

# The Plight of Mid Glamorgan

Roy Davies

Wales has been described as the poorest nation in the United Kingdom and Mid Glamorgan, the poorest county in Wales. Cynon Valley is the poorest district in Mid Glamorgan. The population of Mid Glamorgan was estimated as 544,300 in 1993 with a workforce of 155,200 in employment or one person working in each four.

The *South Wales Echo* in August 1992 presented a comparative picture of the economic and social conditions in Mid Glamorgan and East Sussex which is shown below

|                             | Mid Glamorgan (%) | East Sussex |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Population change:          | -1.8              | +3.7        |
| Men not employed:           | 34.5              | 22.4        |
| Women not employed:         | 45.0              | 35.4        |
| Owner-occupiers:            | 73.5              | 73.1        |
| Living in council property: | 18.9              | 11.6        |
| Households with no car      | 37.4              | 33.1        |
| Households with two cars    | 18.3              | 22.9        |
| Long-term illness           | 39.2              | 24.2        |

The Mid Glamorgan County Council Economic Policy and Research Unit has done valuable work by publishing a quarterly bulletin appraising the county's economic and social circumstances. This article is based on some excerpts from the bulletins which draw attention to the difficulties facing people in Mid Glamorgan over the last decade.

The economy of the county relative to other counties has had many setbacks in the last decade because of the decline in basic industries and the lack of new industries to replace them. Wales has depended a great deal on state intervention to locate new industries, built the Thatcher and Major governments with their policies based on market forces have weakened the situation considerably. According to recent statistics from the Welsh Development Industry, Mid Glamorgan has attracted 36 foreign firms, mainly from Germany and Japan, but they have not remained in the county.

One of the most damaging blows to jobs in Mid Glamorgan has been the decline of its mining and manufacturing industries. Moreover, despite attracting new industries and retaining Tower Colliery, they have not replaced the jobs lost

as is reflected in the high rate of unemployment. The employment position in Mid Glamorgan is given below in Table 1 which illustrates the shift of structure over the period 1981-93.

Table 1: Employment in Mid Glamorgan by sex & industry

| Year | Men    | Women  | Manfn  | Services | Total   |
|------|--------|--------|--------|----------|---------|
| 1981 | 95,400 | 66,200 | 50,700 | 78,400   | 161,600 |
| 1993 | 70,300 | 75,400 | 41,800 | 94,600   | 145,800 |

The above table shows that there has been an overall increase in the number of people out of work. The most marked change was in the number of full time jobs which disappeared in manufacturing as the service sector provided jobs for women.

Unemployment has been compounded with the closure of the mines which had once been the main source of employment for many years. In 1964, Mid Glamorgan had 24 working pits employing 35,833 miners and ancillary workers. Yet by 1989, this had fallen to merely 2,533. Table 2 below shows the dramatic decline in employment in the mining industry in Mid Glamorgan.

Table 2: Employment in the Mid Glamorgan

| Year | Collieries | Employmt | %Male |
|------|------------|----------|-------|
| 1964 | 41         | 35,883   | 26.7  |
| 1974 | 21         | 16,245   | 11.1  |
| 1984 | 14         | 10,313   | 7.0   |
| 1989 | 4          | 2,533    | 1.7   |

Although the average rate of unemployment for Mid Glamorgan in 1994 was 11.4% this masks the scales of unemployment particularly in the valleys—Cynon Valley, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda, and Rhymney Valley— illustrated below.

Table 3: Male unemployment in Mid Glamorgan

|              | Eligible | Econ active | Employed(%)* |
|--------------|----------|-------------|--------------|
| Cynon Valley | 19,998   | 15,320      | 59.3         |
| Rhondda      | 24,078   | 17,972      | 57.5         |
| Ogwr         | 41,263   | 33302       | 68.9         |
| Taff Ely     | 30,931   | 25,167      | 70.2         |
| Rhymney      | 32,534   | 25,177      | 61.7         |
| Merthyr      | 18,053   | 13,762      | 60.4         |

|                | Eligible | Econ active | Employed (%) | Part-time(%) |
|----------------|----------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Cynon Valley   | 18443    | 10742       | 51.8         | 18.1         |
| Rhondda        | 21693    | 11859       | 47.9         | 16.3         |
| Ogwr           | 38661    | 24169       | 57.1         | 20.0         |
| Taff Ely       | 28594    | 16859       | 60.6         | 21.4         |
| Rhymney Valley | 30605    | 17781       | 61.7         | 18.7         |
| Merthyr        | 16948    | 9571        | 49.8         | 18.5         |

In Mid Glamorgan, 59.9% of women eligible to work were employed, compared to 62.3% for Wales and 67.6% for England. Most women worked in public administration (34%) and other services (11%).

Information about unemployment amongst people of different ages illustrates how desperate the situation is for those under forty with heavy family commitments. Mid Glamorgan's Policy Unit Report of 1993 argues that "almost 2/3rds (of the unemployed) are under 35 while young men under 25 account for a quarter of all Mid Glamorgan's unemployed". Moreover, "over two-thirds of Mid Glamorgan's unemployed have been out of work for a year or longer, with one in ten having been without a job for three years or longer. For men, long-term unemployment is an even more serious problem with two in every five employed males having not worked for a year or longer.

| Age group | Unemployed (%) |
|-----------|----------------|
| 16-24     | 32             |
| 25-34     | 31             |
| 35-44     | 18             |
| 45-54     | 13             |
| 55+       | 6              |

Source: Mid Glamorgan Policy Update, Autumn 1993

Unemployment is closely associated with poverty and this is reflected in the household incomes of people in the area. Disparities between average earnings in these districts is not so pronounced, however, as between the districts and average earnings in other parts of the UK as is illustrated below.

|                | H'd income/head | %UK average |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Cynon Valley   | £6,282          | 72.3        |
| Merthyr Tydfil | £6,283          | 72.3        |
| Ogwr           | £7,498          | 86.3        |
| Rhondda        | £5,540          | 63.8        |
| Rhymney Valley | £6,561          | 75.5        |
| Taff Ely       | £7,809          | 89.9        |

|         | Male     |         | Female   |         |
|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
|         | Mid Glam | Britain | Mid Glam | Britain |
| Manual  | £247.80  | 274.30  | £164.10  | £177.10 |
| Non-man | £382.10  | £418.20 | £258.40  | £268.70 |
| All     | £307.50  | £353.50 | £235.50  | £252.60 |

The state of the Mid Glamorgan economy illustrates that it is not strong enough to sustain the social needs of its community. The general situation is one of social deprivation associated with high unemployment and low wages. In consequence, the area has worse housing, health, dependence on income support, crime levels and drug-taking linked to the unemployment and despair. Unemployment amongst men is twice as high for men as women although they earn much more. The phrase *economic activity* underestimates the number of people unemployed as 18% are either on job training schemes or seeking work. Of the 2611 men on a government training scheme, it is unknown are on their second or third or more. For example, many miners I have spoken to, have been on more than one scheme because they 'lack job experience'. Many of the 'economically active' are seeking jobs which do not exist.