

**THE PRESS IN SCOTLAND:
ARTICULATING A NATIONAL IDENTITY?**

David Hutchison

The media are now firmly at the centre of political debate. hardly surprising, for we spend extraordinary amounts of time using television viewing and radio listening take up thirty three hours average person's week and while it is difficult to get totally accurate for time spent reading newspapers and magazines, it seems reasonable to assume that most of us spend about forty hours a week using one or other of the media. This is as much time as many people spend working and would lead any observer to conclude that much of the information we obtain about the world must come via the media. Indeed it is widely believed that the media have considerable impact upon the ways in which we form attitudes and beliefs on a large range of subjects. That is why so many organisations employ public relations consultants, in order to ensure that their 'message' gets across, and why political parties, trade unions and other bodies continually on the look out for examples of 'bias' and 'misrepresentation'.

It is instructive to look at the way in which the debate on the impact of the media has developed over the last sixty years.⁽¹⁾

In the twenties and the thirties apparently irrefutable evidence of the ability of advertising, in both the press and the new medium of radio, to persuade consumers to buy particular products led researchers in the field to postulate causal connections between media depictions of anti-social behaviour and the incidence of such behaviour in reality. Although modern researchers would now be reluctant to postulate without qualification one to one relationships, it is worth noting that the contemporary research about violence on television is conducted in terms which owe much to the kind of research work done before the war, despite the fact that the methods of that work were largely inconclusive.

In more recent times the emphasis on the behavioural effects of the media has given way to an emphasis on the rather more intangible ideological impact. Researchers who have favoured this approach have been drawing much of their theoretical apparatus from the European

tradition, tend to emphasise the ways in which the media present information within an ideological framework, which is favourable to the status quo – Western capitalist democracy. These critics argue that in such a situation it is extremely difficult for radical views to be heard. What is particularly interesting about this position as it is articulated in the UK is that it encompasses the obvious partisanship of newspapers – which, it is said, all share the same basic ideology within which they are free to champion the political party of their choice – and also the supposed impartiality of the broadcaster, which is seen as a cloak for a continuing process of ideological reinforcement. Indeed the most bitter dispute between academics and media practitioners in recent years has arisen out of the work of a group of researchers based at Glasgow University who have published several analyses which seek to prove this thesis as far as television news output is concerned⁽³⁾. Although the debate has been at times unnecessarily vitriolic, it has at least served to focus attention on the meaning of such terms as ‘consensus’ and ‘balance’ and to demonstrate the very real difficulties of achieving total ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’, no matter how good the intentions.

In the discussion on the Scottish press which follows a number of assumptions will be made. Firstly, and most obviously, that newspapers are products, whose relationship to the world of experience is not simply that of a window through which we gaze on reality. The relationship is more complex: a particular version of reality is being constructed for the reader and the nature of that version will depend on a range of factors, such as the political stance of the paper, the impact of that stance on reporting of events, the nature of the readership as perceived by the paper’s staff, and the impact of market forces on the paper. Furthermore, it is assumed that the reader uses his newspaper in various ways. He may be looking for entertainment and diversion as much as information, he may be looking for stock exchange prices or betting tips. If he belongs to one of the more powerful groups in our society, particularly those with a political axe to grind, he is likely to be concerned above all with the way in which that group’s interests are represented in the press; if he belongs to a less powerful group, he may be equally concerned to see how the concerns and problems of everyday living, for example, unemployment, damp housing, and crime are being articulated. It is also assumed that readers of newspapers are rather sceptical people. All the surveys tell us that people most certainly do not believe everything they read – indeed a growing proportion are equally distrustful of television news⁽⁴⁾. This distrust is obviously a good thing provided of course that it does not reach epidemic proportions, and gives the lie to the idea that people are simply media fodder willing to swallow any falsehood they are offered, a view all too

prevalent in certain quarters. People have a variety of sources of information and can weigh up media information alongside these. Where the media will be at their strongest is where personal experience is at its weakest. Most of us have little direct experience of, for example, serious crime, yet there is a lot of it reported, often in lurid fashion. It is surely not fanciful to suggest that the continual reporting of crime, particularly violent crime, could create a climate more favourable to authoritarian measures than our personal experience would lead us towards. What is true of crime is likely to be true of other aspects of experience. Newspapers may not push us overtly in a particular direction, but by creating a climate of opinion, they may well help to incline us towards that point of the compass. This assumption about the ideological significance of the press, its ability to influence what is discussed and how it is discussed, is the final crucial one made in the ensuing discussion.

The most immediately striking characteristic of the Scottish newspaper market is that most of the morning and Sunday newspapers read in Scotland are produced here. Because separate Scottish circulation figures for the Fleet Street titles are not produced by independent auditors, totally accurate figures are difficult to come by, but it would appear that during the week the five Scottish produced papers have about two thirds of the market, while the remaining one third is shared by the nine English produced titles, including the Manchester produced *Scottish Daily Express*.

As Table One demonstrates, the market is dominated by the *Daily Record*, which sells one copy for every seven people in the country. By way of comparison it should be noted that the biggest selling UK morning paper, the *Sun*, sells one copy for every thirteen people in England and Wales. The circulation figures achieved by the other four papers, which all hover around the 100,000 mark, compare very favourably with the regional English newspapers, none of which attain the Scottish figures. Of the English produced nationals the *Sun* makes the biggest impact in Scotland selling over 200,000 the *Scottish Daily Express* is not far behind, while the *Daily Star* tails below the 100,000 mark. The combined circulation of the Fleet Street broadsheet dailies at just over 60,000 is less than a third of the combined circulation of the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman*, the two broadsheet papers which circulate throughout Scotland.

The situation on Sundays is rather similar. Between them the *Sunday Post* and the *Sunday Mail* account for over seventy per cent of sales. The truly astonishing circulation of the *Post* – see Table Two – is inflated by significant sales in the north of England, but it is still remarkable that a

newspaper should achieve such a high penetration of its market.

TABLE 1

Circulation of Morning Newspapers in Scotland

Aberdeen Press and Journal	111,512	
Daily Record	758,169	
Dundee Courier	129,522	
Glasgow Herald	118,545	
Scotsman	96,017	
Total Scottish produced	<u>1,213,765</u>	(67%)
Daily Mail	36,267	
Daily Mirror	25,440	
Daily Star	93,934	
Daily Telegraph	24,224	
Financial Times	8,600	
Guardian	13,649	
Scottish Daily Express	178,142	
Sun	210,000	
Times	15,106	
Total English produced	<u>605,362</u>	(33%)

Sources – Audit Bureau of Circulation for Scottish titles and the Express. Other sources for English titles. The figures relate for the most part to the period January to June 1985; *Today* did not appear till 1986.

Although the *Mail's* figures pall beside those of the *Post* they too are strikingly high. Of the English produced papers, the *News of the World* makes most impact in Scotland, while the *Scottish Sunday Express* and the *Sunday People* both clear the 100,000 mark. The combined circulation of the three broadsheet Sundays is just over 180,000, considerably higher than the figure achieved by English broadsheets during the week, though hardly surprising given the absence of any Scottish paper for that segment of the market.

The obvious question which arises is why in a highly centralised country like Britain, which is geographically compact and has a reasonably effective transport system, the Scots insist on buying Scottish produced newspapers.

TABLE 2

Circulation of Sunday Newspapers in Scotland

Sunday Mail	822,394
Sunday Post	<u>1,503,854</u>
Total Scottish produced	2,326,248 (75%)
Mail on Sunday	44,383
News of the World	242,096
Observer	63,000
Scottish Sunday Express	133,438
Sunday Mirror	46,040
Sunday People	140,905
Sunday Telegraph	27,840
Sunday Times	<u>91,364</u>
Total English produced	789,066 (25%)

Source – As for Table One.

Historically it can be argued that this preference was a Hobson's choice, in that even with printing facilities in Manchester English papers had difficulty in distributing throughout Scotland⁽⁵⁾. The argument runs that if English papers had been able to crack the distribution problem at the beginning of the twentieth century the Scottish press of that time might have had difficulty in surviving. Alternatively it can be argued that once Scottish newspapers began to emphasise their Scottishness in various ways, and to carry much more information about what was happening in Scotland, a process which has accelerated since 1900, then it was unlikely that Fleet Street titles would ever make a large impact on the market. The Scottish newspaper buyer does seem to want his newspapers to talk about Scotland and it is very difficult for English titles to do that in a very satisfactory way. It should be noted however that the development of new technology makes it feasible for small proportions of a newspaper's output to be separately editionised at no great cost. It is therefore possible to envisage a situation where a paper could produce twenty different editions tailored to the needs of different parts of Britain. But although the production cost would be relatively low, the cost of employing the journalists to write the relevant copy would not be, and it is hard to see Fleet Street managements, even after they have made the breakthrough to low cost technology, considering the Scottish market ripe for attack in this fashion, although the English provinces might well be a different matter.

However it should be emphasised that there are very real fears in the Scottish newspaper industry about some current developments. Before the dispute between Rupert Murdoch's News International and the print unions broke out in early 1986, the Scottish newspaper industry was very apprehensive about the printing plant which had been constructed by that company at Kinning Park in Glasgow. It was felt that if the plant were to be used to print a northern edition of the *Sun*, which was the ostensible reason for its construction, then that paper would be in a better position to attack the market leader, the *Daily Record*. This argument does demonstrate a certain lack of confidence in the *Record*. It is hard to see how the *Sun*, even if it produced a Scottish edition, could get over the mismatch between its very obvious political ideology and the very different ideology which prevails in Scotland. Its current circulation in Scotland is impressive – and after the commissioning of the Kinning Park plant much less expensive to distribute for News International which used to air freight copies from London – but it must be close to the maximum possible in the Scottish market. If it were to increase that circulation the cause would lie as much in changes taking place in the make up of the *Daily Record* as in any other factor. But given the extraordinary and unnecessary dispute which blew up at the *Record* and *Mail* headquarters at the beginning of 1986, and the bizarre behaviour of the paper's proprietor, it would not now be surprising if either paper were to embark on an editorial course which damaged its own market position.

If it is the case that the newspapers Scots buy are for the most part Scottish produced it is most definitely not the case that they are Scottish owned. The *Record* and *Mail* are part of Mirror Group Newspapers which Reed International sold to Robert Maxwell's Leichenstein based company in 1984, while the *Glasgow Herald* and *Evening Times* are owned by Lonrho, the international trading company. The Aberdeen and Edinburgh morning and evening papers are owned by the International Thomson Organisation, originally a newspaper based company, but now with interests in a variety of other spheres including travel and North Sea oil, and based in Canada. Only D C Thomson of Dundee, who own the city's morning and evening papers, and the *Sunday Post*, are a Scottish based company, and one which has continued to take most of its income from newspapers and of course from its famous comics and magazines. All of these companies have interests of varying size in commercial broadcasting.

The Scottish pattern is not very different from what is to be found south of the border. Murdoch's News International, which can be regarded as either Australian or American, but certainly not British, owns the

Times, the *Sunday Times*, the *Sun*, and the *News of the World*. The Canadian entrepreneur Conrad Black recently acquired a controlling interest in the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph*, Lonrho has the *Observer* and acquired a controlling stake in Eddy Shah's *Today* in mid-86, a few months after the paper's launch, and Maxwell the three Mirror Group titles. The other Fleet Street papers are owned by newspaper companies or conglomerates and in one case, that of the *Guardian*, a trust.

While it is true to say that most newspaper readers could not apparently care less who owns the paper they buy, it has to be insisted that there are important public policy issues involved. It is not a coincidence that under Murdoch the *Times* and *Sunday Times* have become much less willing to challenge the established order of things, nor that under Maxwell the Mirror Group titles have become much more trivial than they once were. These two men are examples of dominant proprietors, who seek to use their papers to thrust their own views and tastes down their readers' throats or to trumpet their own supposedly important initiatives and contributions to the life of the nation. The current editor of the *Times*, a Murdoch appointee, apparently while in his previous post as executive editor, sent the foreign department a memorandum which began 'The foreign pages generally seem to be short of two distinct types of stories sex stories and computer stories'.⁽⁶⁾ Murdoch is apparently very keen on both. During the miners' strike readers of the *Record* and the *Mirror* were treated to detailed accounts of Maxwell's pompous and hopeless attempt at mediation.

Faced with such obvious abuse of proprietorial power one has to say that the way in which conglomerates like the International Thomson Organisation and Lonrho run their newspapers is preferable by far, although it has to be said that there is evidence of some pressure being brought to bear on the editor of the *Observer* by its parent company over its coverage of events in Africa, a continent where Lonrho has substantial interests. The Thomson Organisation for its part is however credited with a policy of benevolent non interference, provided its newspapers are making money. Indeed that organisation lost a fortune on the *Times* before it sold the paper and its Sunday stablemate to News International. Furthermore, it can be argued that if companies like these two were not prepared to take over ailing newspapers and give them an infusion of capital then they might simply disappear.

It is difficult to dissent from the obvious pragmatism of such an argument, but it is necessary to put another case. Newspapers are fundamental to the operation of democracy. At their best they provide the

citizen with a wide range of information about what is going on in his society, and they challenge those who hold power whether in government, industry, the trade unions or elsewhere. Macaulay and others said that the gallery in the House of Commons, to which newspaper reporters finally gained admittance in the latter part of the nineteenth century, had become a 'fourth estate of the realm'. This rather grand notion of the importance of the journalist may seem a little anachronistic in the days of bare breasts and bingo, but it is worth holding on to, for it provides us with a useful basis on which to judge the present pattern of control and ownership.⁽⁷⁾ If journalism is to be the fourth estate, then it is vital that those who practice it have a commitment to truth and to scepticism. It is equally vital that the environment in which they work is one which promotes such a commitment. It therefore follows that the patterns of newspaper ownership to be encouraged should be those which lead towards these objectives. Newspaper companies ought to be just that, they ought to be restricted in the number of titles which they own, should be home based, and the market ought to be a competitive one to which access for new titles is not well nigh impossible to all except the wealthy. The kind of situation envisaged here would be one where newspapers would certainly have to survive in the market, and that means attracting both readers and advertising, but would be able to pursue their responsibilities to the public, in relative freedom.

Such a declaration will of course produce world weary sighs from those who would claim that idealism has no place in a discussion of the newspaper industry. Realism dictates a different order of things. To which there is a simple answer. Virtually all of our neighbours in Western Europe have recognised that there are serious problems for democracy if market forces are allowed to hold sway in the press, and have taken various measures to discourage concentration or foreign ownership, and to encourage a diversity of titles. None of these countries has found a magic solution, but they have tried and are continuing to try. In this country the governing party appears totally indifferent to what has been happening lately, while the opposition parties criticise individual developments but have yet to produce coherent proposals which would command wide assent. The hour is getting late.

The point was made in the preceding paragraph that even in a more intelligently organised newspaper market, papers would have to survive by attracting both sales and advertising revenue. It should be added that any perceptive media policy would have to take account of the distortions which the pattern of advertising can produce and to seek ways of remedying that distortion so that papers with a reasonably sized readership but sparse advertising would have some chance of survival. Newspapers have always

taken advertising. What is striking about the contemporary situation is the way in which the pattern of advertising has accentuated the polarisation of the market into broadsheet quality on the one hand and popular tabloid on the other. Both are capable of attracting enough advertising to survive, but any paper which sought an intermediate editorial position would face considerable financial difficulties. In the current situation the quality newspaper is able to charge rates proportionately higher than the popular because it is able to offer the advertiser access to a readership which is not only wealthier than the popular one, but a substantial proportion of which is spending money on behalf of its employers in addition to its own personal spending. By way of example, Table Three shows the average net cost of advertising in the nationally circulating Scottish dailies.

TABLE 3

	Single Column Centimetre	Full Page	Circulation
Daily Record	£25.25	£6612	758,169
Glasgow Herald	£13.20	£5750	118,545
Scotsman	£11.00	£4800	96,017

Source: British Rate and Data January '86

One important consequence of this situation is that the broadsheet paper depends for over half of its revenue on advertising, which explains the growth of the special supplement whose editorial material is a thinly disguised public relations exercise in favour of the principal advertiser around whose activities the supplement is organised. The tabloid paper on the other hand depends for over half its revenue on sales, which explains why sales wars between tabloid titles are much more ferocious than those between broadsheet ones.

Overall it is doubtful if there is much scope for substantially expanding the total of Scottish advertising. The ill-starred *Scottish Daily News* came up against this hard fact as did the equally ill-starred *Sunday Standard*. Both newspapers attempted to fill definable readership gaps, and the *Standard* was a newspaper of considerable worth, but there just was not enough advertising around to provide the necessary financial bedrock. When the *Standard* closed in 1983 its circulation was 116,000, more than either the *Herald* or the *Scotsman*, but it did not have the equivalent of the pages of classified property and employment advertising these dailies carry.

The economic limitations imposed by the size of the Scottish market also have their effect on the content of papers. It is often asserted that Scotland is rather a parochial country and that is why foreign news is not given the prominence it is given in a paper like the *Guardian*. The *Scotsman* carries a regular page, the *Herald* a half page. It has to be said that foreign news is not cheap if a paper wishes to use its own correspondents. The *Scotsman* has a European correspondent and a regularly used freelance in America, while the *Herald* has no foreign correspondents, though it uses 'stringers' in various parts of the world. But there is no way in which a Scottish newspaper could easily find the resources to offer a comprehensive foreign coverage. Nor indeed can a Scottish paper employ a large number of specialist writers and commentators. This problem is in part overcome by using outsiders as columnists. Academics, for example, frequently write on matters which a Fleet Street paper would expect members of its staff to cover.

Where of course Scottish newspapers are at their strongest is in their reporting and commenting on the affairs of Scotland. Although the concern in this essay is with the political and economic spheres it should be emphasised that Scottishness is articulated in a number of other areas such as sport, crime and entertainment. These aspects tend to dominate in the tabloids. Indeed when one looks at the kind of package the *Record* offers its readers, it seems to have more in common with an evening's television viewing than the kind of package offered by the *Scotsman* or *Herald*. This is not just because a lot of the material is television related – background stories on the private lives of the stars, prospective developments in soap opera story lines and so on, little of it of specifically Scottish interest – but because so much of what is in the papers is of a light hearted entertaining nature. Hard news is often seriously under represented in the *Record*, a tendency which has been accentuated under Maxwell's ownership. Paradoxically the *Record's* sister paper, the *Sunday Mail*, although having the magazine like nature of all Sunday papers, does still offer a higher proportion of hard news and feature material than the *Record*, though within a very popular framework. When the *Sunday Standard* began publication in 1981 the *Mail* decided that it ought to go a little down market, but since that paper's sad demise it appears to have decided to move slightly up market again in a bid to partially fill what is a major gap in the Scottish scene.

Both the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman* seek to cover the affairs of Scotland as a whole, although it is possible to detect biases towards the affairs of their cities of origin, but these are not significant enough to detract from the claims which both papers make to being 'national' Scottish

newspapers. One would not expect the other two Scottish mornings, the *Dundee Courier* and the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* to make similar claims. The *Courier* still gives over its front page to classified advertising, and while inside there is a mixture, sometimes a conglomeration, of local, Scottish, British and international news, the accent is firmly on what is happening on Tayside. The editorials often range widely, but the news coverage does not. Concessions to the fashions of contemporary journalism are few – the paper now carries a 'Wednesday Girl', sometimes on page three at that, but the photograph is a head and shoulders shot of a fully clothed young woman. The *Press and Journal* is a more modern looking paper and it has a similar mix of contents to the *Courier's*, though with a more systematic coverage of world and national affairs. Its style is livelier than the *Courier's*, but it lacks the sensationalism of the tabloids. Indeed the healthy circulation of both papers suggests that there is a public appetite for news presented in reasonably straightforward fashion about without the hectoring and bawling tones which more and more characterise the tabloid press.

The same point might be made about the evening papers which are produced in Scotland. They are all essentially local papers but they offer some coverage of national and international affairs. The evening paper market has suffered most grievously from the growing dominance of television, but the six evenings produced in Scotland do seem to have achieved a position of relative stability in recent years. Their circulations vary widely, as Table Four demonstrates, and there is naturally a huge gap between the *Glasgow Evening Times* and the Paisley and Greenock papers but the evenings appear to have weathered the competition for advertising revenue which commercial radio represented. Whether they could survive further erosion of that revenue by cable television, is another matter. But then it is far from clear that there is any great public appetite for cable and it could well prove a licence to bury one's money in the streets.

TABLE 4

Circulation of Scottish Evening Newspapers

Aberdeen Evening Express	81,739
Dundee Evening Telegraph	49,052
Edinburgh Evening News	124,624
Glasgow Evening News	181,608
Greenock Telegraph	21,853
Paisley Daily Express	13,220

Source: As for Table One

The ultimate concern of this essay is with political reporting in the Scottish press and in order to examine the coverage of the final stages of the campaign to save the Gartcosh steel plant from closure has been looked at in some detail. The Gartcosh campaign has been chosen because it raised important issues as well as economic and social ones.

The campaign to save Gartcosh reached its conclusion in January 1986. At the beginning of that month a small group of marchers led by shop stewards convenor, Tommy Brennan, set off on the journey to London in order to bring their case to a wider public and to make one last appeal to the Government for a reprieve. They did not succeed, and at the end of January the workers at the plant, confronted with irrefutable evidence that it would soon close, voted to begin negotiating redundancy terms.

The three nationally circulating Scottish dailies gave extensive coverage to the march, although it is clear that at times the turbulence in Mrs Thatcher's cabinet over the Westland affair had the effect of relegating Gartcosh stories to less prominent places than they might otherwise have enjoyed. For example when the workers voted to accept redundancy that occupied the back page of the *Record*, while Leon Brittan's resignation occupied the front page. However, despite the Westland furore, the Scottish papers managed to find space both to report the march and to discuss its ramifications. The *Record* covered the start of the march and gave en route reports. It used a stop at Corby to run a large feature on how that town had tried to cope with the run down of its own steel industry, and it reported on the continuing fears for Ravenscraig which surfaced during the march.

As one would expect, photographs were an integral feature of the *Record's* coverage, as they were of all the papers' approach. Bleak photographs they were, for the marchers were few and the conditions none too pleasant. A photograph on the back page of the *Herald* on the 6th January for example conveyed a particularly embattled and lonely feeling. As part of its coverage the *Herald* gave considerable attention to the tensions within the Conservative Party: one constituency association, South Cunninghame, threatened to disband (although some nifty footwork by the party prevented that actually happening); two back bench MPs refused to support the government. The *Herald* commissioned its own System Three poll on attitudes to the closure among the Scottish electorate and used the results – 80% of those polled wanted the plant kept open and had little faith that Ravenscraig would survive if Gartcosh went – as the basis for an editorial on 17th January which pointed out that 64% of Conservative supporters wanted Gartcosh retained and had thus parted

company with their leaders on the issue. The editorial went on to argue that the “prospect of another Conservative government, with an ever diminishing base in Scotland seems highly likely to prompt a renewal of interest in constitutional change”. A week earlier on the 11th January the *Herald* had urged Malcolm Rifkind, the new Secretary of State, to study the Scottish select committee's report on Gartcosh with more sympathy than George Younger had shown, but it was soon clear that was not going to happen.

What is interesting about the *Herald's* commissioning and use of the System Three poll is the way in which it focussed on the fortunes of the Conservative Party in Scotland. The *Herald* is no longer a Tory paper – it is not always clear which party it now supports although it leans to the centre – but clearly there is a residual concern with the Tory Party's position, and below the surface one suspects there is a wish that it was still the party of MacMillan and Heath to which support could more easily be offered.

The *Scotsman* also addressed the position of the Tory Party, in an editorial a week after the *Herald's* on that subject appeared. After listing all the issues which have been causing the party trouble in Scotland it focussed on Gartcosh and argued that as far as Ravenscraig is concerned “nobody is deceived by British Steel's assurances, except the Government which is committed to a three year reprieve and nothing more.” The editorial went on to argue that support for devolution is greater among Tories than the party likes to admit and that “thoughtful Tories” who do not like the Labour Party now have other alternative parties to defect to, the Alliance, and the SNP. Again, the constitutional issue was raised. The *Scotsman* has of course been committed to devolution for a very long time. A week earlier the *Scotsman* too had suggested that Malcolm Rifkind should look again at the situation or at least come clean on his position.

“Mr Brennan and his marchers have asked him if he thinks there is a future for steel in Scotland. He should have the courage to reply, either by telling them what kind of future it has or by explaining how he is planning to ensure that the economy can endure a future without it.”

When the final moment came – the vote by the workers to accept redundancy – all three papers put the emphasis not on the constitutional implications but on the emotion of the moment and the fears for Ravenscraig. “Gartcosh battle ends with tears” was the *Scotsman's* headline on 25th January over its story on an inside page, inset in which was a head and shoulders photograph of Tommy Brennan in tears. “Steelmen

rally forces after Gartcosh defeat” was the headline over the *Herald's* front page report which carried a much larger photograph of Mr Brennan. The fears for Ravenscraig were again highlighted. The *Record's* back page story had the heading “Gartcosh: it's the end – NOW THE BATTLE BEGINS” and it too emphasised the Ravenscraig situation. All three reports quoted Dr Jeremy Bray's fears for the future of the Motherwell plant, while both the *Record* and the *Herald* gave space to the views of Ian Lawson who left the Tory Party over the Gartcosh issue and was now claiming that the Tories would suffer electorally for what had been done.

The *Record* used photographs extensively – a large picture of Tommy Brennan over the quote “We won't give up the fight for Ravenscraig”, a picture of a father and son who lost their jobs over the caption “ON THE SCRAPHEAP” and a boxed head and shoulders shot of another worker who is quoted as saying “Any Scots who vote for the Tories now must be off their heads”. As one would expect it was the *Record*, which supports the Labour Party, and like all tabloids has long since given up pretending that there should be a distinction between report and comment, which slanted its material in the most anti-government fashion. It also focussed on the human aspect of the closure. Three redundant workers were quoted and pictured in its report and on an inside page over the heading “A Family in tatters” the human aspect was again emphasised as the effects on one family were examined. The *Herald* took a similar approach in an inside page story headed “Bitter-sweet blow ends uncertainty”. The piece appeared to argue that the steelmen felt relief that the battle was over and took consolation from the fact that the fight for the steel industry was continuing. It was a strange piece, for alongside the accounts of the effect on three families of the closure, there was the statement “Management and workers, shoulder-to-shoulder, relived the good and the bad times yesterday afternoon at the Gartcosh Works Social Club”. There was almost an air of nostalgia pervading the report, contrasting with the bitterness of the *Record's* coverage.

The most interesting coverage of the Gartcosh closure was, perhaps surprisingly, in the *Sunday Post*. In the first place it devoted far more space to the issue than did its rival the *Sunday Mail*. The latter usually mentioned the campaign each week and on 19th January carried an editorial which argued strongly that the fight for Ravenscraig must go on until there was a binding commitment from all political parties that its future is secure. However for most of the time the *Mail* concentrated on other stories, including its own successful campaign to persuade petrol companies to stop charging higher prices in Scotland than they do elsewhere. Of course since the *Record* and *Mail* are sister papers with a shared political stance it would

be a reasonable editorial assumption that many of the *Mail's* readers had already heard all that they needed to hear about Gartcosh.

The *Post* managed to work in some reference to Gartcosh in all of its January editions. The coverage culminated in an astonishing front page on the 19th. Headed “THE CASUALTY LIST”, it gave the names of the seven hundred workers who had lost their jobs with the closure and explained that such casualty lists had not been published by newspapers since the First World War.

“It may serve to remind everyone involved that the unemployed are not numbers. Not statistics. Not percentages. Not seasonally adjusted. Not underlying trends. Not the jargon of Whitehall or Westminster. They are people – and here are their names:-”

The *Post's* middle page comment article the same week was also devoted to the Gartcosh issue. It argued that the works had no more right to survive than “a worked out pit or a bankrupt business” but insisted that something must be done about the growing number of unemployed. Of course the government had introduced various measures which the *Post* approved of, of course high unemployment is here to stay “but something must be done quickly to reduce the dole queue if only as an act of faith in the future. Especially for our young people”. The editorial asserted that “This is not to argue for either nationalism or the spendthrift excesses of socialism” and credited the government with curing inflation, but nonetheless declared “The cure must be seen to go hand in hand with compassion. The treatment of casualties doesn't stop with the surgery!”. The following week the same centre page space was handed over to Councillor Lawrence McGarry, the Chairman of Strathclyde Region's Economic and Industrial Development Committee, who set out the consequences the closure of Ravenscraig would have for the Scottish economy, and argued that the battle to prevent closure must succeed.

The *Post's* coverage illustrates very clearly the ideological tensions which Thatcherism has produced in Scotland. Here is a paper, which is essentially conservative, confronted with a radical Tory government which has waged war on many of the paper's favourite targets, but in the process has turned parts of Scotland into industrial wastelands, as many of the *Post's* own readers would be able to testify. Thatcherism does not seem to be a viable ideology in the Scottish context, for north of the border there are very few of the apparent successes of that approach of the kind which can be pointed to in southern England. When an MP of the St Andrews monetarist school like Michael Forsyth attempted to articulate the case for closure of

Gartcosh, he was well enough reported in Scottish newspapers but in the context of the criticism which had descended on his head. It is not sympathy with Mr Forsyth's ideological fervour that does make one wonder if there are not dangers in the relative unanimity of the Scottish press when confronted with the Gartcosh closure. There is a case to be made that the Scottish steel industry in the long term cannot be sustained without substantial public support and that such support can only be at the expense of other kinds of investment. The problem with Thatcherism is that it has not sought to present the choice in these terms, indeed it is clear that the kind of massive public sector investment in advanced technology, which has characterised other economies, is regarded as ideologically unacceptable by the present government. What this means is that the Scots are forced back on defensive arguments about saving Gartcosh or Ravenscraig or Prestwick or Govan Shipbuilders, and that can have the effect of inhibiting discussion of alternative industrial strategies, which might offer a more secure long term future. In the coverage which has been examined here there is certainly evidence of such thinking but mainly in the form of sub-textual, hints rather than fully articulated proposals. If the choice appears to be between Thatcherism and support for dying industries it is not easy to object to the latter without appearing to endorse the former.

The basic point to be made about the political stance of Scottish newspapers at the present time is that support for Thatcherism is non-existent in the nationally circulating titles. This means that the Scottish picture is very different from the Fleet Street one, for there Mrs Thatcher and right wing views are given substantial coverage and endorsement. This could be regarded as one more illustration of the deep seated differences between Scotland and England. Or it could be regarded as striking evidence of the way in which Mrs Thatcher has split Britain into two, a wealthy south and an impoverished north. Or of the hopelessly unrepresentative nature of the Fleet Street papers. It is certainly the case that in Scotland the distaste for Thatcherism to be found in the press is representative, for the opinion polls tell us that the vast majority of Scots would vote for parties other than the Tory Party.

The Scottish broadsheets are however reasonably even handed in their reporting of the affairs of all the political parties operating in Scotland. They may both incline to a centrist position editorially, but that does not mean that the affairs of the non-Alliance parties are unreported. Nuances can be detected in the writing of the various journalists who comment on political affairs – the *Herald's* Political Editor, Geoffrey Parkhouse, for example seems more sympathetic to the Tories than his opposite number at the *Scotsman* – but if the Fleet Street broadsheets all followed the example

of their Scottish counterparts the Left might not complain so much about the way in which its affairs are reported.

As far as the tabloids are concerned, the *Post* with its magazine style of content and its relatively limited overt interest in politics, is something of a special case. The *Record* and *Mail*, although they do not engage in gutter journalism fail to be even handed in their political reporting. The fact that the Fleet Street tabloids are tarred with the same brush does not make the offence any less intolerable. It is perfectly possible to produce reasonably fair popular political journalism, though the tabloids behave as if it were not. There is not much complaint about this situation in Scotland, since the *Record* and *Mail* support the Labour Party which remains the largest party north of the border. So left wing politicians reserve their ire for the *Sun*. But this really is hypocrisy. It is in the interests of democracy that all newspapers separate reporting and commenting. Alas it is not going to happen. Unless of course the Press Council suddenly acquires teeth and uses them. Or unless some of our journalists and proprietors decide to become reformed characters.

Scottish newspapers then do report the affairs of their home patch and in times of crisis tend to rally round in defence of what they perceive to be threats to the national well being. In that sense they can be said to be articulating a national identity, and the opinion poll evidence cited earlier certainly suggests that as far as Gartcosh is concerned they were totally in tune with their readers' views. The difficulties of self criticism in the present climate have been alluded to, but it would be a worrying development if the need to defend beleaguered parts of the Scottish economy prevented our papers from exploring more openly than they have felt able to do of late the options which will confront the Scottish economy, with or without Thatcherism, when the oil starts to run out and adjustments have to be made to that reality. Thatcherism has produced a fair degree of unity in our national newspapers, but so far that unity is sustained by distaste for what is happening rather than by an alternative vision of where the country should go. It would be a brave individual who prophesied the result of the next British General Election, but if the Conservatives are returned for a third time with their faces firmly set against devolution and reflation, then our papers are going to have to make some hard choices as to where they stand on the constitutional future of Scotland.

David Hutchison, Senior Lecturer in Communication Studies, Glasgow College of Technology.

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6. Martin Huckerby 'Why I could not board the bus to Wapping!' *UK Press Gazette* 3.2.86.
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