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‘The living dead of the mining industry’: Deindustrialisation, sheltered workplaces and the re-employment of disabled miners in post-war Wales.

Steven Thompson

In a letter was published in *The Miner*, the official journal of the South Wales Miners’ Federation, in 1944, J. M. Jones of South Pit Lodge addressed a topic that was gaining considerable and increasing attention, both in south Wales and beyond, at that time. Jones remarked on the high levels of industrial impairment that he witnessed around him in his community. While some men had been ‘maimed for life through accident’, others were incapacitated by pneumoconiosis as a result of the inhalation of coal dust. Such men were the ‘living dead of the mining industry’, ‘sentenced to a hopeless, destitute and empty future’:

Go through these villages, talk to these men, and they will tell you how they suffer mentally and physically. Slow and unsteady in step, the small hill leading to their home leaves them exhausted . . . young in age, old in body, and wasted. With their bony frames and crumbling lungs, they trudge along to the end of their days . . . forgotten men.<sup>1</sup>

As ‘one of the victims of this dread disease’ himself, Jones called on his comrades to raise the matter in their lodge meetings, in Federation conferences, and in their communities, to dispel from the men’s minds that they were ‘the cast-offs of industry.’ In particular, he mentioned the possibility of rehabilitation to equip the men for work in light industry and, in addition,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Miner*, (January 1945), p. 14.

the need to attract such industries to south Wales to ‘absorb these stricken men of the mining industry’.

Such a rhetoric of impairment, with calls for rehabilitation and alternative forms of suitable employment for disabled people, came to prominence in the 1940s and was part of a range of developments that led to significant initiatives and policies in medical and vocational rehabilitation, in regional policy and the diversification of the economy, and in the resettlement of disabled workers, often in sheltered workplaces, in the post-war period. South Wales was very much at the heart of these various developments in modern British history, both in terms of its influential role in the development of national, Britain-wide approaches but also in terms of distinct experiments in provision that were not replicated elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Focus on this particular region contributes particular insights into the history of disabled employment in Britain and demonstrates the considerable effort made to ensure provision and the extent of the political consensus behind it.

### Industrial impairment in south Wales

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<sup>2</sup> On the centrality of south Wales to scientific and medical research on pneumoconiosis, and union campaigning on this matter, see Arthur McIvor and Ronald Johnston, *Miners’ Lung: A History of Dust Disease in British Coal Mining* (Aldershot, 2007); Michael Bloor, ‘The South Wales Miners’ Federation, miners’ lung and the instrumental use of expertise, 1900 – 1950’, *Social Studies of Science*, 30, 1 (2000), pp. 125-40. For more detail on the south Wales economy, regional policy and development areas, see Leon Gooberman and Ben Curtis, ‘The age of factories: the rise and fall of manufacturing in south Wales, 1945-1985’, in Louise Miskell (ed.), *New Perspectives on Welsh Industrial History* (Cardiff, 2020), pp. 181-204; Leon Gooberman, *From Depression to Devolution: Economy and Government in Wales, 1934-2006* (Cardiff, 2016).

The letter from J. M. Jones to *The Miner* was just one item among a growing number of treatments of the ‘toll of the mine’ in the Welsh and British press in the 1940s, many of them focused on the problems in south Wales. In particular, it was the matter of pneumoconiosis that focused attention on the region and on the matter of industrial impairment in this period. Between 1931 and 1945, 22,000 men across Britain had been certified with pneumoconiosis – with 5,000 in the latter year alone – and 19,000 of them had worked in south Wales despite the coalfield employing only a sixth of all coalminers across Britain. Many such men had been able to find employment during the war years as the demand for labour increased but unemployment amongst this group increased in the immediate post-war years so that there were 5,000 of them unemployed by 1949, consisting of about 30 per cent of all those certified with pneumoconiosis; the vast majority of these unemployed men were to be found in south Wales rather than distributed more evenly across the British coalfields.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Committee on Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire was the only one of its type established in Britain in the post-war decades and this was attributed to the extent of the problem in the region and the pressure exerted by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) on the Minister of Labour.<sup>4</sup>

The sense of crisis was exacerbated by a measure passed in 1943, that prevented men diagnosed with pneumoconiosis from working in the coal industry.<sup>5</sup> That these men were excluded from the coal industry by a medical diagnosis, in communities in which there were so few other opportunities for alternative employment, created a significant social problem. A

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<sup>3</sup> P. Hugh-Jones and C. M. Fletcher, *The Social Consequences of Pneumoconiosis among Coalminers in South Wales* (London, 1951), pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives, London (TNA), LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales minutes, 23 March 1956, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> McIvor and Johnston, *Miners' Lung*, pp.86-7.

diagnosis of pneumoconiosis had a range of social consequences for these men. The most obvious impact was on their earning capacity; a survey undertaken in 1946 found that while the average earnings of a skilled collier approximated £9 a week, something like 75 per cent of pneumoconiotic miners who succeeded in getting another job in those late 1940s received less than £5 a week in their new occupations. Alongside this, the experience of having been forced out of the coal industry, and breaking contact with colleagues and a particular work culture, contributed to an increase in depression and mental illness. The period immediately after losing his employment was considered extremely important by medical and rehabilitation professionals – the man had lost the only job at which he was skilled and for which he was paid a good wage, and now found himself on the ‘dole’ and with little to structure his day.<sup>6</sup> That possibility of depression was exacerbated by fears for the future as many sufferers had seen family members and work colleagues fade away as the disease took its toll on their bodies and led them to an early grave. The physical effects on the body and the suffering experienced was considerable, and caused massive trauma in the families affected; a local minister in the anthracite district noted how the men ‘die many times before they are brought to their death-bed’.<sup>7</sup>

That measure of 1943 was partly set aside in 1948, and this meant that some men could continue working in the industry under ‘approved’ dust conditions, but the greater problem through the 1950s and particularly the 1960s was the programme of colliery closures that meant the potential redundancies of so many disabled miners. This matter was a sensitive one and exercised the thoughts and efforts of the NUM in those post-war years. Miners’ trade unions across Britain had long insisted, to varying degrees of success, that coal employers

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<sup>6</sup> Dr Idris Davies, ‘Rehabilitation and resettlement in pneumoconiosis’, *Rehabilitation: Journal of the British Council of Rehabilitation* (January, 1951), pp. 12, 23.

<sup>7</sup> *The Guardian*, 18 December 1945, p. 4.

had a moral responsibility to those men impaired by work in their employ, while the Workmen's Compensation legislation from 1897 onwards, though not without problems in this regard, had worked to formalise 'light work' for 'partially disabled' men in receipt of partial compensation.<sup>8</sup> This all meant that the industry continued to employ large numbers of disabled miners in a variety of roles, both underground and on the surface, by the 1940s, and that the newly nationalised industry inherited the practice of placing disabled men in light work. The closure of older, less productive collieries in the late 1940s and 1950s, and the broader series of closures in the 1960s, posed even greater challenges to these efforts as the task of moving disabled miners to other collieries, themselves with large numbers of impaired men in light work already, became more difficult. With the closure of Great Mountain Colliery, Tumble in 1962, for example, the miners' union insisted that only the movement of able-bodied men from lighter work to face-work would free up sufficient places at Cynheidre Colliery to accommodate the partially disabled men from Great Mountain.<sup>9</sup> Calculations on the ability of collieries to absorb disabled men posed complications for the NUM's response to colliery closures.

Such was the provision made within the coal industry for disabled workers that the sociologist John Sewel, in his study of colliery closure and social change in the Dulais Valley in the 1970s, remarked on 'the hidden "sheltered workshop" function of collieries'; this function, he remarked, was assisted by workmates sharing out the additional work produced by the employment of an impaired man and by the 'indulgence of local management'. With

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the 'moral economy' of provision for impaired men, see Kirsti Bohata, Alexandra Jones, Mike Mantin and Steven Thompson, *Disability in Industrial Britain: A cultural and literary history of impairment in the coal industry, 1880-1948* (Manchester, 2020), pp. 185-6.

<sup>9</sup> South Wales Coalfield Collection, Swansea University (SWCC), Swansea University, NUM/L/21/34, NUM, Minutes of Swansea District meetings, 14 January 1961.

colliery closures, this function was too often lost and disabled men were likely to find themselves ‘the most likely candidates for redundancy but also . . . in the weakest position to compete for jobs in an already difficult local labour market’.<sup>10</sup> Something of the scale of this “sheltered workshop” function’ can be seen in the papers completed as part of the process to close the Onllwyn No.1 Colliery in 1964: of the 490 men employed at the colliery, fully 92 (i.e. 19 per cent) were recorded as having an industrial impairment, most of them pneumoconiosis or injuries sustained in accidents.<sup>11</sup> As the colliery closure programme continued more attention was given to this matter and a return of 34 collieries in the late 1960s found that the rate of disablement varied from 4.5 per cent at Blaenant Colliery (15 out of 334 men employed) to 43.4 per cent at Aberpergwm (135 out of 311 men employed), with an average across the whole group of 21.8 per cent (4,453 out of 20,402 men employed).<sup>12</sup>

Given such proportions, it is possible to understand the attention given this matter in the post-war period. Even as the numbers of unemployed disabled people declined from the late 1940s onwards, nevertheless the constant stream of disabled ex-miners into the labour market as a result of colliery closures ensured that this continued to be a considerable social problem. By 1966, for example, there were 2,000 partially disabled men seeking employment in the south Wales coalfield and the prospect of another 1,200 men in same category coming

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<sup>10</sup> John Sewell, *Colliery Closure and Social Change: A Study of a South Wales Mining Valley* (Cardiff, 1975), p. 7. For another contemporary social survey that characterised the coal industry as ‘a form of sheltered employment’, see Stephen W. Town, *After the Mines: Changing employment opportunities in a South Wales valley* (Cardiff, 1978), p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> SWCC, MNA/NUM/L/61/B/66, Onllwyn Lodge, ‘National Coal Board, South Western Division, Area No.9, Onllwyn No.1 Colliery, Schedule of Manpower Employed, position as at 13/11/64’.

<sup>12</sup> TNA, EW 7/1115, Table showing ages and numbers of disabled men in 34 collieries as at 1 April 1967.

on to the labour market in next two years as a result of colliery closures.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it was stated that the National Coal Board (NCB) viewed the matter of providing jobs for elderly and disabled miners as the main problem arising from the rundown of the industry. Civil servants and ministers at the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Labour, the latter with an office for Wales in Cardiff, in addition to successive Welsh Ministers, all agreed and looked to deal with this problem as sensitively as possible.<sup>14</sup>

### **Schemes for the resettlement of the disabled ex-miners**

The need for employment for disabled ex-miners, therefore, was universally acknowledged and there was significant political will to explore various possibilities from the 1940s onwards. The context in those immediate post-war years, with the political commitment to full employment, the considerable power and influence of trade unions, and the creation of a welfare state, meant that considerable effort and resources were dedicated to this particular social problem. More broadly, significant attention was devoted to the rehabilitation and ‘resettlement’ of disabled persons in industry beyond just the coal industry. As Minister of Labour, Ernest Bevin has initiated a scheme to place more disabled persons in industry in 1941, and a proposed extension of this initiative led to the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Committee on the Rehabilitation and Resettlement of Disabled Persons, under the chairmanship of George Tomlinson, M.P., appointed in December 1941. In its final

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<sup>13</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, Grenfell Factories: Silicosis, Letter from A. G. Thompson, Board of Trade Office for Wales, to L. R. Hinson, D.1 Division, London, 13 July 1966.

<sup>14</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, Letter from A. G. Thompson, Board of Trade Office for Wales, to L. R. Hinson, D.1 Division, London, 13 July 1966.



report in early 1943, the Committee made a number of recommendations on the establishment of a scheme of medical and vocational rehabilitation of disabled persons, on the one hand, and a service to facilitate the entry of disabled people into suitable employment, on the other. The coalition government accepted the recommendations of the report in principle and subsequently passed the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act in 1944; this legislation was the basis for official policy until the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> The main purpose of the Act, following Tomlinson, was the rehabilitation and training of persons disabled by disease, injury or other impairments and the placing of such individuals in suitable employment. The first part of this purpose was served by medical rehabilitation in hospitals and other health-care contexts, in addition to vocational training at one of seventeen Industrial Rehabilitation Units located across Britain, including one at Cardiff.

More importantly for the current study, the second part of the Act introduced a range of measures intended to facilitate the ‘resettlement’ of disabled persons in employment. First, any person of working age was able to register voluntarily at their local employment exchange as a disabled person; a distinction was drawn on the register between Category I, which included disabled people judged capable of work in ‘normal’ industrial conditions, and Category II that consisted of more severely disabled individuals that required ‘special’ conditions in sheltered workplaces. Disability Resettlement Officers, trained to place disabled persons in employment, were appointed at each employment exchange. They were to advise disabled persons on the types of work that might prove suitable to them, recommend medical rehabilitation and vocational training, consult with voluntary and local authority welfare

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<sup>15</sup> The following overview of the legislation is based upon sources in Modern Records Centre, Warwick University (MRC), MSS.292B/146.9/3, Ministry of Labour Press Notice, ‘Disabled Persons Act comes of age’, 20 February 1965, and Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for the years 1939-1946* [Cmd.7225], 1946-47, xii, pp. 232-43.

agencies, and liaise with local employers to facilitate the successful placing of disabled people. Moreover, Disablement Advisory Committees, constituted by representatives of local employers, relevant trade unions, local authorities and other, relevant organisations, were established at a local level to survey conditions in their areas and to make recommendations to the Ministry of Labour, on the one hand, and to oversee the disablement register locally and liaise with local employers, on the other hand.<sup>16</sup> One of the issues over which the DACs liaised with local employers was their observance of the quota system established by the Act, by which employers with twenty members of staff or more were required to recruit at least 3 per cent of their workforce from the disabled persons register.

One of the most eye-catching aspects of the Act was the Disabled Person's Employment Corporation, soon re-named Remploy, established in 1945 to provide sheltered employment workplaces for the most severely disabled individuals.<sup>17</sup> This was a non-profit company that was responsible for the provision of employment to severely disabled people who required employment under 'special' (i.e. sheltered) conditions. The very first Remploy factory in Britain, opened on 29 April 1946, was located on the former Royal Ordnance factory site at Bridgend. A decade later, there were twelve Remploy factories in south Wales producing a range of different items: Abertillery (textiles, industrial gloves); Blackwood (cardboard boxes); Bridgend (tables, textiles); Brynamman (kitchen units); Merthyr (orthopaedic and surgical appliances, industrial shelving); Neath (printing, metal windows); Porth (kitchen units); Swansea (kitchen units); Tonyrefail (kitchen cabinets); Treforest

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<sup>16</sup> For more detail on Disablement Advisory Committees, see MRC, MSS.292/146.92/6, Trades Union Congress, Disablement Advisory Committees, 1945-1959, 'Constitution and Functions of Disablement Advisory Committee', c.1945.

<sup>17</sup> On the history of Remploy, see Andrew Mark Holroyde, 'Sheltered Employment and Disability in the Classic Welfare State: Remploy, c.1944-1979' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2019).

(tables, huts and glasshouses); Treorchy (furniture); and Ystradgynlais (kitchen units).

Homeworking schemes, by which Remploy factories provided the materials for products to be assembled or finished by severely disabled individuals at home, were also organised from the Bridgend, and later Treforest, factories.<sup>18</sup> The Act of 1944 applied to the whole of Britain but, given the higher rates of disablement in south Wales relative to other places, and the greater levels of unemployment of disabled persons on the registers, the Act was perhaps a more significant influence in the regional economy than elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

Before Remploy could make its presence felt in south Wales, the particular problem of pneumoconiosis had led to a Working Party under the chairmanship of Dai Grenfell, M.P. for Gower and Parliamentary Secretary for Mines during the war years, being appointed in 1945. It looked into the employment opportunities of pneumoconiotic miners and concluded that:

There is substantial agreement among all consulted that provision of work for disabled persons is more urgent than in the case of able-bodied unemployment and justifies a measure of priority. This is because of the adverse psychological effects of the feeling of being outcast and unwanted, which persons disabled by these diseases

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<sup>18</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales minutes, 14 December 1956, Appendix I.

<sup>19</sup> Remploy's factories were located across Britain but particular concentrations were evident in those districts in which existed the greatest need, most notably the industrial districts of south Wales, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the north-east of England; J. L. Edwards, 'Remploy: an experiment in sheltered employment for the severely disabled in Great Britain', *International Labour Review*, 147 (1958), p. 151. One source suggested that, by the mid-1950s, over a sixth of the Remploy workers in Britain were resident in Wales; *Western Mail*, 22 February 1955, p. 4.

experience. In the vivid phrase of one medical witness, they feel they are “just waiting for the undertaker”.<sup>20</sup>

The suggestion made by Grenfell’s Working Party was the erection of ten ‘advance factories’ (i.e. factories built for companies to then occupy) as an inducement for commercial firms to locate in areas they would not otherwise have considered. Accordingly, in December 1945, ten such factories, each of 25,000 sq. ft. were authorised in areas of south Wales with large numbers of disabled unemployed.<sup>21</sup> The factories were built at Ammanford, Garnant, Tonypany, Ponthenry, Llwynypia, Cross Hands, Ferndale, Bargoed, Ynyshir and Ystalyfera, at a cost of £400,000, and were managed by the Trading Estate Company.<sup>22</sup> They were to be tenanted by companies that would then employ ‘disabled persons’ as defined by the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944. The inducement offered by these ‘advance factories’ did not have the desired result and so potential tenants were also offered a reduction in the rent to be paid in return for the employment of ‘disabled persons’: the companies were required to employ disabled people to the extent of a minimum of 50 per cent of the total workforce in return for a 50 per cent reduction in the rents to be paid.<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, five other factories

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<sup>20</sup> TNA, LAB 21/244, Training and resettlement of disabled persons: Grenfell factories, ‘The provision of employment in south Wales for persons suspended from the mining industry on account of silicosis and pneumoconiosis’, October 1945, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, ‘Grenfell Factories. Brief Note by the Office for Wales’, 19 April 1967, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, LAB 8/1350, Official Committee on Balanced Distribution of Industry, ‘Provision of employment in South Wales for persons suspended from the mining industry on account of silicosis and pneumoconiosis’, 29 November 1945; TNA, LAB 20/394, Report of the Industrial Rehabilitation, Training and Employment Sub-Committee of the National Joint Pneumoconiosis Committee, presented to the National Joint Pneumoconiosis Committee in 1948, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 5 January 1946, p. 3.

were built on a 'sliding scale' basis by which rent concession was fixed in proportion to numbers of disabled people employed.

The Grenfell scheme was never envisaged as a complete solution to the problem of disabled unemployment. It was believed that the maintenance of full employment would deal with this issue in the main and that the Grenfell factories would fill any gaps and absorb remaining disabled workers. The Grenfell factories were intended for men who suffered dust disease, rather than other physical impairments, and it was believed that most pneumoconiotic miners would be able to manage work in the dust-free conditions of light industry without too much difficulty. In addition, the Grenfell Working Party believed that it was important to avoid the 'sense of inferiority and dependence' and 'the segregation of this class of workers from their fellows' that would have resulted from employment in sheltered workplaces.<sup>24</sup> As such, pneumoconiotic miners would find themselves working alongside non-impaired workers in the Grenfell factories in 'normal' industrial conditions and in factories continued on a purely commercial basis.<sup>25</sup>

While the Grenfell factories constituted a focused attempt to provide for a particular group of disabled people in south Wales, and while Remploy factories provided employment for more severely disabled ex-miners in the regions, other, voluntary efforts can be observed that contributed to the mix of resettlement activities. Of these, the most important was the Maes-yr-Haf Educational Settlement, established in 1927 by a number of Quaker activists to provide an unemployed club at Trealaw in the Rhondda Valley. It started various workshops

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<sup>24</sup> Board of Trade, *Provision of employment in South Wales for persons suspended from the mining industry on account of silicosis and pneumoconiosis* [Cmd.6719], 1945-46, xx, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, LAB 20/395, National Joint Pneumoconiosis Committee, Industrial Rehabilitation Training and Employment Sub-Committee, A. T. Doig and C. G. Hillier, Ministry of Labour, Cardiff, 'Pneumokoniosis Job Survey in South Wales', 18 February 1948, p. 69.

for disabled girls and boys – hand-weaving for the girls, carpentry for the boys – but these came to an end at the start of the war.<sup>26</sup> Then, in 1943, apparently in response to the Tomlinson report and the imminent passage of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, and because, as one of the organisers later wrote, ‘the Rhondda Valley had the highest percentage of disabled persons in the whole of Great Britain’, the Settlement established workshops for disabled workers.<sup>27</sup> The Wales Regional Controller of the Ministry of Labour was strongly in favour of supporting this initiative, partly because, as he stated, ‘we have an unlimited supply of severely disabled men in Tonypany and surrounding districts’, and clearly it coincided with official measures to address the issue of disabled unemployment.<sup>28</sup>

The ‘Industries for the Disabled’, as this part of Mae-yr-Haf’s activities came to be named, started out on a small scale, with only five men engaged in the production of furniture, such as tables and cupboards, and rug-making, from May 1944. By April 1947, thirty disabled men were in employment and accounts showed a profit of £2,586.<sup>29</sup> It employed men with a variety of impairments and disabling conditions, including some associated with mining such as pneumoconiosis, bronchitis, emphysema, and limblessness but also impairments not caused by industrial contexts, such as epilepsy, heart disease,

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<sup>26</sup> TNA, LAB 20/80, Maes-Yr-Haf Educational Centre for grant, Letter from William Noble, Maes-yr-Haf, to C. G. Hillier, Ministry of Labour, Cardiff, 17 April 1943.

<sup>27</sup> William Hazelton, *Maes-yr-haf 1927-1952: An account of twenty-five years of work and friendship in the Rhondda Valley* (Trealaw, c.1952), p.11.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, LAB 20/80, Correspondence from C. G. Hillier, Regional Office, Cardiff, to Ministry of Labour Headquarters, London, 8 November 1944.

<sup>29</sup> TNA, LAB 9/109, Scheme of grants to voluntary undertakings employing severely disabled persons: Maes-Yr-Haf of Settlement Industries for the Disabled account file, Supplementary Note for Briefing, prior to inspection on 12 November 1951.

impaired vision, tuberculosis and learning disability.<sup>30</sup> The Settlement received ‘deficiency grants’ from the Ministry of Labour which consisted of a payment per disabled worker per year to cover the additional costs of employing such severely disabled individuals.<sup>31</sup>

### Success or Failure?

These, then, were the main providers of employment and sheltered employment to impaired ex-miners in south Wales in the post-war period. A number of smaller initiatives, such as the Factory for Peace at Seven Sisters in the Dulais Valley, established in 1963 and engaged in the production of storage heaters, and the Monwel Works, initially set up at Cwmbran in 1966 and later with sites at Pontypool and Tredegar from 1967, that produced road traffic signs, also made some provision but this was on a much smaller scale than that provided through the Grenfell factories, Remploy and Maes-yr-Haf. The extent to which the problem of unemployed, disabled ex-miners in post-war south Wales was solved by these various efforts and policies is arguable. The different initiatives and schemes varied from place to place, over time, and between different groups within the disabled population; defining success, whether it be in terms of numbers employed or else according to the subjective experience of disabled workers, is also a difficult matter.

For its part, the Grenfell scheme was characterised by one very notable success. The Austin Motors factories at Bargoed, producing toy pedal cars, was considered an excellent employer and succeeded in providing employment for a large number of pneumoconiotic ex-

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<sup>30</sup> TNA, LAB 20/80, ‘Workers at Maes-yr-Haf Industries 13.2.57’.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, LAB 20/147, Disabled Persons Act 1944: Cambrian Factory Ltd., Llanwrtyd Wells, Brecon, Note from G. C. Slater to W. Taylor, 7 July 1952.

miners. As at 30 September 1968, for example, of the 450 employees employed in the two sites at Bargoed, 432 were registered disabled and all of them were registered as such as a result of pneumoconiosis.<sup>32</sup> Management in the factories graded work processes and the abilities of workers with different levels of impairment, and attempted to match worker to task with the result that industrial relations were good, productivity and profitability were favourable, and workers apparently felt some ‘community of interest (all ex-miners; all pneumoconiosis sufferers) in themselves and in the viability of the factory’. The result was that ‘Over the years “Austins” has become for mineworkers in the area, a highly desirable place to work when pneumoconiosis drives them out of the pits. A number with partial pneumoconiosis have voluntarily left mining in order to work at Austins.’<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, this particular company was the only real success in the Grenfell scheme. More typical perhaps was Crompton Parkinson Ltd., at Garnant in the Amman Valley, which employed 59 disabled persons, 14 of whom were pneumoconiotic cases, out of a total workforce of 209 workers, or even Celnik & Power Ltd. at Tonypany with 135 workers, of whom 11 were disabled and only 4 were pneumoconiotic cases.<sup>34</sup> Difficulties had beset the Grenfell scheme from the start and it was not long before it was judged a failure. At the NUM annual conference in 1950, for example, the scheme was described by one south Wales delegate as having ‘flopped’. Will Arthur noted that many factories remained unoccupied and blamed the low level of the inducement for the reluctance of companies to

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<sup>32</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, Board of Trade Office for Wales, ‘The Grenfell Scheme’, January 1969.

<sup>33</sup> TNA, LAB 21/244, Training and resettlement of disabled persons: Grenfell factories, Letter from S. Ll. Awbery, Deputy Controller, Department of Employment & Productivity, to E. Betterton, Disabled Persons Branch, Department of Employment & Productivity, 6 March 1969.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, Grenfell Factories: Silicosis, Board of Trade Office for Wales, ‘The Grenfell Scheme’, January 1969.



take them on. He was also critical of the policy of allowing private employers to take the factories on and then produce 'luxury goods', the market for which was very unstable leading to redundancies when demand fell away. He believed they should be run as state concerns, using disabled miners to produce equipment for the Post Office, the mining industry and for other nationalised industries.<sup>35</sup>

A civil servant at the Ministry of Labour came to a similarly pessimistic conclusion in 1951. While all ten factories were occupied by that time, he opined that 'It is true to say that the Grenfell Scheme has been somewhat disappointing in that it has not provided the amount of employment anticipated', and this was the fundamental problem throughout the post-war period. As at 26 May 1951, for example, the target labour force of the nine Grenfell factories in operation at that time was 998 but as few as 409 workers were actually employed, of whom only 218 were disabled (with 122 cases of pneumoconiosis).<sup>36</sup> It was noted that the factories were necessarily located in places where there were large numbers of pneumoconiotic miners but that these places suffered poor transport links that exacerbated the more general problem of attracting tenants. Tellingly, twenty-eight allocations of factories to companies were required to keep the ten factories occupied in the first nine post-war years, demonstrating how difficult it was to fill them on a permanent basis.<sup>37</sup>

Another analysis of the scheme, carried out in the late 1960s, noted that the reduced rent proved 'a negligible bait to strong firms and a temptation to weak'; 'the very high proportion of disabled persons required to be employed involved risks and problems quite uncompensated by a rent rebate equal only to the wages of a couple of workmen'.<sup>38</sup> Or, as

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<sup>35</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 4 July 1950, p.7.

<sup>36</sup> TNA, LAB 21/244, Letter from C. G. Hillier, to E. Harrison, London, 29 June 1951.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, 'Grenfell Factories. Brief Note by the Office for Wales', 19 April 1967, p.2.

<sup>38</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, 'Grenfell Factories. Brief Note by the Office for Wales', 19 April 1967, p.2.

was put in another analysis of the scheme, ‘more firms appear to have been deterred by a covenant of 50 per cent disabled employees’ than were attracted by the prospect of “50 per cent concession”’.<sup>39</sup>

The result of these various factors was that the Grenfell factories employed far fewer men than was hoped and made only a marginal difference to the total level of unemployment among pneumoconiotic ex-miners. The ‘de-Grenfellisation’ of some factories had to be negotiated and, by 1966, only five of the ten factories still operated under the terms of the Grenfell leases.<sup>40</sup> Civil servants were required to consider how to respond to the fact that factories were employing fewer disabled men and falling foul of the terms of their leases. At the same time, they recognised the difficulties that companies faced and were also sensitive to the fact that many areas of the coalfield were experiencing real difficulty in providing full employment; as such, they were loath to intervene if the viability of factories was to be placed in jeopardy. In addition, the rent rebates did not cost much – the rent rebate of £6,560 paid in 1965, for example, went to companies that provided jobs for 800 partially disabled men at the cost of £5 per job per annum – while the political sensitivity of the fate of disabled ex-miners meant that the factories were ‘politically . . . an extremely valuable weapon in our armoury’.<sup>41</sup> Both these considerations ensured that the Grenfell scheme continued to be supported longer than might have been the case had the scheme been administered with more attention to the bottom line. Nevertheless, the consensus seemed to be that the Grenfell

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<sup>39</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, A. G. Thompson, ‘Grenfell Factories’, 31 January 1969.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, ‘Grenfell Factories. Brief Note by the Office for Wales’, 19 April 1967, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> TNA, BD 41/328, Letter from A. G. Thompson, Board of Trade Office for Wales, to L. R. Hinson, D.1 Division, London, 13 July 1966; on the political sensitivity to the unemployment of disabled ex-miners, see also EW7/1115, Letter from James Griffiths, ‘Remploi and Colliery Closures in West South Wales’, to Ray Gunter MP, 13 January 1966; BD 41/328, A. G. Thompson, ‘Grenfell Factories’, 31 January 1969.

scheme had failed in its primary aim and that too few pneumoconiotic ex-miners were employed to make a significant difference to the level of unemployment amongst this group.

The extent to which Remploy succeeded in its aims is a little more difficult to assess and cannot be reduced to the matter of numbers of disabled people employed in quite the same way as with the Grenfell factories. If the Grenfell factories were considered 'normal' workplaces characterised by the usual industrial conditions and conducted on the basis of commercial considerations, Remploy was considered differently and, clearly, certain social welfare functions were recognised. An early leaflet intended to explain Remploy to the public, for example, described sheltered workplaces variously as 'non-competitive' and 'non-profit making', offering a clear distinction between sheltered and other workplaces.<sup>42</sup>

Reflecting such characterisations, Remploy's funding arrangements were heavily dependent on annual grants from the Exchequer to cover any trading deficit incurred as a result of the greater production costs of disabled labour. Such 'deficiency grants' inevitably increased as more and more sheltered workplaces were established by Remploy through the late 1940s and into the 1950s; from grants amounting to £7,000 in 1945-6, the cost increased to as much as £2,234,000 by 1950-51.<sup>43</sup>

Government expenditure inevitably attracted scrutiny, of course, but, in Remploy's case, that scrutiny was coloured by a tension between its social welfare functions, on the one hand, and the prospects of its factories as going concerns in a capitalist economy, on the other. Such tensions also exposed the limits of the post-war consensus on full employment, regional policy and social welfare provision as a Conservative government replaced a Labour

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<sup>42</sup> MRC, MSS.292/146.92/2, Ministry of Labour and National Service leaflet, 'The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, 1944: What is Sheltered Employment?'.

<sup>43</sup> Edwards, 'Remploy: an experiment in sheltered employment', pp. 156-8.

administration in 1951.<sup>44</sup> Certain concerns that the social welfare function of Remploy was being undermined were evident in south Wales in the early 1950s. George Thomas, M.P. for Cardiff West, raised a question relating to the dismissal of three men from the Remploy factory at Treforest in the Commons in June 1952, for example, supposedly on medical grounds; he was informed that there had been no change in policy and that it had always been the case that men who were not capable of ‘any useful work’, because of the severity of their impairment, would not be retained in employment.<sup>45</sup> This did not allay fears in the region and various officials on local Disablement Advisory Committees doubted that the vacant positions were going to be filled; significantly, they attributed the situation to ‘the profit aspect’.<sup>46</sup>

Such concerns and accusations intensified in the mid-1950s as the government embarked on a policy of ‘consolidation’ for Remploy. The rationale for this approach was that the costs of the rapid extension of Remploy, and the failure of increased wages to be matched by an increase in sales, necessitated a pause in further expansion, a consideration of the structure and organisation of Remploy, a reduction in the number of supervisory and executive staff, and a pause on the recruitment of severely disabled workers.<sup>47</sup> Labour M.P.s were vocal, in Parliament and beyond, in their criticisms of the Conservative government.

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<sup>44</sup> On the post-war consensus, see Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975); K. Jeffreys, ‘British politics and social policy during the Second World War’, *Historical Journal*, 30, 1 (1987), pp. 123-44; Rodney Lowe, ‘The Second World War, consensus, and the foundation of the welfare state’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 2 (1990), pp. 152-82.

<sup>45</sup> HC Deb 17 June 1952, col 502, cc991-2.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire, minutes, 20 June 1952, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Memorandum for Disablement Advisory Committees: ‘Remploy Limited’, 15 March 1955.

Walter Padley, Labour M.P. for the Ogmore constituency in which was located the Bridgend Remploy factory, for example, castigated the ‘Tory government’ for their ‘contemptible cuts’.<sup>48</sup> The Rev. Llywelyn Williams, M.P. for Abertillery, was one of the strongest critics of the new policy of consolidation and characterised Remploy as the greatest step forward in social progress in the post-war period. Noting the importance of ‘two great Socialist stalwarts’, Ernest Bevin and George Tomlinson, to the establishment of Remploy, he insisted that the Labour Party would always be careful that nothing should happen to ‘this great vision . . . fraught with such tremendous possibilities in the alleviation of suffering and the restoring of self-respect to so many members of the community’; his party, he said, would ‘be very solicitous that no cold hand of the Treasury shall in any way interfere with the possibilities of this scheme’. In a clear articulation of Remploy as a social service, Williams insisted that the company:

was never intended to be an ordinary business concern with profit and loss measured merely in terms of £ s. d . . . happiness, self-respect, a sense of belonging to a community, of being able to do something for one’s family are things which can never be measured in terms of financial profit and loss . . . we must dismiss altogether this idea of Remploy being a matter of £ s. d. It is a social service.

He referred to the Remploy factory in his own constituency as a ‘never-ceasing miracle’ for the ‘light and relief and real joy’ that it brought to the community.<sup>49</sup> Such politicised defence of Remploy by Labour politicians during a Conservative administration demonstrates something of the limits of political consensus in post-war Britain.

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<sup>48</sup> *Western Mail*, 31 January 1956, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> HC Deb 19 July 1955, cols 288-9; *South Wales Gazette*, 22 July 1955, p. 1.

The comments made by Williams point to the subjective experiences of disabled workers themselves and the benefits that he thought they derived from work in Remploy and other sheltered workplaces. Others, of course, shared such views and might be described as viewing Remploy as the provision of ‘employment based welfare’.<sup>50</sup> This was most certainly the view of the Trades Union Congress (TUC); in its deliberations relative to the Piercy Committee, appointed in 1953 to review progress in the rehabilitation, training and resettlement of disabled persons, the TUC stated:

It cannot be too strongly stressed that the provision of sheltered employment is a social service and cannot be considered simply by standards of commercial efficiency applicable to ordinary industry. Remploy was established to give the severely disabled, incapable of work under the ordinary conditions, all the help they needed to make the utmost use of their residual capacity in productive employment . . . The needs of the disabled themselves must necessarily be a determining factor throughout the whole field of the Company’s work . . . Concentration on problems of production and sales, inseparable from the rapid expansion in the early years, has in our view resulted in too much emphasis being laid on the Company’s commercial aspect, and too little on its responsibility to the disabled themselves. A strong re-statement of the principles of the Tomlinson Report is badly needed.<sup>51</sup>

While the sharpening political differences over Remploy can be contrasted to the earlier situation from 1945 to the early 1950s, those differences in the mid-1950s also stand

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<sup>50</sup> Jameel Hampton, ‘Discovering disability: the general classes of disabled people and the classic welfare state, 1948-1964’, *The Historian*, 75, 1 (2013), p. 77.

<sup>51</sup> MRC, MSS.292/146.9/5, ‘Committee on Rehabilitation of the Disabled’, c.1953, pp. 2-3.

in contrast, inevitably, to the later 1960s. With Labour in power again, Labour M.P.s from south Wales looked to work with the relevant ministries to ensure that Remploy met the needs of disabled ex-miners and tempered any criticisms they might have had. This was, of course, a period in which a more significant programme of colliery closures was pursued by the government and, significantly, there was some suggestion that there should be some co-ordination between that programme and the efforts to provide sheltered employment for disabled ex-miners. In 1965, Jim Griffiths, a former miners' leader and, from 1964, Secretary of State for Wales, met with deputations from the NUM and NCB about their concerns for the fate of disabled miners as pits were closed. Griffiths was convinced that the government needed to show to miners that 'colliery closures can be carried out without leading to severe hardship'; the alternative was that, otherwise, 'the Government will come under pressure to slow down the closures'.<sup>52</sup> This was met with rebuke from Ray Gunter, another M.P. from south Wales, and Minister of Labour in Wilson's government, who did not believe that sheltered employment should be the means by which to ease colliery closures and that attention should be focused instead on the efforts of government to bring new employment to the region.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the policy adopted by the Labour administration was to set the pace of colliery closures in the second half of the 1960s according to the amount of reasonable alternative employment opportunities available, rather than the extent of sheltered employment alone, and this was as true of the north-east of England and Scotland as much as south Wales.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> TNA, EW7/1115, Letter from James Griffiths, 'Remploy and Colliery Closures in West South Wales', to Ray Gunter MP, 13 January 1966.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, EW 7/1115, Letter from R. J. Gunter to James Griffiths, MP, January 1966.

<sup>54</sup> TNA, EW 7/1115, 'Meeting with N.C.B. and N.U.M. Elderly and Disabled Miners: Brief for Joint Parliamentary Secretary, D.E.A.', 1 May 1967, p. 5.

Jim Griffith's assertions on the role of sheltered workplaces in the colliery closure programme came in the context of pressure from the NUM and the NCB to extend the provision made for disabled miners. Calls for the provision by Remploy in south Wales to be extended in the mid-1960s to take account of the closure programme were rebuffed by ministers; they argued that the region already had more Remploy factories than anywhere else in Britain, that an envisaged expansion of Remploy over three years would add to the existing provision in any case, and that most disabled miners were not severely disabled and so did not come within the remit of Remploy. This last point was crucial and, in response, some new ideas about sheltered employment and the resettlement of disabled persons in work were articulated. While such ideas were not accepted and implemented, they nevertheless demonstrate the extent to which sheltered employment and disabled workers received considerable attention in post-war south Wales and how they were closely associated with considerations of the colliery closure programme.

As the discussions continued in 1966 and 1967, V. W. Oubridge, a civil servant at the Department of Economic Affairs, suggested that an organisation such as Remploy but concerned with the resettlement of less disabled workers in employment might be advantageous. In noting the cost incurred by government for each worker employed by Remploy, Oubridge suggested that an agency for the resettlement of partially disabled men might be sensible 'in so far that while it did not employ people who would otherwise be fully absorbed into the economy it did not cost the state more than would otherwise be paid out in social services'; his calculation was that partially disabled men were more productive than those with severe disability and that there would less need for deficiency grants.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> TNA, EW 7/1115, Letter from V. W. Oubridge to Mr Vernon, 21 December 1967.



The suggestion of an agency to facilitate the entry of partially disabled miners, or indeed any group of workers, into the workforce was not implemented by the government but its discussion again raised the matter of the financial costs of disabled employment relative to its social benefits. Many organisations and individuals defended Remploy on a budgetary basis. They tended to set the revenue loss on Remploy against the sums obtained by the Exchequer through the income tax and National Insurance paid by disabled workers, the taxes paid on goods purchased, not to mention the sums saved on National Assistance and unemployment benefits; they argued that the difference between the two was small enough to justify Remploy's existence. They also tended to come to the conclusion that the outlay by the government was smaller than it first appeared from Remploy's accounts and was worthwhile due to the social benefits derived by disabled workers and the community as a whole.<sup>56</sup> In a further contribution to this debate within the relevant ministries, another civil servant pointed out that these calculations considered budgetary matters alone – balancing the losses of sheltered employment against unemployment benefits and other costs of unemployment – and that a broader point needed to be made. He noted that an unemployed man produced nothing but that, if he produced only one thing, the community was better off for that one thing. This additional value to the community, he argued, needed to be taken into account when assessing the value of Remploy, and he too made the case for an additional agency to provide employment for partially disabled ex-miners that much stronger on this basis.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For examples, see TNA, EW7/1115, Letter from James Griffiths, 'Remploy and Colliery Closures in West South Wales', to Ray Gunter MP, 13 January 1966; Welsh Economic Council, Second Report of the Industry and Employment Panel, 11 July 1966, p. 7; Letter from V. W. Oubridge to Mr Vernon, 21 December 1967.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, EW 7/1115, Note from G. Conti on 'Employment of Partially Disabled Miners and an Industrial Agency', to Mr Vernon, 2 January 1968, pp. 1-2.

Apart from such social considerations, and while the work of Remploy cannot be assessed solely on the basis of the numbers of disabled people employed, it is still possible to make some assessment of the numbers involved, and certainly government monitored the amount of employment provided on a constant basis. By the end of 1954, 1,084 disabled people were employed in the thirteen Remploy factories in Wales.<sup>58</sup> By July 1966, those same factories employed 1,400 disabled persons, including 1,150 Section II cases and the level of unemployment of individuals registered as disabled stood at 4,686 (roughly 11 per cent of those on the disablement register) in comparison with a figure of 11,578 in March 1950.<sup>59</sup>

Social considerations also governed views of the Maes-yr-Haf Educational Settlement. It often referred to itself as an experiment in social work during the interwar depression and used the same analogy in its descriptions of its provision of work to disabled men. Its organisers believed that the example they set would be emulated: ‘The whole history of the Settlement has been an experiment and a readiness to pass on results to larger and more effective bodies’, it was stated, ‘One can hardly conceive of a state of society in which such a function has no place.’<sup>60</sup> Implicit here is the recognition of the small scale of the Industries for the Disabled at Maes-yr-Haf and its impact beyond the immediate locality, at least as far as the numbers of disabled people employed is concerned. The workshops employed five men when they were first established in 1943 but, while this had increased to a high-point of

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<sup>58</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire, minutes, 1 April 1955, Appendix I, Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, 1944, General Review of Progress in Wales.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, EW 7/1115, Welsh Economic Council, Second Report of the Industry and Employment Panel, 11 July 1966, p. 6.

<sup>60</sup> SWCC, MNA/I/24/1, Mae-yr-Haf Educational Settlement, Annual Report, 1945-46.

thirty-two men by 1948-9, various difficulties caused a decline to twenty-three men by 1953-4 and fifteen by the time the venture came to an end in 1957.<sup>61</sup> On this basis at least, the settlement did not make a significant contribution to efforts to reduce disabled unemployment in south Wales; in its own locality, of course, it constituted an important and valued effort to do something about this particular problem. Certainly, civil servants and officials at the Ministry of Labour were impressed by the diligence and initiative of officials at Maes-yr-Haf and did all that they could to assist its work and prolong its existence.<sup>62</sup>

Unfortunately, Maes-yr-Haf was overtaken by circumstances beyond its control. Changes in tax laws in 1947-8 made the production of furniture uneconomic while a significant fall in demand for rugs meant that a branch factory at Ynyshir was closed and staffing cut. An attempt was made to diversify the activities of the workshops and boxes for a nearby fizzy drinks factory were added to the list of products. The situation was desperate by the mid-1950s and the rehabilitative hopes of such work were being undermined: the Warden of Maes-yr-Haf, reported in 1956 that ‘The men are badly disabled and their efforts are flagging . . . So much pressure has to be brought to bear upon them to increase output in order to reduce production costs’, he stated, that ‘he [could] no longer be responsible for any further deterioration in their state of health.’<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Labour grants and financial assistance from the county council helped to protect the venture from more serious financial

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<sup>61</sup> Mae-yr-Haf Educational Settlement, Annual Reports, 1943-44; 1948-49; 1953-54; LAB 20/147, ‘Workers at Maes-yr-Haf Industries, 13.2.57’.

<sup>62</sup> For examples, see TNA, LAB 20/147, Letter from C. G. Hillier, Ministry of Labour, Cardiff Office to Headquarters, Disabled Persons Branch, 3 January 1948; Note from G. C. Slater to W. Taylor, 7 July 1952; Letter from H. V. Manly, Ministry of Labour, London, to Glyn Morris, Ministry of Labour Cardiff Office, 28 February 1957.

<sup>63</sup> TNA, LAB 20/80, ‘Note of meeting at Pontypridd Employment Exchange on 1st October 1956’.

losses but it failed to balance its books from 1949 until its eventual demise in 1957.<sup>64</sup> Maes-yr-Haf was not dissimilar to Remploy in that there was a general acknowledgement that it was not likely to make a profit, and indeed that losses were acceptable as this was a ‘piece of service which has a very real social significance’ that could be emulated by other, larger organisations.<sup>65</sup> Ultimately, Maes-yr-Haf could not continue in these circumstances and the Industries for the Disabled was wound up in 1957.

Therefore, the various schemes intended to provide employment for disabled ex-miners varied in the success with which they met the challenges that faced them. They were intended for different groups of disabled people and operated according to different considerations and priorities, but each made at least some contribution to lessening the unemployment of impaired ex-miners. On a statistical level, it is possible to see that the numbers of unemployed disabled people in south Wales fell consistently through the 1940s and 1950s, though this, of course, was not an uncomplicated pattern and we should be careful of relying on the figures alone as an assessment of the particular initiatives under consideration.

Table 1: Numbers of unemployed registered disabled persons in Wales.<sup>66</sup>

Date	Section I	Section II	Total
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<sup>64</sup> Mae-yr-Haf Educational Settlement, Annual Report, 1947-48. Also, TNA, LAB 9/109, ‘Note of meeting held at No.8 St James’s Square, London, S.W.1 on 9th July 1952’.

<sup>65</sup> Maes-yr-Haf Educational Settlement, Annual Report, 1949-50; *ibid.*, 1950-51.

<sup>66</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire minutes, 14 December 1956, Appendix IV. ‘Section I’ refers to partially disabled persons, considered capable of work in ‘normal’ industrial conditions, while ‘Section II’ consists of severely disabled persons requiring work in ‘special’ conditions (i.e. sheltered workplaces).

	Male	Female	Male	Female	
20/1/47	13,962		2,267		16,229
15/12/47	12,098	320	2,085	33	14,536
20/12/48	11,583	334	1,750	22	13,689
19/12/49	10,409	284	1,372	25	12,090
18/12/50	8,597	327	1,105	31	10,060
17/12/51	6,332	351	1,119	20	7,822
15/12/52	6,011	357	991	21	7,380
21/12/53	4,815	371	659	25	5,870
20/12/54	3,758	413	628	27	4,826
19/12/55	3,312	430	550	21	4,313
19/11/56	3,546	444	499	24	4,513

One crucially important consideration in the assessment of the reasons for the fall in the unemployment of disabled persons is the effect of the performance of the economy more generally. The broader, official aim of full employment, the status of south Wales as a Development Area, and the efforts to attract light industries to the region and thereby diversify the economy, all meant that large numbers of disabled people were absorbed into the labour force without any assistance from Disability Resettlement Officers or initiatives such as the Grenfell and Remploy factories. As was noted at the time, 578 factories and extensions of over 5,000 square feet had been approved between the end of the war and August 1954, and these provided jobs for nearly 41,000 men and 23,000 women.<sup>67</sup> Many of

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<sup>67</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire minutes, 1 April 1955, Appendix I, 'Disabled Persons (Employment) Act, 1944, General Review of Progress in Wales'.

these new jobs were filled by disabled people and here it is perhaps possible to discern the significance of the quota system. One assessment in 1953 suggested that ‘the majority of employers in Wales continue to employ substantially more than the statutory quota of 3 per cent. disabled persons.’ The voluntary returns of thirteen firms at that time, for example, suggested that 10 per cent of their collective labour force of 6,891 workers was recruited from the disabled register.<sup>68</sup> A few years later, another informal survey found three factories in which 13.2 per cent, 12.9 per cent and 15.2 per cent of workers respectively were registered as disabled.<sup>69</sup>

Local authorities also contributed to the effort to ensure employment for disabled people and a survey of different types of councils in Wales in 1952 found that the proportion of workers who were registered varied from 2.7 per cent in county councils and 4.1 per cent in borough councils, to 7.1 per cent in urban district councils and 8.5 per cent in rural district councils; in total, 2,367 registered disabled persons were employed by Wales’ local authorities at that time.<sup>70</sup> Even if the quota system was less obvious than the Grenfell and Remploy factories, therefore, it is possible that it had at least some impact in causing employers to consider the employment of disabled people to a greater degree than might otherwise have been the case.

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<sup>68</sup> *Wales and Monmouthshire, Report of Government Action for the year ended 30th June 1953* [Cmd.8959], 1952-53, xvii, p. 39.

<sup>69</sup> *Second report from the Select Committee on Estimates together with minutes of evidence taken before sub-committee E of the Select Committee on Estimates of Session 1955-56, on 7th February, 1956, and subsequent days and an appendix, 1956-57, paper no.34, p. 63.*

<sup>70</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire minutes, 14 December 1951, ‘Quota position of local authorities in Wales and Monmouthshire’.

Some disabled people nevertheless continued to experience unemployment despite these efforts and despite the more general fall in disabled unemployment. As far as ex-miners were concerned, these tended to be older, more severely disabled men. The point was often made that when given the choice between a younger disabled man and an older disabled man, employers usually chose the former. As time passed and more disabled ex-miners were placed in employment, so the age profile of unemployed men increased and so the extent of impairment across the group was more serious. Of the 4,371 unemployed disabled persons on the register in south Wales by December 1954, for example, 2,382 were over the age of 50 and 1,655 were over the age of 55.<sup>71</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The attention to the unemployment of disabled people and the provision of different forms of support into employment after the Second World War constituted a distinctive innovation in state policy on disability and social welfare. It was the culmination of various currents in social welfare, medical rehabilitation and the management of the labour market from the decades before the war years but it also built upon a number of the political forces and attitudes unleashed by the war itself and the distinctive post-war environment in which full employment, planning and the welfare state were high priorities. With a higher disablement rate than other parts of Britain and distinctive patterns of industrial impairment, south Wales was very much at the heart of these efforts to address disabled unemployment in the post-war period and considerable efforts were made to solve the problems identified in the region. While it is possible, perhaps, to discern the limits of consensus between the

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<sup>71</sup> TNA, LAB 20/538, Committee on the Resettlement of Disabled Persons in South Wales and Monmouthshire minutes, 1 April 1955, Appendix 1, p. 2.

political parties and point to certain disagreements or differences of opinion between the parties, what is also striking is the continued commitment to the employment of disabled people across different governments in those post-war decades.

It is clear to see that the particular matter of disabled ex-miners was seen as a political and social priority. Both the NCB and the NUM were keen that such men were not treated as the ‘cast-offs of industry’, ‘sentenced to a hopeless, destitute and empty future’, and that provision was made to ensure that they could continue their working lives, albeit in other industries beyond coal. Both were well placed, even during times of Conservative government, to make the case for such men and to exert considerable political pressure to alleviate their difficulties, and it is instructive to see the ways in which the discussion of alternative sources of employment, and even sheltered employment, was carried on in the context of the colliery closure campaign. With the Grenfell and Remploy factories in mind, it might be argued that disabled ex-miners were the best-connected and more powerful group of disabled people in mid-twentieth century Britain, and that it was the economic importance of coal and the power of the miners’ trade union that granted them that power.

This point is valid, perhaps, even if the extent to which the various initiatives succeeded is questionable. Considerable resource and effort were expended on the various mechanisms and agencies that constituted official policy, from advance factories and sheltered workplaces for disabled ex-miners to quotas, disablement registers, and rent rebates and deficiency grants from general taxation. What constitutes success in this context is debatable, and would have varied according to the perspective from which these efforts were viewed. Certainly the various initiatives did not end unemployment among disabled people, or indeed ex-miners, in the region in that post-war period, nor did the majority of Grenfell factories and Remploy workshops quite achieve the levels of disabled employment that politicians and civil servants had hoped for them.



More importantly, viewed from the perspective of impaired ex-miners themselves, the jobs provided in these factories and workshops could not offer wages that compared with work in the coal industry, nor could they prevent the loss of status that came with a reduced income or, for many of the more severely impaired, the social isolation and pain that impairment meant in their daily lives. At the same time, it is conceivable that these were never the real aims here and that official policy intended to do no more than to help plug some of the gaps left by the ordinary workings of the economy as a whole, at time when full employment was a political aim. If the aims of official policy were more modest than some of the more idealistic hopes for Remploy workshops, Grenfell factories, disablement registers, quotas, deficiency grants and the all the rest, it could still nevertheless be argued that these ex-miners were not necessarily the 'forgotten men' of the coalfield and a not inconsiderable amount of political effort and practical resource was devoted to their cause.