



# LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES

Mae'r fersiwn digidol hwn o'r erthygl/cylchgrawn wedi'i greu gan Lyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru.

NODER y gall cyfyngiadau hawlfraint ac amodau trwydded fod yn berthnasol. Am ragor o wybodaeth, ewch i **Mwy o Wybodaeth** wrth ddarllen y cylchgrawn ar wefan [Cylchgronau Cymru](http://cylchgronau.llyfrgell.cymru) (cylchgronau.llyfrgell.cymru).

Efallai y bydd hefyd gennych ddi-ddordeb yn [Papurau Newydd Cymru](http://papurau.newydd.llyfrgell.cymru) (papuraunewydd.llyfrgell.cymru), chwaer-wefan gan Lyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru sy'n rhoi mynediad i dros 1.1 milwn o dudalennau o dros 130 o bapurau newydd a gyhoeddwyd rhwng 1805 a 1919.

This digital version of the article/journal has been created by The National Library of Wales.

PLEASE NOTE that copyright restrictions and license terms may apply. For more information, view **More Information** when reading the journal on the [Welsh Journals](http://journals.library.wales) (journals.library.wales) website.

You may also be interested in [Welsh Newspapers](http://newspapers.library.wales) (newspapers.library.wales), a sister-site from the National Library of Wales that gives access to over 1.1 million pages from over 130 newspapers published between 1805 and 1919.



# DR. THOMAS PRICE AND THE ELECTION OF 1868 IN MERTHYR TYDFIL

## A STUDY IN NONCONFORMIST POLITICS

### PART I

'THERE is something in the history of this election', wrote *Gohebydd* (John Griffith) with reference to the general election of 1868 at Merthyr Tydfil, 'which makes it a kind of "public property"—as if everyone had a voice in it; and the representatives of those boroughs (i.e. Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare) are regarded not as the representatives of Merthyr and Aberdare only, but of the Principality itself . . . and here alone of all the Welsh boroughs, it is permissible to say that the election is almost entirely in the hands of the people, and that these are almost exclusively nonconformists'.<sup>1</sup> This had been *Gohebydd's* view of the significance of this election since its earliest stages, when he had argued that in the formation of a public opinion Aberdare and Merthyr were to Wales what London was to England.<sup>2</sup> Later, when the election was over, he was still of the same opinion, and attributed the courageous victories of the North Walians to the splendid example of Merthyr in returning Henry Richard at the head of the poll.<sup>3</sup> This was by no means the view of all Welsh nonconformists: the breakdown of local particularisms in general elections which such a view implied was resented in some quarters, and nowhere more so, as we shall see, than in Merthyr Tydfil itself. Nevertheless, it was distinctively the attitude adopted by the generality of Welsh nonconformist leaders such as Thomas Gee and Henry Richard himself,<sup>4</sup> and it is this displacement of local by 'national' issues which is the most important symptom of a change in the nature of Welsh politics at this time. The antecedents of this change and the nature of some of the agencies which helped

<sup>1</sup> 'Y mae rhywbeth yn hanes hon fel ag yr ystyrir bron yn fath o "public property"—fel pe bai bawb â llais ynddi; ac edrychir ar gynrychiolwyr y bwrdeisdrefi hyn, nid fel cynrychiolwyr Merthyr a 'Berdâr, ond yn gynrychiolwyr y Dywysogaeth . . . ac yma, yn unig, o holl fwrdeisdrefi Cymru, y gellir dweyd fod yr etholiad bron yn gyfangwbl yn nwyllaw y bobl, a'r rheini bron yn gyfangwbl yn Ymneullduwyr'. *Baner ac Amserau Cymru* (henceforth cited as *Baner*) 4 November 1868. Compare also the same correspondent in *ibid.*, 23 September 1868.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 October 1867.

<sup>3</sup> See the quotation from his post-election article in Richard Griffith, *Y Gohebydd, Cofiant a Dyfyniadau o'i Lythyrau* (1905), p. 56: 'oni bai am . . . diysgogrwydd (gwŷr Merthyr ac Aberdar) o blaid Richard fuasem ni yn y Gogledd ddim wedi gwneyd y gwrhydri a wnaethom'. Compare also his eve of the poll article in *Baner*, 4 November 1868.

<sup>4</sup> For Thomas Gee's views see, for example, the pre-election survey of Welsh politics in *Baner*, 2, 9, and 23 September 1868: 'Y mae y mater hwn (y sedd ychwanegol, hynny yw) o bwys cenedlaethol:—ar ryw olwg, y mae math o lais gan bob Cymro yn newisiad y cynrychiolydd chwanegol a roddir i Gymru'. For Richard's view, see his letter in *Baner*, 28 October 1868, 'At Etholwyr Anghydfurfiol Cymru' which is couched in the terms of an election address.

to create and to make effective the new public opinion in the country at large, I have discussed in another place.<sup>5</sup> The object of this study is to examine the role of one of the main exponents of the new view of Welsh politics in a context of time and place which appeared to be uniquely suitable for the successful application of those principles in practice. This will enable us to assess with some confidence the relative importance of 'national' as against local interests and issues in the most important of the Welsh constituencies, and so to assist us towards an understanding of the nature of Welsh politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

\* \* \*

By Easter of 1867, when the general election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil can be said to have begun,<sup>6</sup> the Rev. Thomas Price, M.A., Ph.D. (or Price Penpound, as he was universally known), may be said to have reached the zenith of his influence in the social and political affairs of Aberdare and Merthyr and of the Principality at large. His local influence was such that it was inevitable that he should play a dominant role in the election; his reputation in the country was such that the nature of this role could be confidently predicted. In the event, not only were his attitudes and actions the reverse of what had been expected of him, but they were, in addition, repudiated by the classes of people in his community whose leader he was. To understand how this situation came about it is necessary, before examining in detail his role in the election itself, firstly to analyse the nature of his power in the constituency both as regards local and parliamentary politics, and secondly, his standing in the Principality as a nonconformist political leader. These two aspects of his reputation are, of course, organically related; nevertheless, they can be clearly distinguished in this way, because such a distinction was inherent in the parliamentary politics of the time, and it was his refusal so to distinguish which accounts for the failure of his leadership.

\* \* \*

Thomas Price<sup>7</sup> arrived in Aberdare to take charge of the Baptist church at Carmel (or Penpound as it was then known) towards the

<sup>5</sup> See I. G. Jones 'The Liberation Society and Welsh Politics, 1844 to 1868', *Ante* II (1961), 193-224.

<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of this election see I. G. Jones, 'The general election of 1868 in Merthyr Tydfil: a study in the politics of an industrial borough in the mid-nineteenth century' in *Journal of Modern History*, XXXIII (1961), 270-86, and cf. H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management. Politics in the Time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (1959), pp. 173-5.

<sup>7</sup> For biographical details see *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig hyd 1940* (1953), *sub nom.* Thomas Price (1820-88), and B. Evans (Telynfab), *Cofiant Dr. Price Aberdâr* (1891).

end of 1845 when he was 25 years of age, after having spent three and a half years at the Baptist College at Pontypool. For some five years previous to entering College he had been employed as a painter by the contractors Peto and Gazelle, having before that completed his apprenticeship at Brecon. Little is known about his early years, either at Brecon or London, but it is relevant to note that at a very tender age this son of a peasant of Maes-y-cwper, Breconshire, had shown unusual initiative in that he had managed to save sufficient from his wages as a servant boy in the Clifton family to pay his indentures. There, also, he had broken with family tradition by joining the Baptist church at Watergate, and it was during this time that he evinced an interest in learning and in public speaking. His apprenticeship completed, he walked to London where he followed his trade as a painter for some four years. At London he continued to educate himself, and evidently to take an active and intelligent interest in affairs both secular and religious. He enrolled in Dr. Birkbeck's Mechanics' Institute, and he seems to have attracted sufficient attention to himself as an opponent of Owenite socialism for this fact to be remembered to his credit in later years.

In 1845 the parish of Aberdare was experiencing a population explosion.<sup>8</sup> The census returns of 1841 had shown that its population had increased five-fold since the beginning of the century—from 1,486 in 1801 to 6,471 in 1841. Twenty years later it had trebled again, until by 1871—roughly the period covered by this essay—the parish contained more than 40,000 people; that is to say, an increase of the order of twenty-seven times in the course of the century. Price's arrival coincided with the second and most marked phase of this growth which began in the early 1840s and which was caused by the rapid development of the sale-coal industry in the parish. In the previous decade, from about 1818, people had been attracted into the valley by the growing prosperity of the older ironworks which were being taken over and reorganized by established firms of ironmasters from outside the parish.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in 1818, Richard Crawshay, of Cyfarthfa in the Merthyr valley, purchased the almost defunct ironworks at Hirwaun, subsequently enlarging them and placing

<sup>8</sup> Decennial statistics are as follows:

1801	..	1,486	1841	..	6,471
1811	..	1,338	1851	..	14,998
1821	..	2,062	1861	..	32,247
1831	..	3,961	1871	..	40,305

See *Census Reports* and *Merthyr Tydfil Union Abstract of Accounts* (1894).

<sup>9</sup> For the growth of the iron industry in the district see, in general, A. H. John, *The Industrial Development of South Wales* (1950), John P. Addis, *The Crawshay Dynasty* (1957), Sir John Lloyd, *Old South Wales Ironworks* (1906), and C. Wilkins, *History of the Iron, Steel and Tinplate Trades* (1903).

them under independent management. The Abernant Ironworks, established in 1800 by F. and R. Tappington, were taken over in 1819 by Rowland Fothergill, whose company already owned flourishing works at Tredegar and Pont-hir, near Chepstow. In 1823 he also took over the sole management of the Aberdare Iron Company at Llwydcoed, purchasing it outright in 1846. Both these concerns passed into the ownership of his nephew, Richard Fothergill, the future member of parliament for Merthyr. The Gadlys Iron Company was founded in 1827 by Matthew Wayne, who had previously managed the Cyfarthfa furnaces for Richard Crawshay and enjoyed a profitable partnership with Sir Joseph Bailey at Nant-y-glo. Although small by comparison with Llwydcoed and Abernant it was, nevertheless, expanding throughout our period, and this despite the fact that from the late '30s onwards the Waynes were increasingly turning their attention to the production of sale-coal. Population growth in this first period was associated with this resurgent activity in the iron industry. Thus Hirwaun expanded very rapidly, and the hamlets of Llwydcoed and Abernant became small townships, while Aberdare village itself, where the Gadlys Works and its associated colliery were sited, grew in importance as well as in size. Nevertheless, the parish as a whole, compared with its neighbouring parish of Merthyr Tydfil, was still not significantly industrialized in this early period. The census returns of 1831 showed that 13·8 per cent. of the total numbers employed were in agriculture as compared with 3·2 per cent. in Merthyr, and only 1·2 per cent. as against 19·8 per cent. directly engaged in manufacture.<sup>10</sup>

The second period in the industrial history of the parish opened in 1837 with the sinking of a pit to the Four Foot steam coal seams by the Waynes in association with three others, on land belonging to one of the partners, William Thomas David, at Abernant-y-groes, Cwm-bach.<sup>11</sup> This venture was distinct from the iron interests of the Waynes, and was planned for the production of steam coal for export to London and other markets. Its success stimulated others to emulate these pioneers. Three years later Thomas Powell, who had been in the coal trade as producer and shipper for twenty years, began sinking a pit in Cwm-bach, and two years later struck the same seam. This was the first of five pits sunk by Powell during the 1840s, but in addition others had been sunk by local capitalists,

<sup>10</sup> See *Census of 1831, Enumeration Abstract*, 11, pp. 890-1.

<sup>11</sup> For the growth of the coal industry see, in general, J. H. Morris and L. J. Williams, *The South Wales Coal Industry, 1841-1875* (1958). For the location of Matthew Wayne's first pit see C. Wilkins, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

notably by David Williams at Ynys-cynon, and David Davis at Blaen-gwawr, and by immigrant industrialists such as Crawshay Bailey at Aberaman, Thomas Nixon at Werfa, and George Elliot in the lower region of the valley.

This was the turning point in the industrial history of the valley, and the cause of the second and greatest period of population growth through which Thomas Price lived. A study of the enumerators' returns for the censuses of 1851 and 1861 shows clearly that it was the new colliery districts which were attracting the immigrants.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the two southern hamlets of Fforchaman (west of the river Cynon) and Cefn-penar (east of the river) which previously had been agricultural, supporting but a sparse population, saw the creation of new townships in the vicinities of the new pits. The valley bottom itself, along which the canal ran and, from 1846, the railway, came to be completely built up, as did most of the tributary valleys of the river. Meanwhile, the town itself was expanding and taking on its character as the nucleus of a much greater, straggling conurbation filling the whole valley.

It was estimated by de la Bèche in 1845 that one-third of the population increase was by birth and two-thirds by immigration.<sup>13</sup> The vast majority of these latter appear to have come from the adjacent counties of Glamorgan and Breconshire, but a substantial and increasing proportion came from counties further west. The long post-war agricultural depression, the bad harvests of the '40s, and the continual pressure of a rising population on inadequate resources compelled these people to move in search of a livelihood. The expanding industrial areas such as Merthyr and Aberdare were insatiable in their demand for labour, and the immigrants flocked into these areas in ever-growing numbers. The attractive forces of this 'Awstralia Morgannwg' ('the Australia of Glamorgan'), as one inhabitant called it,<sup>14</sup> were probably no less enticing than the repellent ones of life in the countryside in the motivations of these immigrants. Certainly, wages could be high, and the opportunities for a higher standard of living more available. But the immigrants were in effect colonizing their own country, and they came to townships which were characterized by 'an absence of those civic relations and

<sup>12</sup> The enumerators' returns are in H.O. 107/2460/1-4, for 1851, and H.O. RG9/4063-4073.

<sup>13</sup> See Health of Towns Commission, *Report on the State of Bristol, Bath, Frome, Swansea, Merthyr Tydfil and Brecon* by Sir Henry T. de la Bèche (London, 1845), p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> T. J. Jones, 'Traethawd ar Hanes Plwyf a Phentref Aberdar', *Gardd Aberdar* (Carmarthen, 1854), p. 87.

institutions which exist in more mixed commercial communities'.<sup>15</sup> T. W. Rammell, from the Board of Health, noted in 1850 that 'there were no men of middle station, none of the ordinary class of "residents" who are to be found more or less in number, in every other town in England, however they may be disconnected from the ordinary commerce of the place'.<sup>16</sup> Rammell saw only the ironmasters, their agents and workmen, and such tradesmen and professional men as were necessary to supply the needs of these groups. In fact, a nascent middle class consisting of the agents and professional people, the lesser industrialists and the shopkeepers, existed, but in the early decades of the growth of the town there was lacking that sense of community of interest and of aim which might enable it to build traditions of civic duty and function, which was probably what Rammell saw to be lacking. Aberdare, like Merthyr, was likely to be a place to escape from once a man had made enough to retire.<sup>17</sup>

These facts, the too-rapid growth of the town, and the absence of an established, indigenous middle class, help to account for the fact that 'to all intents and purposes, (Aberdare) was as destitute of civic government as the smallest rural village in the empire'.<sup>18</sup> There was a complete absence of proper sanitary arrangements, no permanent sewage disposal, no adequate water supply, so that in some places 'the lower classes seemed in danger of being engulfed and poisoned by their own excretions'.<sup>19</sup> The death rate was consequently inordinately high—2.17 per cent. (as compared with 2.6 per cent. in Merthyr Tydfil), and the average expectation of life low—for the children of colliers and artisans, 17½ years, for tradesmen, 32 years.<sup>20</sup> Conditions began to improve in the late '50s, but even then, with the public health acts in force, the men who controlled local government were extremely dilatory in their actions, and it needed a succession of typhus and cholera epidemics to awaken the public conscience in these matters.

The religious life which Price entered into was also changing rapidly. The basic denominational pattern already existed and, taken together, it is probable that the percentage increase of the main

<sup>15</sup> *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry into the sewerage, drainage, and supply of water, and the sanitary condition of the inhabitants of the Town of Merthyr Tydfil*, by T. W. Rammell (London, 1850), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> R. A. Lewis, *Edwin Chadwick and the Public Health Movement*, p. 41. Quoted by Tydfil Davies Jones, 'Poor Law and Public Health Administration in the Area of Merthyr Tydfil Union, 1834-94' (M.A. thesis, University of Wales, 1961), p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> See de la Bèche, T. W. Rammell, and Miss Jones, *op. cit.*

denominations was not far short of the population increase in the parish. This was particularly true of the Baptists among whom Price had come to work. According to him, the growth of his denomination up to 1860 had been proportionately greater than that of the parish in general.<sup>21</sup> For this denomination the period of greatest expansion, involving the foundation of new churches, was between 1846 and 1866.<sup>22</sup> In Aberdare parish itself at the latter date there were no less than eleven Baptist chapels in addition to Calfaria, with a total communing membership of over 3,500.<sup>23</sup> The features to be noted about this growth are, first, that all these chapels, either directly or indirectly, owed their existence to the expansionist policies of Price and were offshoots of the mother-church at Calfaria, and second, that the connection between the mother- and daughter-churches was closely maintained and cultivated.<sup>24</sup> Thus, from 1854 onwards, the Sunday Schools held an annual festival, and, in addition, quarterly meetings became a regular feature of their organization. There was an annual *eisteddfod*, the profits of which went, in turn, to the participating Sunday Schools.<sup>25</sup> From time to time baptismal services were held at convenient places in the river Cynon, which were attended by all the associated churches.<sup>26</sup> At all such gatherings and functions Dr. Price presided—indeed, their great success was due to his extraordinary organizing and administrative talents. In a very real sense most of the chapels associated with Calfaria were his creations. They had all hived-off in accordance with a carefully conceived procedure, by which the authority of the mother-church was maintained long after, it might be, they had achieved full independence. Most of them had started as branches of Calfaria, their executive bodies being chosen from among the Calfaria diaconate.<sup>27</sup> In this way the overall organization was the expression of a more personal organization—a complex of kith and kin relationships dominated by Price himself. He was known to all, his authority accepted in all matters pertaining to the well-being of the

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas Price, *Jiwbili Eglwys Calfaria, Aberdar* (1862), and B. Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics are to be found in the *Llythyr Cymansa Bedyddwyr Morgannwg*, annually from 1833 onwards. The enumerators' returns for the *Census of Religious Worship* of 1851 for the parish of Aberdare are missing in H.O. 129/26/582.

<sup>23</sup> According to Price's *Jiwbili*, quoted in B. Evans, *Cofiant*, *op. cit.*, pp. 92 and 96, in 1862 members numbered 3,096.

<sup>24</sup> On these features see B. Evans, *Cofiant*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–118. In his *Jiwbili* Price claimed that in 1860 there were sixteen chapels and branches associated with Calfaria, with a total membership of 3,096, eighteen ministers and an average of eighteen Sunday Schools, 419 teachers, and 3,272 pupils.

<sup>25</sup> B. Evans, *Cofiant*, *op. cit.*, pp. 121 and 128. And see, for example, *Seren Cymru*, 18 January 1861, for a report of the *eisteddfod* held at Aberaman when twelve chapels participated.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Fothergill gave assistance in the building of a baptistry on the bank of the river near Abernant. See J. W. Moore, *Hanes Eglwys Bethel, Abernant* (1880), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> J. W. Moore, *op. cit.*, is a good example of the procedure.



denomination in Aberdare—so much so, that he was often known affectionately, but perhaps a little ironically, as *Father Price*.<sup>28</sup>

It follows that Dr. Price, as the acknowledged head of the strongest denomination in the Aberdare side of the Merthyr Tydfil constituency, should have exerted an influence in denominational and religious affairs in his locality far greater than that wielded by any other minister. Apart from the Unitarians, who were numerically weak though socially and politically strong,<sup>29</sup> the other denominations lacked the central organization and social cohesion which Price had given the Baptists. Among the Independents, for example, though there were some outstanding personalities, there were no ministers with the kind of extra-ecclesiastical authority possessed by Price.<sup>30</sup> The Independents had increased by parthogenesis like the Baptists, but there does not seem to have been the same continuing cohesion between the mother- and sister-churches in that denomination, with the result that no one minister could be said to enjoy a larger measure of prestige than his fellows or exert a more compelling influence. The various Methodist connections,<sup>31</sup> though numerically powerful as a whole and accustomed to acting together, were governed by constitutions which militated against active political and social action. What influence they exerted as denominations was determined more by the dictates of the county Associations to which they belonged rather than by the exigencies of local conditions.

This leadership in a well-organized cohesive denomination in a rapidly expanding community provided the basis for an equal authority within the body of nonconformity as a whole in Aberdare, and, to a lesser extent, in the constituency in general. In non-conformist politics Price first came into prominence both locally and nationally in 1847, on the occasion of the publication of the famous *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, when his name was coupled with that of Rev. Evan Jones (*Ieuan Gwynedd*), Rev. William Rees (*Gwilym Hiraethog*), Henry Richard, and others as one of the most effective critics of those

<sup>28</sup> B. Evans, *Cofiant*, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> On the Unitarians in Aberdare see D. Jacob Dafis (ed.), *Gweriniaeth yn Hanes yr Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, Aberdâr, 1751–1951* (1951), and bibliography therein, p. 86.

<sup>30</sup> For the Independents see T. Rees and J. Thomas, *Hanes Eglwysi Annibynnol Cymru*, II, 323 et seq. (Liverpool, 1872) and D. Silyn Evans, *Bywgraffiad . . . Barch. David Price, Siloa, Aberdâr* (1896).

<sup>31</sup> These were as follows in 1854: Welsh Calvinistic Methodists—three chapels; Wesleyan Methodists—four chapels; Primitive Methodists—four chapels. See T. J. Jones, op. cit., in *Gardd Aberdâr*, p. 78.

*Reports*.<sup>32</sup> The inhabitants of Aberdare had been particularly incensed by the 'evidence' submitted to the commissioners by the vicar of the parish, the Rev. John Griffiths, who had entered into his living only shortly before the commissioners arrived.<sup>33</sup> In his memorandum Griffiths had drawn attention to the degraded character of the women of Aberdare relative to the men, to the fact that sexual promiscuity was an accepted social convention, to the drunkenness and improvidence of the miners, and to the emotional levity of the religious observances of the nonconformists. Price had immediately challenged the vicar to a public debate, and although Griffiths had declined, saying that he would never give Price that honour, the meeting arranged for that purpose had been held, and Price had emerged as the undoubted champion of nonconformity in Aberdare. His speech on that occasion brought him to the forefront as a formidable controversialist and orator, while the fact that it was he who had initiated the agitation and arranged the demonstration indicated that here was a politician with the ability to give practical effect and expression to the feelings and aspirations of the, as yet, unorganized body of nonconformists. Moreover, it gave him a kind of parity, if not yet of leadership, among the new rising generation of Welsh coalowners and colliery proprietors who were also nonconformists, and who were later, with Price, to form the core of the liberal-nonconformist caucus in Aberdare. His marriage in that same year to Mrs. Anne Gilbert, daughter and heiress of William Thomas David, Aber-nant-y-groes, one of the six partners in the sinking of Wayne's first pit, brought him into a closer relationship with this group. Thus David Davis, Maes-y-ffynnon, and David Williams, Ynys-cynon (*Alaw Goch*), both on the thresholds of their industrial careers, and both destined to play dominant roles in the cultural and political life of the locality, were official speakers at the meeting.<sup>34</sup> Others who took part included a prosperous business man, and, of course, ministers of religion.<sup>35</sup> Shortly after, Price was publicly

<sup>32</sup> See the *Reports* and Appendices (1848). On the controversy aroused see, in general, J. Rhŷs and D. B. Jones, *The Welsh People* (1900), pp. 484–6. The role of Ieuan Gwynedd is discussed by Brinley Rees in the introduction to his *Ieuan Gwynedd, Detholiad o'i Ryddiaith* (1957) where the *A Vindication* is printed. Henry Richard's role is discussed in C. S. Miall, *Henry Richard, M.P.* (1889), pp. 21–6, in Henry Richard, *Letters and Essays on Wales* (1884), and in Eleazar Roberts, *Bywyd a Gwaith y Diweddar Henry Richard, A.S.* (1902), pp. 21–6.

<sup>33</sup> For Griffiths's evidence see *Reports*, Appendix, p. 489. Also B. Evans, *Cofiant*, op. cit., pp. 48–9 where it is quoted in full.

<sup>34</sup> On these see C. Wilkins, *The South Wales Coal Trade* (1888), J. H. Morris and L. J. Williams, *The South Wales Coal Industry, 1841–1875* (1958), B. Morus, *Enwogion Aberdâr* (1910), and *Y Bywgraffiadur Cymreig*.

<sup>35</sup> W. Williams, London Warehouse, was one of the rising generation of shopkeepers, later to be active in politics. See Silyn Evans, op. cit., p. 51, and *Aberdare Times*, 8 August 1868.

thanked at a special meeting for the leading part he had taken in this contest.<sup>36</sup>

Of the resolutions passed at that meeting to protest against the Blue Books, two were explicitly directed at the vicar of the parish. The first denied the accuracy of his views and expressed disapproval of his conduct, while the second called for the publication in Welsh of this memorandum 'it being but fair that Mr. Griffiths should tell his parishioners in their own language what he has already told the Government respecting their state of morals'.<sup>37</sup> In fact, this represented a climacteric in the growing church *versus* chapel controversy out of which a distinct body of political opinion was to emerge in the constituency. Ieuan Gwynedd and others had already demonstrated, or were in process of demonstrating, that the commissioners were guilty not only of procedural errors and systematic confusions of method, but also of sectarian bias in so far as they relied on the evidence of church people who were not only unsympathetic to the aspirations of dissenters, but incapable by reason of their vested interests of appreciating them.<sup>38</sup> Arguments such as these dealing with the Reports as a whole were effective catalysts of opinion in the country at large. In the localities they were made politically potent by being 'personalized' as at Aberdare, where Price and the vicar came to embody two apparently incompatible religious and political points of view.

If the contest with the vicar had marked the emergence of a redoubtable champion of nonconformity subsequent contests of a similar nature<sup>39</sup> served not only to consolidate and enhance this reputation, but also to bring Price into the centre of local politics. The Reports themselves inevitably stimulated such a movement since they were of the widest political significance, not only centrally, at Westminster, but also locally. They had described in detail the deficiencies in the educational facilities provided by the various organizations, public and private, in Aberdare, and had related these deficiencies to the kind of society emerging in the valleys. The commissioners had found, for instance, that in Aberdare there was accommodation in the ten existing schools for only 1,317 children, and that apart from the National schools (accommodating 135)

<sup>36</sup> Silyn Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> See *A Vindication* in Brinley Rees, *op. cit.*, p. 77 ff.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, the controversy over Rustic Sports held to celebrate a royal wedding, which the church and 'trade' helped to organize but which Price thought to be degrading; and, more importantly, the church rate controversy.

there were no workmen's schools<sup>40</sup> and none provided by the dissenters. By implication, they considered the failure of the ironmasters to give a lead in this respect to be a serious criticism of their social morality since it was they who were creating a new type of society in which the ironworks were replacing the ancient units of social structure in which their employees had previously moved.<sup>41</sup> By implication, too, dissent was indicted for its failure to provide British schools. Price, while rejecting some of the social analysis of the commissioners, accepted the validity of their criticism of the dissenters, and it was largely due to his energy and vision that a committee of nonconformists was immediately formed, charged with the task of founding a school under the aegis of the British and Foreign School Society. Price was appointed secretary and included on it were David Williams (*Alaw Goch*), chairman; John Jones, a druggist, treasurer; Evan Griffiths of Hirwaun, a businessman; and three ministers representative of the major denominations.<sup>42</sup> Seven months later the Park Schools (or *Ysgol y Comin*) had been built on land provided by the trustees of the Bute Estate, and shortly afterwards were officially opened.

From the point of view of the political life of the parish this was an event of great significance. It was the first time the nonconformists had acted together in response to a common stimulus and towards the realization of common aspirations. Moreover, since the venture, if it were to succeed, demanded a continuing organization, involved in this event was the creation of what came to be—or could easily be contrived to become—a kind of political caucus well adapted to the furtherance of nonconformist aims in other directions and spheres. Its membership, as we have seen, was representative of the emerging political classes, of the newer industrial interests and the 'shopocracy', as well as the leaders of the old pattern of society—the farmers and small landowners.<sup>43</sup> It is important to notice, also, that the iron interest was not represented. The owners of all three

<sup>40</sup> There was a school in Crawshay's Ironworks at Hirwaun. See W. W. Price, *Park Schools Centenary; its History* (1948), pp. 28–9, and *Reports*, but not one in Aberdare.

<sup>41</sup> For this interesting social analysis of Lingren's see *Reports*, op. cit., pp. 20–1.

<sup>42</sup> John Jones was clerk to the Vestry, clerk to the Road Board for north Glamorgan, and was a director later of the Aberdare Water Works. W. W. Price, op. cit., p. 29, gives details of his career and interests. Evan Griffiths was active in the Vestry. See *Aberdare Vestry Books*, vol. I sub 5 February 1837. Later committee members and trustees included David Davis, J.P., Maesyffynnon (son of David Davis, Blaengwawr, the coal proprietor), the 'Gladstone of Wales' as he was later called; and Samuel Thomas, founder of the Ysguborwen Colliery and the Clydach Vale Colliery (father of D. A. Thomas, Lord Rhondda). W. T. Lewis, Lord Merthyr, served as a trustee. For details of these see *Bywgraffiadur*, and W. W. Price, op. cit. Dr. Price gives a list of committee members in his reminiscences in *Seren Cymru*, 4 November 1864.

<sup>43</sup> The committee in 1847 consisted of four ministers, four tradesmen, three coal proprietors, one contractor, and one farmer.

iron-making concerns—Rowland Fothergill of the Aberdare Iron Company, the Waynes of the Gadlys Iron Company, and W. T. Crawshay of the Hirwaun Iron Company—were members of the established Church and supporters, therefore, of the National schools, which were likewise responding to the same stimuli. The major land and royalty owners were likewise adherents of the Church, and although ready—like the Bruces of Mountain Ash—to be associated with the British School committee, were, if anything, antipathetic to the extra-educational activities in which the committee was soon involved.

But if the ironmasters were excluded by religious persuasion—and perhaps by political antipathy—from the nonconformist school committee, in all other respects they were a predominant and established influence. This was particularly true of the sphere of local government. When Price arrived in Aberdare late in 1844 the functions of local government were divided between the Parish Vestry and the Poor Law Guardians of the Merthyr Tydfil Union, into which the parish of Aberdare had been assimilated when the Poor Law Amendment Act had been applied in 1836. The most important functions of local government had thus been removed from the cognizance of the Vestry, and its subsequent history follows closely those of similar parish governments overwhelmed by the multifarious problems which rapid industrialization brought in its wake—that is to say, the creation of special boards for the more efficient administration of the more vital sectors of local government, functioning as independent statutory bodies, separately elected on a democratic franchise. In Aberdare, in both of these instruments of local government—in the administration of the poor laws and in the Vestry and its offshoots—the ironmasters occupied positions of great, but not of undisputed, power. Moreover, as during the thirty years with which we are concerned in this essay the industrial pattern of the valley was changing, iron giving place to coal as the leading industry, so, too, the pattern of political power changed correspondingly. This political change, reflecting a social and industrial shift, took place gradually during the first twenty years of Price's domicile in Aberdare. It was a transition from the older traditional social pattern characterized by the absence of any powerful social group mid-way between the ironmaster and the freeholder farming class, and the new emerging pattern in which a middle class of indigenous coal proprietors allied with the shopkeepers and tradesmen, the professional men, and the dissenting ministers, had come to predominate over both the older groups. The histories of both the Vestry and the Union illustrate

this change. For instance, up to 1837, no business of the slightest importance was transacted by the Vestry without the ironmasters, or their agents, being present. On less important occasions the majority of men signing the minutes were freeholders and farmers.<sup>44</sup> This remained true even after the Vestry had largely lost its powers to the Union and the other statutory bodies. When these latter come to be formed, Fothergill, Wayne, or Crawshay Bailey invariably head the lists of elections, as, for instance, the Board of Highway Surveyors,<sup>45</sup> or the Board of Health provisionally formed in 1853.<sup>46</sup> But by the middle '50s the power-shift was pronounced, and the major organs of government were being run by the 'new men'. From this time forward it is these who predominate; indeed, they succeed in engineering the retirement from public life of the leading ironmaster, Richard Fothergill.<sup>47</sup> Decisions respecting such diverse and controversial matters as health, highways, social and cultural amenities—ranging from the decision to levy a rate for a new burial-ground, the Church-rate question itself, the creation of a gas company, the decision to enclose common land as a public recreation ground administered by the local Board of Health—decisions such as these were, in fact, being taken by the 'new' industrialists and their allies. It is these who were determining the slant of social progress. And among these Thomas Price was an acknowledged leader.

The history of the Vestry, in this context, is less important than that of the Union, but here again, both in the election of guardians and in the work of the guardians elected, the same shift of power and decision-making to the emerging middle class allied with the dissenters is clearly to be seen. In the first election, in 1836, and annually until 1850, one ironmaster and two freeholders or farmers were elected by the parish.<sup>48</sup> In 1851, when the number of Aberdare guardians was increased to four,<sup>49</sup> there is a significant change. The elections of that year resulted in the return of an ironmaster (Richard Fothergill), the vicar, a farmer, and a coal-proprietor. This remained the pattern until 1853 when the ironmaster was replaced by his

<sup>44</sup> See *Aberdare Vestry Books*, I, Glamorgan Record Office, P/61/5.

<sup>45</sup> *Aberdare Vestry Books*, II, 23 March 1848. Glamorgan Record Office, P/61/2. Ibid., 23 September 1853. It is interesting to note that the Abernant district—where the Aberdare Iron Company was located—was to be left to Fothergill and his agents to administer.

<sup>46</sup> For the history of public health administration in the area see Tydfil Davies Jones, 'Poor Law and Public Health Administration in the area of Merthyr Tydfil Union'.

<sup>47</sup> For this episode see Part II of this article, forthcoming.

<sup>48</sup> Merthyr Tydfil Union: Minute Books, I (1836–40); II (1840–49); III (1849–51), Glamorgan Record Office, U/M. But see *Aberdare Vestry Book* P/61/5, f.310 where under 30 March 1837 Rowland Fothergill, a farmer, and a freeholder, are recorded as having been returned.

<sup>49</sup> Merthyr Tydfil Union: Minute Books, III (1849–51), 23 March 1850, Minute 2608, f. 185, records the order for the increase.

agent, the vicar by a dissenting minister. The agent returned was Rees Hopkin Rhys, agent at one time to Fothergill, but also a businessman in his own right and soon to become a coal-proprietor.<sup>50</sup> and destined to exercise a powerful influence in local affairs. The dissenting minister who ousted the vicar was Thomas Price. Two years later—in 1855—there is another slight adjustment, Price being replaced by a tradesman. In 1860, there was a further change with the granting of two additional guardians. The pattern now was: three coal-proprietors, one farmer, one tradesman, and the vicar again. In 1861–62 the coal-proprietors number four, having gained the seat occupied by the farmer. Thus, by the early '60s local government in Aberdare was firmly in the hands of the indigenous coal-proprietors allied with the tradesmen, and having a strong dissenting character.

It will be noticed that Dr. Price sat as a guardian for only two years—from 1853 to 1855—a short period of service compared with most of the other guardians. But the length of his service in that capacity should not obscure the importance of those two years in his career and in the developing political life of the community. First, it is essential to stress that his election was evidence of the emergence into politics of organized nonconformity. The election of a non-conformist minister was unprecedented in the Union, and in a way it was more remarkable than the contemporaneous emergence of the coal-owners—although it must be remembered that from 1847 he had been closely associated with them. Second, we must stress that Price appears to have been highly successful and popular as a guardian. One admirer, with more poetic exaggeration than can be pardoned, thought of him as 'a second Howard to the poor', and of his residence, Rose Cottage, as a haven for the destitute.<sup>51</sup> Third, he appears to have given up his guardianship in order to devote himself to the local Health Board. He had been indefatigable in persuading the community to adopt the Health of Towns Act, and during the period between 1852, when formal application was first made, and 1854 when the Act was applied,<sup>52</sup> Price was one of those

<sup>50</sup> He is thus described in 1861, in Minute Books, 1860–63, f. 67.

<sup>51</sup> See 'Pryddest o glôd i'r Parch. T. Price am ei ofal dros y Tlodion, yng nghyd â'i ymdrechion diflino o blaid crefydd yng Nghwm Dâr' by Gwalch [i.e. John Jones] in *Seren Gomer* (1858), pp. 272–3.

<sup>52</sup> Details of the (repeated) applications can be found in *Aberdare Vestry Books*, II. I am indebted to Miss Tydfil Jones, M.A., for this reference.

made responsible for seeing that the details of the Act were anyway applied.

To sum up thus far, it is clear that Thomas Price's influence was based, apparently securely, first on his position as a leading non-conformist minister and particularly among the Baptists, and second, on an alliance with the middle class coal-proprietors and tradesmen who, by the middle '50s had come to form the most important social group in the valley. Such an association between the 'clerical' leadership of dissent and the rising wealthy classes was perhaps typical of most of the industrial communities in Wales at that time. Certainly, it seemed to be accepted as an organic part of those new urban societies, and recognized by some astute observers as a social phenomenon peculiar to Wales.<sup>53</sup> In some respects, however, Price was untypical of clerical nonconformist leadership in so far as he had become himself a man of property and, to a limited extent, an entrepreneur in his own right. By his marriage to Mrs. Anne Gilbert, the daughter of Thomas David, Esq., Cwmdare, a landowner at Aber-nant-y-groes, he had allied himself to a substantial local family. When she died two years later, in 1849, Price inherited her quite considerable property.<sup>54</sup> Not only so, but her son, Edward Gilbert, who took the name of Price, became a prominent businessman, setting up as a broker and accountant, and later establishing a woollen mill in Aberdare—the South Wales and Glandare Woollen Manufactory (Ltd.), Aberdare, with a capital of £20,000.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Price was a director of this concern. He was, also, at one time, a director of the Aberdare Gas Company.<sup>56</sup> He was, therefore, a man of substance, and, in this respect, on an equality with the businessmen with whom he associated, sharing some of their interests, understanding and sympathizing with their social and economic aspirations. It is, perhaps, understandable that his residence, Rose Cottage, should be a large, detached house, much more the home of a prosperous professional man than of a one-time penurious Baptist minister.

<sup>53</sup> Edward Miall, in a speech at Swansea in September 1862, contrasting the socio-religious attitudes of the English middle classes with those of Wales, said that in England when the middle classes gather wealth they tended to fall away from dissent into the established church: 'three generations of carriage folk never continue to be Dissenters'. *Cambrian*, 26 September 1862. This tendency was almost certainly less pronounced in Wales than in England.

<sup>54</sup> For details of the marriage and family see B. Evans, *op. cit.*, *Bywgraffiadur, Seren Gomer*, October 1849, p. 310 and *ibid.*, November, p. 350. For a list of Aberdare landowners in c. 1850 see T. J. Jones, *op. cit.*, in *Gardd Aberdâr*, p. 57.

<sup>55</sup> See advertisement in *Aberdare Times*, 4 November 1871. It would appear that the Prices bought this mill as a going concern, since the Glandare Mills were owned by Thomas Roberts in 1868. See *Slater's Directory for 1868*, *sub* Aberdare.

<sup>56</sup> See *Gwron*, 1 May 1858. Price had been among the foremost agitators for a gas company, see *C.M.G.*, 4 March 1848.



Thomas Price's relations with other social groups, and, particularly, with the working classes, are more difficult to define. His ministerial authority was clearly effective here also, since the bulk of non-conformists were working-class people. There can be no doubt either that although fortune and an aggressive, driving personality and a more than average intelligence had enabled him to climb out of the class into which he had been born, he felt, nevertheless, a genuine affinity with the workers. In his relations with them, although gruff and sometimes domineering, there was no suggestion of 'class' superiority or of aloofness. His language was forceful and picturesque, very often, according to his biographer, scarcely becoming a minister of the gospel,<sup>57</sup> but, at least, it was the language of common discourse. Moreover, he never forgot his peasant origins, his tough working-class youth and early manhood in London. Nor did he allow his congregations and audiences to forget these autobiographical facts: indeed, the tale of his walk to London from his home in Brecon at the age of 16 with 13s. 4d. in his pocket to work as a journeyman painter was a kind of saga in the Samuel Smiles tradition—as it were, a 'spiritual' counterpart to the Crawshay saga.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, his influence with the working class, and particularly among the colliers and ironworkers, did not depend exclusively on denominational or ministerial factors, on his place in the formal politics of the parish, or on his connections with trade and industry. It was based rather on two other aspects of his career which grew in importance as time went on, namely, his enthusiasm for friendly societies, and his work and policy as an editor of newspapers and magazines.

His association with the friendly societies began soon after his arrival in Aberdare, at a time when the fraternal orders were absorbing the older multiplicity of ill-organized and insecure societies which had characterized South Wales in the previous decades.<sup>59</sup> He belonged to all the major orders—to the Oddfellows, the True Ivorites, the Alfredites, the Foresters—but it was to the well-being of the Oddfellows and the Ivorites that he devoted most of his time

<sup>57</sup> E.g. B. Evans, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> See his own recollections at a presentation to him as editor of *Y Gwron* in 1858: *Gwron*, 1 May 1858. See also T. R. Roberts, *Eminent Welshmen* (1908), *sub* Thomas Price.

<sup>59</sup> On friendly societies in general, see J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain* (1926), i, 295–300, 588–91; P. H. J. H. Gosden, *The Friendly Societies in England, 1815–1875* (1961) and Gwyn A. Williams, 'Friendly Societies in Glamorgan, 1793–1832', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, XVIII, 111, (November 1959), 275–89. According to T. J. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 78, there were in 1854 six orders, with a total of fifty-nine lodges, and an aggregate membership of 5,162.

and energy, and in whose councils he attained highest eminence.<sup>60</sup> He became head of the South Wales Unity of Oddfellows at a time when there were 16–18,000 members, and in 1864 he was elected vice-president of the Order, and in the following year, Grand Master, being the first Welshman to be so honoured. He had already served as president of the Ivorites—the only Welsh Order—in 1859, and there is no doubt that the expansion of the Order in the years following owed much to his dynamic energy and drive.<sup>61</sup> His knowledge of the law relating to friendly societies was detailed and profound: he was known as the Welsh Solicitor-General of Friendly Societies, was consulted even by professional lawyers in these matters, and himself often conducted cases involving societies in the courts of law.<sup>62</sup> In these ways he became almost indispensable and, by transference of fame, as it were, enhanced his reputation among the working classes in other directions as well.

Of scarcely less importance as establishing and strengthening these ties was his work as editor of various periodicals. From 4 June 1855 he edited *Y Gwron*<sup>63</sup> with W. Williams (*Caledfryn*), and A. J. Davies of Aberaman. Previously, from its foundation on 21 December 1854 by John Josiah Jones,<sup>64</sup> at that time of Carmarthen, *Y Gwron* had been edited singly by W. Williams. The transfer of the paper to Jones's new publishing offices in Aberdare, in April 1854, and the appointment of the two new editors, probably saved the paper from extinction. By July 1855, it appeared weekly instead of fortnightly as before, and its circulation had increased greatly.<sup>65</sup> The transfer of the paper to Aberdare, at the centre of the most populous part of the coalfield, would have ensured an increased circulation, but its success was due largely to the editorial policy of Price and Davies. It became a livelier paper, reflecting the interests and points of view of an industrial, rather than an agricultural, society, even though it circulated in the rural districts as well. Considerable space was given to local affairs, particularly those affecting the interests of

<sup>60</sup> The Foresters honoured him with a presentation in 1849, and the Alfredites in 1863. See *Y Gweithiwr Cymreig*, 8 March 1888.

<sup>61</sup> For details of his activities see the whole of chapter xv in B. Evans, *op. cit.* Statistics of growth between 1859 and 1865 are given in a testimonial presented to Price and printed in *ibid.*, pp. 185–7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>63</sup> For the history of this newspaper, *Y Gwron Cymreig a Chyhoeddwr Cyffredinol Dywysogaeth Cymru* see R. D. Rees, 'Glamorgan Newspapers under the Stamp Acts', *Morgannwg*, III (1959), 78–9.

<sup>64</sup> For W. Williams and J. J. Jones see *Bywgraffiadur*. A. J. Davies was an Independent minister at Aberaman.

<sup>65</sup> According to a letter in *C.M.G.*, 27 December 1857, its circulation in that year was 2,000 copies weekly. That of *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*, formed in 1859, with a 'national' coverage, is put at 4,000 copies weekly.

workmen, such as safety, compensation, insurance, master and man relationships, and it always provided a forum for discussion in which they could publicize their view, even when the editors were totally out of sympathy with them. This was of inestimable value to the workmen, particularly during times of depression when *Y Gwron* remained almost the only paper in which they could be sure of a fair hearing, or have their views published without unfair comment or in a garbled manner.<sup>66</sup>

The same is true of the other paper edited by Price, the denominational *Seren Cymru*. He became sole editor of this magazine in 1860, and soon turned it into something quite distinctive and unusual in such publications. It devoted, on the whole, less space than most of its contemporaries to denominational and ecclesiastical affairs and more to current politics and ideas. Both in appearance and purpose it resembled the weekly newspaper-cum-magazine, reflecting the radical politics of the locality, giving a firm guide in current affairs, carrying much educative and 'elevating' material and, again, providing the working classes with a forum. It is quite clear that these classes had confidence in the editorial policy of these papers, and looked to them for the publication of their views, and for articles and other material reflecting their own particular interests and concerns.

Complementary to these journalistic activities was Price's work as a lecturer. In this he was indefatigable and enjoyed a tremendous popularity. Current affairs were his speciality,<sup>67</sup> and though his lectures were, more often than not, long and elaborate, they were always carefully prepared and illustrated by maps and diagrams of his own design. In the fields of foreign affairs, politics, and industrial topics he was extremely well-informed, and since, as one observer noted, the Welsh worker 'was fond (there is no accounting for taste) of hearing lectures'<sup>68</sup> it is probable that he reached a much wider audience in this way than if he had confined himself to writing. In politics he expounded the views of the radical wing of the Liberal party and of the 'political' nonconformists led by the Liberation Society. His interest in industrial affairs lay less in the economics of the subject than in the more sociological aspects—questions of safety

<sup>66</sup> Colliers' meetings would often end with a vote of thanks to the editors of *Y Gwron*.

<sup>67</sup> In 1855, for instance, he gave a series of four lectures, at the invitation of the management, to the Abernant workmen on the war. See *Gwron*, 15 March 1855 to 12 April 1855 for reports of these lectures. Other topics included 'Hanes y Rhyfel Presennol yn India', 'The Indian Mutiny', 'Y Colier a'i beryglon'.

<sup>68</sup> The quotation is from G. T. Clark's evidence before the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, Fifth Report, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1867-8, xxxix (3980), Q. 125.

and inspection, of the double versus the single shift, and master-man relationships generally. These were all important issues in the coalfields, and came to a head in the crisis of 1867–68, during the election, at which time both Price and the colliers were compelled to define more closely than heretofore their attitudes to the problems involved, and to bring out into the open, therefore, the latent differences between them.

What these latent differences were we can discover by studying the history of Price's relations with the men on the questions of safety, the double shift, and strikes. Up to 1867 it is fairly clear that on the question of safety in the mines the colliers and Price saw, more or less, eye to eye. After that date, the question of the double shift made it well-nigh impossible for them to agree any longer, for, on this important question, the men were fiercely and diametrically opposed to the policy advocated by Price. His interest in safety dated from the Lletty-Shenkin explosion of 1849 when fifty-two men and boys were killed.<sup>69</sup> The steam-coal pits of the Aberdare area were peculiarly liable to explosions because of the volatile nature of the coal, the increasing depth at which it was mined, and, above all, the effects of the rate of expansion in production which involved inadequate safety measures (even by the requirements of the Act of 1850) and the employment of insufficiently trained and technically ill-equipped officials.<sup>70</sup> Since 1849 more than 270 men had been killed in twenty-nine further explosions of mounting severity in Aberdare and Merthyr alone.<sup>71</sup> In 1856, Price drew up a memorandum on the subject, which he submitted to the Inspector of Mines. In this he advocated an improvement in underground communications, and an improved system of inspection, involving the appointment of six sub-inspectors charged with visiting every colliery at least once a month. They would be paid a maximum salary of £200 per annum from a Consolidated Fund set up for the purpose to which masters and men would contribute. In addition, he advocated the creation of a Perpetual Fund, financed in the same way, out of which compensation to the victims of explosions, or their dependent relatives, would be paid. The colliers were unenthusiastic. They agreed on the need for a sub-inspectorate, and wanted more and not less governmental supervision, but they wished the sub-inspectors to be chosen from among themselves, experienced colliers rather than general engineers,

<sup>69</sup> On this see J. H. Morris and L. J. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, the whole of chapter VIII is relevant.

<sup>71</sup> These are conveniently, but incompletely, listed in Dafydd Morgannwg (David Watkin Jones), *Hanes Morgannwg* (1874), pp. 63–4.

'of the people' rather than 'of the masters'.<sup>72</sup> From time to time, Price returned to this theme, especially in the '60s, but without eliciting much support from the workmen who, for other reasons, may have been somewhat suspicious of his motives and disinclined to be led by him on this issue. Not until 1867 did safety become once again a great cause of discord in the coalfield, and by that time, as we shall see, it was complicated by the related question of shift-working, and of politics, in both of which the colliers were taking a very independent line.

If we are correct in inferring a certain lack of confidence between Price and the colliers with respect to working conditions, there is clearer evidence that his attempts to act as an independent conciliator in industrial disputes were not wholly acceptable to the working men. The evidence is of two kinds. First, and indirectly, Price was a whole-hearted subscriber to the view that trade unions, of whatever kind, were against the 'real' interest of the workmen. Believing in the economic doctrines of the Manchester School, he taught that any kind of organization among the workers designed to compel the masters to improve working conditions, or to raise the price of their labour, was a dangerous interference with the mechanisms of trade which, when allowed to function freely, would best ensure prosperity for both sides and for the community at large. Trade unions were invariably the creations of vicious and evil men, importations from over the border, and invariably wedded to the hated doctrines of socialism. Thus, in September 1863, he had written a leading article in *Seren Cymru* condemning the attempt to form a National Miners' Union, and arguing that in the nature of the economic processes such an organization could not achieve more for the men than was inherently theirs already if they but exercised restraint and devoted themselves to self-help through education. The gradual improvement in wages which had taken place in the early '60s, and, later, the so-called Sheffield trade union outrages of 1867, seemed to vindicate his arguments.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the workmen refused to adopt these attitudes, and in times of industrial disputes, strove to create unions, which they hoped would be permanent.

Perhaps they suspected Price's attitudes and doctrines as being more favourable to the masters than to the men, and here they believed they had direct evidence of his real views. Generally

<sup>72</sup> *Seren Cymru*, 27 March 1867, gives a detailed exposition of Price's views on the safety question. In general, see Morris and L. J. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-208, but the authors do not discuss the 'sub-inspectorate' plan.

<sup>73</sup> See B. Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.

speaking, when the men were striking for a rise or, as was more often the case, striking against a wage reduction, Price invariably argued in favour of a return to work. The classic example of this—apart from 1867, which will be described later—occurred in the great winter strike of 1857–58. This strike against a penal reduction of 20 per cent. is of great importance in the history of the coalfield, not merely because it saw the creation of a powerful union for a time, but because it largely determined what the political attitudes of the workmen would be in the election of 1868. Briefly, the situation was this. By the autumn of 1857 the post-war depression was such that it was rumoured that the soft-coal proprietors had determined on a 15 per cent. wage reduction. This was a half of the 30 per cent. rise granted during the three previous boom years, and a delegate meeting of the colliers involved, while agreeing that some reduction was inevitable, determined to send a delegation to the masters to argue for a smaller reduction. A full report of this meeting was published in *Y Gwron*,<sup>74</sup> and in a guarded leader Price gave measured support to these views while stressing the inadvisability of striking. Nevertheless, the reduction of 15 per cent. was officially announced on 26 November and, almost immediately, between 6,000 and 8,000 colliers brought out their tools.

The strike, which lasted well into January, and soon involved the Monmouthshire colliers as well, was a peculiarly bitter and memorable one. Soldiers were quartered in the town, and there was rioting, violence, and looting throughout the coalfields. It was memorable, too, for the way in which it was conducted on the colliers' side. The violence was not as prolonged or as endemic as, in such a protracted strike, it might have become. This must be attributed to the quality of leadership. There was no directing central organization as such: each colliery was free to negotiate as it would, but there were recognized leaders, men of character and of intelligence who, while they could not negotiate on behalf of the men with the united body of masters, could and did arrange mass meetings and use the press to publicize their views. There was a movement towards union in the South Wales coalfield in those days, and the men had produced their own leaders, who were well equipped intellectually and morally to lead the men.

Price was involved as editor of one of the few papers in which the men had any confidence, though it was noticeable that, while claiming to be independent of party and calling for national

<sup>74</sup> *Y Gwron*, 14 November 1857.

behaviour, his comments could often be construed as being highly critical of the men.<sup>75</sup> He interfered more directly on the occasion of a public meeting of colliers in Aberdare addressed by H. A. Bruce. A little previously Bruce had persuaded the Home Secretary to recall the troops<sup>76</sup> and intervened with the masters, persuading them to postpone the imposition of an additional 5 per cent. reduction. With these eminently wise achievements to his credit, Bruce now addressed the striking colliers on the floor of the Market. He made two speeches. In the first, he expounded impeccably the economics of the situation, and argued that on this occasion the masters were not acting unjustly. The miners were visibly impressed; after all, they had been prepared for a reduction from the beginning of the depression. After some discussion, Bruce then went on to make a second speech, in tone and content utterly different from the first. Now he launched into an attack on the colliers for demanding, not only more than the industry could afford to pay, but more than they could with equity expect to receive. Why should Aberdare colliers demand 20s. a week while farm labourers in Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire reared their families on 11s. to 12s.? From his own experience of colliers at Mountain Ash it was perfectly easy for them to live on less than they were demanding. He ended with a denunciation of strikes in general, pointed to their ineffectiveness, and illustrated their demoralizing effects from the events of the strike of 1849–50.<sup>77</sup>

This was a disastrous speech: it did nothing to ease the situation as was shown by the continuation of the strike till desperation ended it on 15 January 1858, while it merely confirmed the men in their hatred of Bruce. Price was associated with this and shared some of the odium, since he was with Bruce on the platform and translated what he had said into Welsh for the benefit of the monoglot.<sup>78</sup> It was actions such as these which tended to generate in the men's minds attitudes of scepticism with regard to Price's real opinions and sympathies.

It scarcely needs pointing out that Price was most successful and influential when crusading on issues upon which his middle class

<sup>75</sup> As when he welcomed, in a leader, a detailed statement of the masters' case by Thomas Joseph, in *Gwron*, 5 December 1857. I am indebted to Mr. W. W. Price, M.A., of Aberdare, for this and much other information which, of his friendship, he has given me over the years.

<sup>76</sup> Actually, he sent a telegram along with that of the Aberdare justices asking for the removal of the soldiers to Cardiff. PRO/HO/45, 7239a and 7239b.

<sup>77</sup> *Y Gwron*, 12 December 1857.

<sup>78</sup> Later, Price denied having heard this second speech of Bruce's, while agreeing that he was on the platform with him. *Seren Cymru*, 8 November 1867.

allies and the working classes saw eye to eye. There had been one such issue in his early career, one which, coming soon after his campaign against the Blue Books and before his entry into the formal politics of the town, even further enhanced his authority—namely, his successful campaign against the introduction of a Truck Shop in Aberdare by the Aberdare Iron Company. It appears that soon after his appointment as general manager of the Company in June 1850, Richard Fothergill, succeeding his uncle Rowland in that capacity, determined ‘to alter the system of paying workmen which had been prevalent up to that time’,<sup>79</sup> by which the men had had their ‘pay’, their ‘large draw’ after the pay, and a ‘draw’ every week if required, both ‘pays’ and ‘draws’ being in the coin of the realm and in the office of the works’ cashier. The opportunity came in October, when John Lewis, a grocer, vacated his shop on premises owned by the Company, which were thereupon occupied by another firm of grocers (with whom Fothergill was connected by marriage), who used it as a Truck shop. At the same time, the old ‘draw’ was abolished, and both ‘pay’ and ‘draw’ transferred from the cashier’s office to the new shop, and it was alleged that pressure was being put on the workmen to deal there.<sup>80</sup>

These proceedings were viewed with ‘universal execration’ by the shopkeepers, coal-owners, and workmen alike, for Aberdare prided itself on the fact that it was almost unique among ironworks towns in being free of the scourge of Truck, and of never having experienced its full rigours.<sup>81</sup> A public meeting was called on 9 April in the Town Hall, which ‘was crammed to suffocation’, at which Price was the main speaker. His purpose was to propose the establishment of an Anti-Truck Society, and he did so in one of the most remarkable speeches of his career. The organization thus set up consisted of shopkeepers, all the independent coal-proprietors, workmen, the vicar, and dissenting ministers. Its object was to procure evidence against the Abernant Company, to collect funds to sustain the costs of prosecution, and to defend any workman who might be victimized by the Company for giving evidence for the prosecution.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> *C.M.G.*, 24 May 1851.

<sup>80</sup> *C.M.G.*, 12 April 1851.

<sup>81</sup> According to one speaker there had been a Company shop in Aberdare in 1828, but it had not been oppressive. *C.M.G.*, 12 April 1851.

<sup>82</sup> For the resolutions, Price’s speech, etc., see *C.M.G.*, 12 April 1851. Cf. also the detailed account of the Aberdare Anti-Truck Society in Tremeneere’s Report of the Commissioners appointed under the provisions of the Act 5 and 6 Vict. c. 99, to inquire into the operation of that Act, and into the state of the population in the Mining Districts, 1852. *Parliamentary Papers*, 1852, XXI (425).



The first case to be brought was on 20 April before H. A. Bruce and two other magistrates, but as the Abernant solicitor refused to plead and paid the trivial fine, no decision was reached on that occasion. But at the Aberdare petty sessions on 10 May, the case was at least publicly argued, and judgment entered against the Abernant Company and the minimum fine imposed in the hope that (in the words of H. A. Bruce) 'the system we have declared to be illegal, he (Richard Fothergill) will think proper to discontinue for the future'.<sup>83</sup> Fothergill responded by refusing to pay the fine, and by instructing his solicitors to remove the case to a higher court, while the Society, on its part, immediately filed further information against the Company. Not until 7 June was the matter finally determined when, at the Aberdare court, the Company 'having been convinced of their course in acting contrary to the law, were determined to give up the truck system entirely'.<sup>84</sup> This was a notable victory for the Society, and for no one more so than Dr. Price. In fact, the understanding given by the Company appears to have been agreed in separate negotiations between Price and Fothergill. Certainly, Price later claimed the credit for it.<sup>85</sup>

There is no doubt that Price was justified in attaching considerable importance to this episode in his career. It is undeniable that the workmen as a whole, and especially the 'respectable' elements among them, were deeply grateful to him for his leadership on that occasion. Politically, however, the benefit accruing to his esteem among the working classes may not have been as unequivocal as one might have expected. The agitation against the shop had been managed throughout by the shopkeepers and tradesmen, and it could be argued, as some workmen did argue, that the Anti-Truck Association was nothing but a middle class conspiracy by 'a body of unprincipled persons' determined to exclude from the distributive trade company-controlled grocers who regularly undercut the local tradesmen.<sup>86</sup> Colour was given to this when shortly afterwards 1,500 to 2,500 workmen attended a demonstration to deplore the attacks on

<sup>83</sup> For Bruce's considered views on Truck, in general, and of its social effects in South Wales, see his speech of 16 February 1854 supporting C. Forester's Bill to amend the Truck Acts, *Hansard*, 3rd series, vol. 130, 762-3.

<sup>84</sup> By this understanding there was no agreement to *close* the shop. It needed the candidature of Fothergill in a general election to achieve that. See *Aberdare Times*, 29 June 1868.

<sup>85</sup> In *Seren Cymru*, 13 December 1867.

<sup>86</sup> These points were made by Fothergill in a letter to the *Mining Journal* reprinted in *C.M.G.*, 21 June 1851. Price himself admitted that goods in the Company shop were cheaper than elsewhere, and it was well known that Crawshay from time to time sold provisions to his Hirwaun workmen at wholesale prices 'in order to bring the tradesmen to heel'.

Fothergill, and an attempt by Price to persuade Fothergill's Treforest workmen of the benefits of a Truck-free society ended in fiasco.<sup>87</sup>

One of the unexpected and paradoxical by-products of this contest was an alliance in local and parliamentary politics between Price and Fothergill. It is noticeable that in his conduct of the anti-Truck crusade Price had been careful to avoid personalities. The stipendiary magistrate, H. A. Bruce, had been far more outspoken than Price, and, characteristically, Bruce and Fothergill were thereafter political enemies. Not so Dr. Price. If anything, he and Fothergill came closer together, and, subsequently, the latter found no warmer supporter in Aberdare than the man who had led the prosecution in 1851. During the general election of 1868, for example, when past records were critically reviewed, it was Bruce who publicly attacked him on the Truck issue and Price who defended him.<sup>88</sup> But by then the association between Fothergill and Price—the nonconformist minister and the anglican ironmaster—had become almost a traditional element in Aberdare politics. Both served on the local Board of Health, Fothergill as its first chairman until hounded out of active participation in public affairs after the scandal of the 1857 local election.<sup>89</sup> On that famous occasion—a contest which occasioned great excitement—Fothergill, Dr. Roberts, Dr. Price, and Philip John had been re-elected with an overwhelming majority.<sup>90</sup> The opposition, led by Thomas Evans, a mineral agent, thereupon examined the voting papers, and initiated proceedings against Fothergill for unfair practices, 'in an effort', as they put it, 'to clean up corrupt local elections'.<sup>91</sup> The award of the magistrate in dismissing the case had been that, although there was a clear factual basis for the charges against Fothergill, the prosecution had failed to prove intent. Consequently, the opposition pressed charges against Fothergill's agent, Rees Hopkin Rhys, a guardian, but these also failed, as did *quo warranto* proceedings in Queen's Bench.<sup>92</sup> It seems fairly clear, from the records, that Fothergill and his party were technically guilty of the misdemeanours attributed to them, and since Price had,

<sup>87</sup> For a report of the Treforest meeting see *C.M.G.*, 7 June 1851.

<sup>88</sup> For Bruce's attack see, for example, *Merthyr Telegraph*, 24 October 1868, and for Price's defence see *Seren Cymru*, 13 December 1867.

<sup>89</sup> For Fothergill's chairmanship of the Board see *Aberdare Leader*, 27 June 1903. *Y Gwron*, 28 August 1858, says that he retired from public life and the Board of Health on account of attacks on him by unnamed persons. Price was certainly not a party to this.

<sup>90</sup> Dr. Roberts was a surgeon employed by the Abernant Company. Philip John was a grocer; see Slater's *Directory* for 1868, *sub* Aberdare.

<sup>91</sup> See T. Evans's letter accusing Price, in his editorial capacity, of trying to whitewash Fothergill, in *Y Gwron*, 14 November 1857.

<sup>92</sup> Details of this contest can be traced in *C.M.G.*, 9 September 1857, *passim*, and *Y Gwron* of the same dates, with the addition of *Y Gwron*, 23 February 1858.

as it were, been returned 'on the same ticket' he was obliged to defend Fothergill. But he could do this only at the cost of alienating a section of the nonconformist party from among whom he had emerged ten years previously.

IEUAN GWYNEDD JONES.

Swansea.

*(To be concluded)*