take up employment in any industry during the period of 56 days immediately following your release from coalmining. Thereafter, however, you may be subject to certain restrictions in seeking and obtaining employment and you should, if you are then unemployed, attend with this letter at a Local Office of the Ministry for advice regarding your position in relation to the choice of further employment.

If on leaving coalmining you claim unemployment benefit, the fact that you are released from your obligation to serve in the coalmining industry may not, of itself, enable you to satisfy the Statutory Authorities that you had just cause under Section 27 of the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1935, for voluntarily leaving your employment. You are therefore advised to make sure that you have a definite prospect of alternative employment before leaving coalmining.

Yours faithfully,

S. J. OAKLEY *h*

Manager.

*Mr E. F. Crouch,  
Palace Bank Mine & Hostel  
South Pelaw, Chester G Street*

<sup>61</sup> Kindly supplied by Desmond Crouch

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PRIMARY SOURCES

#### Unpublished Sources

##### Manuscripts

- BBC-WAC Broadcast by Mr Ebby Edwards M.P., 'A call to the mining industry on the urgent need for coal', (19.10.1941)
- BBC-WAC Broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., 'The Coal Mining Industry', Home Service, (23.6.1941)
- BBC-WAC Broadcast by Douglas Cook, 'Divinity Student Turns Miner', Home Service, (30.8.1943)
- BBC-WAC Broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., Home Service Forces Programme, (5.9.1943)
- BBC-WAC Broadcast by Rt. Hon. Ernest Bevin M.P., Home Service (Schools), (11.11.1943)
- BBC-WAC Broadcast by John P., 'Previous Experience Unnecessary', Forces Educational Broadcast, (24.1.1944)
- BBC-WAC 'How do I manage?' talk by a miner's wife, (8.5.1944)
- BBC-WAC Broadcast by John Raymond, Bevin Boy, (15.11.1945)
- BBC-WAC Geoffrey Davidson, 'Calling East Africa, An East African Bevin Boy', (18.11.1945)
- BBC-WAC Forces Educational Broadcast, interview with John Pierce, (24.1.1946)
- BBC-WAC Derek Agnew, 'Bevin Boys in Kent', World and his Wife – Light Programme, (16.12.1946)
- IWM, 98/10/1 A.T. Gregory, (typescript, undated)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Rejection of appeal letter, (5.7.1944)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Undated letter from Eric Walker to Phil Pearson in reply to an article in the Bevin Boys Association Newsletter, (2001)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, A.H. Mitchell, handwritten letter (undated)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, P.E. Munday, *Them and us: Chronicles of the conscripted miner 1943 – 1948*, (typescript, undated)



- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, B. Folkes, *The Forgotten Army*, (typescript, undated)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, E.P. Rainbow, *Bevin Boy Saga*, (typescript, undated)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Desmond E., *Gone to Earth*, (typescript, 1998)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Alan B., *Short History of Life as a Bevin Boy*,  
(handwritten, 2.10.1992)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Alan W., (typescript, undated)
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Court summons for absenteeism
- IWM Misc. 191, Item 2834, Letter from David B. in South Wales to his parents,  
(9.10.1944)
- IWM Misc. 191 Item 2834, Harold G., *A Bevin Boy's Story or Why Me?*, (typescript,  
undated)
- IWM Misc. 191 Item 2834, Michael B., *I am a Bevin Boy*, (typescript, 1945)
- IWM Misc. 191/1 Bevin Boy Special Bulletin from R. Condon, General Secretary  
and Agent, NUM. (undated)
- IWM 11829/1 Transcript of an interview with David D., (1986)
- IWM 2816/B/B Transcript of an interview with John Hewetson, (1974)
- IWM 009233/5 The anti-war movement, 1914 – 1945 Transcript of an  
interview with Tony P.
- M-O A TC: Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/B *Coal Mine Survey –  
Manchester, Nottingham and London 1944 – 47*
- M-O A TC: Coalmining 1938 – 48, 64/2/J *Coal Mining –  
Miscellaneous 1939 – 48*
- M-O A TC: Industry 1944 – 1955, 75/3/G *Billeting War Workers;  
Training for War Work*
- M-O A Report No. 919, Report on female attitude to compulsion,  
(16.10.1941)
- M-O A Report No. 1255, Appeals to women, (12.5.1942)
- M-O A Report No. 1498, Blaina, (March/April 1942)
- M-O A Report No. 1631, Absenteeism and industrial morale,  
(14.3.1943)
- M-O A Report No. 2059, Will the factory girls want to stay put or go  
home? (March, 1944)



- M-O A Report No. 3007, Attitudes to the nationalisation of coal –  
Doncaster area, (1948)
- M-O A Transcript of an interview by Nick Stanley with Eric G., former  
Mass-Observer, (8.9.1982)
- NSA C900/04566 C1, Millennium Memory Bank, David D.,  
interview (1.2.1999)
- PRO CAB 102/399 Newbegin, E.V., *Labour in the Coalmining Industry 1939 –*  
*1945*, Draft, (October 1946)
- PRO CAB 124/1060 ‘Examination of the effect of mid-week sporting fixtures on  
absenteeism and production’ (February 1946 – April 1947)
- PRO FD 1/5527 ‘Absenteeism amongst women in industry’ (1942 – 1951)
- PRO LAB 6/22 ‘Proposal for the Release from the Armed Forces of Volunteers  
for Coalmining’, letter to Group Captain J.H. Green, Air  
Ministry from S.R. Todd, Ministry of Fuel and Power,  
(undated)
- PRO LAB 6/22 ‘Proposal for the Release from the Armed Forces of Volunteers  
for Coalmining’, letter from Group Captain J.H. Green, Air  
Ministry to H.N. De Villiers, Ministry of Labour and National  
Service, (4.5.1943)
- PRO LAB 6/22 ‘Proposal for the Release from the Armed Forces of Volunteers  
for Coalmining’, letter from Pte John Fallaize to the Ministry of  
Labour and National Service (29.9.1943)
- PRO LAB 6/22 ‘Proposal for the Release from the Armed Forces of Volunteers  
for Coalmining’, from Ibbett, Ministry of Labour to Pte John  
Fallaize, (8.10.1943)
- PRO LAB 8/462 ‘Memorandum on setting out problems of future manpower for  
the coalmining industry’, letter from W.G. Nott-Bower, Mines  
Department to the Mining Association of Great Britain,  
(10.11.1941)
- PRO LAB 8/462 ‘Outline of basic principles of education and training schemes  
(draft), future manpower of the coalmining industry – long term  
problems’, (4.3.1942)

- PRO LAB 8/462 'Outline of basic principles of education and training schemes (draft), boys at school, (4.3.1942)
- PRO LAB 8/734 Interdepartmental letter from Lumpson, Ministry of Labour to De Villiers (25.11.1943)
- PRO LAB 8/923 'Breaches of Defence – Bevin Boys', (4.12.1944)
- PRO LAB 10/126 'Treasury Wages Co-ordinating Committee' 1940 – 1941
- PRO LAB 19/53 'Recruitment of public and secondary school boys for coalmining', letter to headmasters of public and secondary schools from Ernest Bevin, (28.10.1943)
- PRO LAB 22/55 'Provision and management of hostels for workers engaged in the national effort'
- PRO LAB 22/57 'Charges in hostels 1941 – 1946'
- PRO LAB 22/63 'List of industrial hostels 1943 – 1951'
- PRO LAB 22/65 'Comparative costs of hostels'
- PRO LAB 25/196 'Estimated Results of Coalmining Ballot', signed S.B. Chimes, (8.12.1943)
- PRO LAB 26/11 'Conference on transfer and billeting of war workers'
- PRO LAB 26/14 'Residential hostels for new entrants to coalmining industry'
- PRO LAB 26/188 'Charges in hostels: Wartime history'
- PRO LAB 37/16 'Minister of Labour and successors annual reports'
- PRO LAB 79/36 'Coalmining ballot boys: memoranda'
- PRO POWE 16/77 'Ministry of Fuel and Power, Northern 'B' Region, Record of Investigation, Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1943'
- PRO POWE 16/88 'Ministry of Fuel and Power Controllers' Conference', (22.11.1944)
- PRO POWE 26/441 'Statistical information in respect of absenteeism by Bevin Boys and other wage earners in the coal industry, 1944-1945' (30.1.1945)
- PRO WORK 22/188 'Provision of hostels' (1945-1959)

Correspondence from Bevin Boys etc.

- Fred C. Letter to Ann Kneif (October 2002)  
Fred C. Typewritten notes (undated)  
Geoff B. Typewritten notes (undated)  
George A. E-mail to Ann Kneif (October 2002)  
Jenny M. Various documents from her deceased husband, who worked at Chislet  
Colliery  
Norman B. *My story*, account of pit life, e-mails to Ann Kneif (September 2002)  
Roland T. *Drawn from a Hat*, unpublished manuscript based on personal diaries  
(undated)

Interviews (carried out by Ann Kneif unless otherwise stated)

- Peter M. 17.8.1986, Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society  
R. Thompson 30.9.1986, Interviewed by the Oaten Hill and District Society  
Alan W. 29.3.2000  
Peter H. 20.4.2000  
Tony C. 4.5.2000  
Peter F. 6.6.2000  
Ken P. 11.7.2000  
Alan H. 17.7.2000  
George R. 9.5.2001  
Gerry G. 26.3.2002  
Robert K. 28.3.2002  
Warwick T. 18.4.2002  
Jack M. 25.5.2002  
John B. 18.9.2002  
Hubert S. 26.9.2002  
Philip C. 1.10.2002  
Ivor H. 2.10.2002  
Dave W. 2.10.2002  
Edward W. 30.10.2002  
Joe E. 5.3.2003  
Fred B. 29.9.2003  
Geoff B. own tape (undated)

## Published sources

### Published books used as primary sources

- Agnew, D.                    *Bevin Boy*, (London, 1947)
- Coombes, B.L.              *These Poor Hands*, (London, 1939)
- Day, D.                      *The Bevin Boy*, (Oxford, 1995 large print edition)
- Harrison, N.                *Once a Miner*, (London, 1954)
- Harrison, T. (ed)         *War Factory. A Report by Mass-Observation*, (London, 1943)
- Heinemann, M.            *Britain's Coal – a study of the mining crisis*, prepared for the Labour Research Department, (London, 1944)
- Howlett, P.                *Fighting with Figures*, (London, 1995)
- Jones, B. and Williams, C. (eds) *With Dust Still in His Throat – A.B.L. Coombes Anthology*, (Cardiff, 1999)
- Mass-Observation        *People in Production*, (Middlesex, 1942)
- Mass-Observation        *An Enquiry into People's Homes*, (London, 1943)
- Mass-Observation        *The Journey Home*, (London, 1944)
- Mass-Observation        *The Press and Its Readers*, (London, 1949)
- PEP (Political and Economic Planning) *Report on the British Press*, (London, 1946)
- Preston H. (ed)            *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack 1948*, (London, 1948)
- Preston H. (ed)            *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack 1971*, (London, 1971)
- Shaffer A.                 *A Memoir*, (London, 2001)
- Sharpe, I. (ed)            *Sunday Chronicle Cricket and Golf Annual*, (London, 1948)
- Taylor, W.                 *The Forgotten Conscript – a history of the Bevin Boy*, (Durham, 1995)
- Wilson, H.                 *New Deal for Coal*, (London, 1945)
- Wilson, M. and L.        *A Far Cry from a White Apron*, (Brighton, 2000)
- Yates, P.                  *The Bevin Boys' Story*, (Stoke-on-Trent, 1993)

### Official published reports used as primary sources

- PRO LAB37/16            *Mobilisation of Labour for Industry, report 1939 – 1946*, (London, undated)

Hansard Parliamentary Debates (from House of Commons unless otherwise stated)

‘Table 157 - Coalmining: Persons killed and injured’ in *Annual Abstract of Statistics*,  
No. 84, (London, 1947)

Ministry of Fuel and Power, ‘The Coalfields of the Midland Region – Regional  
Survey Report’, (London, 1945)

Ministry of Fuel and Power, Durham Coalfield Regional Survey Report (Northern ‘B’  
Region), (London, 1945)

Articles in journals used as primary sources

- Allison, G. ‘Labour Prospects in 1943’ in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25,  
(January 1943)
- Austin, J. ‘Production Offensive’ in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25,  
(February 1943)
- Baker, G. ‘Miner’s Memories’ in *Staffordshire County Council Education  
Department – Local History Source, Book G32*, (1987)
- ‘Coalface’ ‘Miners Welfare. A Plan for Welfare in a Nationalised  
Coalmining Industry’ in *Fabian Quarterly*, No. 50, (June 1946)
- Cohen, P. ‘Before the Day Shift’ in *Ruskin Magazine*, (Summer 1946)
- Harrisson, T. ‘Galluping Consumption’ in *Fabian Quarterly*, No. 53, (March  
1947)
- Horner, A. ‘TUC’ in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25, (October 1943)
- Horner, A. ‘Nationalisation of the Coal Industry’ in *Labour Monthly*,  
Volume 28, (February 1946)
- MacRae, D. ‘Organised Labour in Wartime’ in *Fabian Quarterly*, No. 44,  
(January 1945)
- Moffat, A. ‘A Miner Looks at 1943’ in *Labour Monthly*, Volume 25,  
(January 1943)
- MOLG ‘The Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) Order 1941’,  
(London, January 1942)
- MOLG ‘Report by the Select Committee on National Expenditure’,  
(London, March 1942)
- MOLG ‘Labour in the Coalmining Industry’, (London, March 1942)
- MOLG ‘Control and Organisation of the Coal Industry – Government  
Proposals’, (London, June 1942)
- MOLG ‘Wages in the Coal Mining Industry’, (London, June 1942)

- MOLG 'Essential Work (Coalmining Industry) (Amendment) Order 1942', (London, September 1942)
- MOLG 'General factors affecting the incidence of accidents', (London, November 1942)
- MOLG 'Employment, output, wages etc. in the coalmining industry 1936 - 1943', (London, May 1944)
- MOLG 'Report of the safety in mines Research Board for 1943', (London, November 1944)
- MOLG 'Miners' Welfare', (London, June 1945)
- Reid, R.W. 'Bevin Boys' in *London Calling*, No. 231, (BBC, 12 – 14 March 1944)
- Shackleton, P. 'Women in Industry – some problems examined' in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 25, (July 1943)

#### Newspaper articles

- Daily Express* (17.1.1944)
- Daily Express* (18.1.1944)
- Daily Herald* (13.3.1942)
- Daily Herald* (18.1.1944)
- Daily Herald* (19.1.1944)
- Daily Herald*, (20.1.1944)
- Daily Mirror* (18.1.1944)
- Daily Mirror* (19.1.1944)
- Daily Mirror* (20.1.1944)
- Daily Mirror* (21.1.1944)
- Daily Mirror* (22.1.1944)
- Daily Mirror* (25.1.1944)
- Daily Sketch* (18.1.1944)
- Daily Sketch* (20.1.1944)
- Daily Telegraph* (18.1.1944)
- Daily Telegraph* (19.1.1944)
- Daily Telegraph* (20.1.1944)
- Daily Telegraph* (21.1.1944)
- Daily Telegraph* (24.1.1944)

<i>Daily Worker</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>Daily Worker</i>	(19.1.1944)
<i>Daily Worker</i>	(21.1.1944)
<i>Daily Worker</i>	(22.1.1944)
<i>Daily Worker</i>	(25.1.1944)
<i>Daily Worker</i>	(17.3.1944)
<i>Daily Worker</i>	(25.1.1944)
<i>Evening News</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>Evening News</i>	(17.5.1944)
<i>Glasgow Herald</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>Glasgow Herald</i>	(19.1.1944)
<i>Liverpool Daily Post</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>News Chronicle</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>New Statesman</i>	(14.8.1943)
<i>Star</i>	(17.1.1944)
<i>Star</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>Sunday Times</i>	(19.9.1943)
<i>The Times</i>	(23.5.1940)
<i>The Times</i>	(14.3.1941)
<i>The Times</i>	(12.4.1941)
<i>The Times</i>	(26.4.1941)
<i>The Times</i>	(4.9.1941)
<i>The Times</i>	(27.4.1943)
<i>The Times</i>	(21.7.1943)
<i>The Times</i>	(24.7.1943)
<i>The Times</i>	(17.9.1943)
<i>The Times</i>	(5.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(6.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(8.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(10.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(18.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(19.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(21.1.1944)

<i>The Times</i>	(25.1.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(9.2.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(14.2.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(8.4.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(11.10.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(21.11.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(2.12.1944)
<i>The Times</i>	(6.2.1945)
<i>The Times</i>	(20.3.1945)
<i>The Times</i>	(26.6.1945)
<i>The Times</i>	(7.9.1945)
<i>The Times</i>	(21.9.1945)
<i>The Times</i>	(11.1.1946)
<i>The Times</i>	(21.1.1946)
<i>The Times</i>	(24.1.1946)
<i>The Times</i>	(12.4.1946)
<i>The Times</i>	(15.4.1946)
<i>The Times</i>	(26.8.1946)
<i>The Times</i>	(9.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(18.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(20.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(21.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(18.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(22.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(27.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(31.10.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(1.11.1947)
<i>The Times</i>	(11.11.1998)
<i>The Times</i>	(16.11.2001)
<i>The Times</i>	(23.12.2002)
<i>The Times</i>	(29.4.2004)
<i>Tribune</i>	(17.9.1943)
<i>Yorkshire Post</i>	(18.1.1944)



*Lymington Advertiser and Times* (9.11.2002), 'More memories of Wales by a former Bevin Boy' by Norris, R.

*Farnham Herald*, (newspaper cutting, undated) 'Days as a Bevin Boy recalled' by Fred C.

### Journals

*Punch* (5.4.1944)

### Newspaper cartoons

UKC-CSCC NEB 1519, *Daily Mail*, (20.2.1943)

UKC-CSCC NEB 1669, *Daily Mail*, (29.12.1943)

UKC-CSCC NEB 0374, *Daily Mail*, (15.4.1946)

UKC-CSCC NEB 0542 *Daily Mail*, (21.1.1947)

### Acts of Parliament

[1 GEO 5] Bill 39, 'Protection of Animals', (1911)

[24 GEO 5] 'Coal Mines ('Protection of Animals)', (1934)

### Internet (articles by Bevin Boys)

Walker, S. 'The Forgotten Few', [www-saw.arts.ed.ac.uk](http://www-saw.arts.ed.ac.uk) (1998)

Taylor, W.H. 'The Forgotten Conscripts of World War II', [www-saw.arts.ed.ac.uk](http://www-saw.arts.ed.ac.uk)

### Miscellaneous primary sources

Correspondence between David Shaw MP and Peter Lloyd, Home Office, February 1991, Copies supplied by Geoff B.

Leaflet from the Workers' Representatives, Norton Colliery, (8.11.1945)

*Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume 5, (London, Autumn 1941)

Questionnaire Information given on questionnaire compiled by Ann Kneif and returned between September and November 2002

## SECONDARY SOURCES

### Theses and other unpublished research papers

- Thomson, A.S.      *Anzac Stories: Using Personal Testimony in Historical Research*, draft manuscript, (Sussex, 1997)
- Griffiths, R.H.      “*The Forgotten Army*” *The Bevin Boys in the South Wales Coalfield 1943 – 1948*, MA thesis for the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, (March, 1995)
- Harding, I.J.      *The Kent Miner: 1915 – 1926. A Social History of the Kent Mining Community – its Organisation, Leadership and Militancy*, (unpublished extended essay for UKC, March 1971)

### Published sources

#### Books

- Addison, P.      *Now the War is Over: A social history of Britain 1945 – 1950*, (London, 1985)
- Barnett, C.      *The Audit of War: the illusion and reality of Britain as a great nation*, (London, 1986)
- Bloome, D.      *Reading Mass-Observation Writing: theoretical and Methodological issues in researching the Mass-Observation Archive*, (Sussex, 1996)
- Bullock, A.      *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin – Volume II Minister of Labour 1940 – 1945*, (London, 1967)
- Bourke, J.      *The Second World War: A people's history*, (Oxford, 2001)
- Calder, A.      *The People's War – Britain 1939-1946*, (London, 1969)
- Calder, A. and Sheridan, D. (eds.) *Speak for Yourself – A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937 – 1949*, (London, 1984)
- Campbell, A., Fishman, N. and Howell, D. (eds.) *Miners, Unions and Politics 1910 – 1947*, (Aldershot, 1996)
- Camrose, (Viscount) *British Newspapers and their Controllers*, (London, 1947)
- Chamberlin, E.R.      *Life in Wartime Britain*, (London, 1972)
- Cole, G.D.H. & Postgate, R. *The Common People 1746 – 1946*, (London, 1963)
- Court, W.H.B.      *Coal*, (London, 1951)

- Crang, J. *The British Army and the People's War 1939 – 1945*, (Manchester, 2000)
- Curran, J. & Seaton, J. *Power without responsibility: the press and broadcasting in Britain*, (London, 1989 edition)
- Dewey, P. *War and Progress in Britain 1914 – 1945*, (London, 1997)
- Donnelly, M. *Britain in the Second World War*, (London, 1999)
- Hancock, W.K. and Gowing, M.M. *British War Economy*, (London, 1949)
- Hartley, J. (ed) *Hearts Undefeated: Women's Writings of the Second World War*, (London, 1994)
- Hilton, J. *A History of the Kent Coalfield*, (Kent, 1986)
- Hinton, J. *Women, Social Leadership and the Second World War: Continuities of Class*, (Oxford, 2002)
- Horner, A. *Incorrigible Rebel*, (London, 1960)
- Inman, P. *Labour in the Munitions Industries*, (London, 1957)
- Jones, B. & Williams, C. (Eds.) *With Dust Still in his Throat: A.B.L. Coombes Anthology*, (Cardiff, 1999)
- Kirby, M.W. *The British Coalmining Industry 1870–1946*, (London, 1977)
- Lewis, P. *A People's War*, (London, 1986)
- Llewellyn, R. *Hersden: Chislet Colliery Village*, (Sturry, Kent, 2003)
- Mackenzie, S.P. *Politics and Military Morale: Current-Affairs and Citizenship, Education in the British Army 1914 – 1950*, (Oxford, 1992)
- MacLeod, R. 'The Promise of Full Employment' in H. Smith (ed), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1986)
- Marwick, A. *The Home Front: The British and the Second World War*, (London, 1976)
- McLaine, I. *Ministry of Morale*, (London, 1979)
- Noakes, L. *War and the British – Gender, Memory and National Identity*, (London, 1998)
- Page Arnot, R. *The Miners in Crisis and War*, (New York, 1968)
- Page Arnot, R. *The Miners: One Union, One Industry – A history of the National Union of Mineworkers*, (London, 1979)
- Perks, R. and Thomson, A. (eds.) *The Oral History Reader*, (London, 2000 edition)

- Plummer, K. *Documents of Life: an introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method*, (London, 1983)
- Pollard, S. *The Development of the British Economy 1914 – 1950*, (London, 1962)
- Pugh, M. *State and Society – A social and political history of Britain 1970 – 1997*, (London 1999)
- Rose, S.O. *Which People's War? National Identity and citizenship in wartime Britain 1939 – 1945*, (Oxford, 2003)
- Samuel, R. (ed) *People's History and Social Theory*, (London, 1981)
- Schweitzer P. et al (eds.) *What did you do in the war, Mum? Women recall their wartime work*, (London, 1993 edition)
- Sheridan, D. *Damned Anecdotes and Dangerous Confabulations: Mass-Observation as Life History*, Occasional Paper No. 7 (University of Sussex, 1996)
- Sheridan, D. (ed) *Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-45*, (London, 2000)
- Sheridan, D. et al (eds.) *Writing Ourselves: Mass-Observation and literacy practices*, (Cresskill, N.J., 2000)
- Smith, M. *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory*, (London, 2000)
- Summerfield, P. *Women Workers in the Second World War: production and patriarchy in conflict*, (London, 1984)
- Summerfield, P. 'The Levelling of Class', in H. Smith (ed), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1986)
- Summerfield, P. *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War*, (Manchester, 1998)
- Supple, B. *The History of the British Coal Industry: Volume 4, 1913–1946: the political economy of decline*, (Oxford, 1987)
- Taylor, A.J.P. *English History 1914 – 1945*, (Oxford, 1965)
- Taylor, P.M. *Munitions of the Mind – a history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present day*, (Manchester, revised 1995)

- Taylor, W.H. *The Forgotten Conscript: A History of the Bevin Boy*, (Durham, 1995)
- Thompson, P. *The Voice of the Past*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Oxford, 1988)
- Tiratsoo, N. (ed) *From Blitz to Blair: A new history of Britain since 1939*, (London, 1997)
- Wightman, C. *More than Munitions – Women, Work and the Engineering Industries 1900 – 1950*, (London, 1999)
- Wybrow, R.J. *Britain Speaks Out 1937 – 1987. A social history as seen through the Gallup data*, (London 1989)
- Zola, É. *Germinal*, translated by P. Collier, (Oxford, 1993)
- (Compiled by East Kent Federation of the WI) *East Kent within living memory*, (Canterbury, 1994)

#### Articles in journals

- Baldwin, G.B. 'Structural Reform in the British Miners' Union' in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 67, Issue 4 (Nov. 1953)
- Bosworth, R.J.B. 'Nations Examine Their Past: A Comparative Analysis of the Historiography of the "Long" Second World War', in *The History Teacher*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (August 1996), pp499 – 523
- Brooke, S. 'Revisionists and Fundamentalists: The Labour Party and Economic Policy during the Second World War' in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 32, No. 1 (March 1989), pp157 - 175
- Burton, S. 'Workers Walk Out in Wartime' in *BBC History*, (January 2002)
- Buxton, N.K. 'Entrepreneurial Efficiency in the British Coal Industry Between the Wars', in *Economic History Review*, new series Volume 23, No. 3, (December 1970)
- Collyer, D.G. 'Coal from Kent', in *Bygone Kent*, Volume 23, Nos. 3 – 6, (2000)
- Court, W.H.B. 'Problems of the British Coal Industry Between the Wars', in *The Economic History Review*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2, (1945)

- Fielding, S. 'What Did "The People" Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (September 1992), pp623 - 639
- French D. 'Discipline and the Death Penalty in the British Army in the War against Germany in the Second World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 33, Issue 4 (October, 1998)
- Gowing, M. 'The organisation of manpower in Britain during the Second World War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 7, Issue 1/2 (January – April 1972), pp147 – 167
- Hall, V.G. 'Contrasting Female Identities: Women in Coal Mining Communities in Northumberland, England, 1900 – 1939, in *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 13, No. 2, (Summer, 2001), pp107 – 131
- Harkell, G. 'The Migration of Mining Families to the Kent Coalfield Between the Wars', in *Oral History – The Journal of the Oral History Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Spring 1978), pp98 – 113
- Heap, P. 'Coal Comes Full Circle', in *Energy World*, No. 225, (February 1995)
- Howlett, P. 'New light through old windows: A new perspective on the British economy in the Second World War', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 28, No. 2, (April 1993), pp361 – 379
- Hutton, P. 'Recent Scholarship on Memory and History', in *The History Teacher*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (August 2000), pp533 – 548
- Jackson, L. 'Working in Wartime: Health and Safety at Work', in *BBC History*, Volume 6, No. 1, (January 2005), pp22 – 23
- Jeffreys, K. 'British politics and social policy during the Second World War', in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 30, No. 1, (March 1987), pp123 - 144
- Jenson, W.G. 'The Importance of Energy in the First and Second World Wars', in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 11, Issue 3 (1968)
- Kirby, M.W. 'The Politics of State Coercion in Inter-war Britain: The Mines Department of the Board of Trade, 1920 – 1942', in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 22, Issue 2 (June 1979)

- Lang, B. 'Bevin Boys and Others – A Wartime Episode' in *Hudson History*, (Yorkshire, 2001)
- Lorenz, C. 'Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives', in *History and Theory*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (February 1999), pp25 - 39
- McCrone, J. 'Not so total recall', in *New Scientist*, 3.5.2003
- Mace, R. 'The War Recalled: Oral Testimony', in *History Today*, (December, 1982)
- Robbins, K. 'National Identity and History: Past, Present and Future' in *History*, Vol. 75, (1990), pp369 - 387
- Samuel, R. 'Perils of the Transcript' in *Oral History – an occasional news Sheet*, No. 2 (University of Essex, December 1972)
- Sheridan, D. 'Mass Observing the British' in *History Today*, (July, 1984)
- Sheridan, D. 'Ambivalent memories: women and the 1939-45 war in Britain' in *Oral History*, (Spring 1990)
- Smith, H. 'The problem of "equal pay for equal work" in Great Britain during World War II' in *The Journal of Modern History*, Volume 53, Issue 4, (December 1981), pp652 – 672
- Smith, H. 'The womanpower problem in Britain during the Second World War' in *The Historical Journal*, Volume 27, Issue 4, (December 1984), pp925 – 945
- Storm-Clark, C. 'The Miners: the relevance of oral evidence' in
- Summerfield, P. 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social Movement', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Volume 20, Issue 3 (July 1985), pp189 - 206
- Taylor, A.J.P. 'War Origins Again' in *Past and Present*, No. 30, (April 1965), pp110 - 113
- Taylor, W.H. 'The Bevin Boys' in *Despatches: The Magazine of the Friends Of the Imperial War Museum*, (October, 2003)
- Thomson, A. 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History', in *The Journal of American History*, Volume 85, No. 2, (September 1998), pp 581 - 595
- Tookey, M. 'Three's a Crowd; Government, Owners, and Workers during the Nationalization of the British Coalmining Industry 1945-47', in *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 1294, (2001)

- Welshman, J. 'Evacuation, Hygiene and Social Policy: The *Our Towns* Report of 1943', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (September, 1999), pp781 - 807
- Willcock, H.D. 'Mass-Observation', in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 48, No. 4 (January 1944), pp445 – 456
- Yelton, D.K. 'British Public Opinion, the Home Guard, and the Defence of Great Britain, 1940-1944', in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July 1994), pp461 - 480

#### Internet

'The Silvertown Explosion', [www.lalamy.demon.co.uk/sivex.htm](http://www.lalamy.demon.co.uk/sivex.htm)

#### Television broadcasts

*The World at War*, Part 3 'Home Fires', Thames Television, 1974

*The Bevin Boys* (50th Anniversary Reunion, Stoke-on-Trent, 5.11.1993), Central Independent Television, broadcast 1994

*The Bevin Boys*, ITV1 (Tyne Tees), broadcast 8.1.2004

*Strike: when Britain went to war*, Channel 4 TV, broadcast 24.1.2004

#### Miscellaneous secondary sources

Ernest Bevin's Work in Wartime 1940 – 1945, pamphlet published by the Labour Party, (London, undated)

Hutchinson, J. 'The Unlikely Lads – the direction of men into the mines during World War 2' Chatterley Whitfield Mining Museum Trust, (1987)

