

A DISUNITED KINGDOM: EXPRESSIONS OF SCOTTISH NATIONALISM IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY REGIONAL PRESS

Marcus K. Harmes, Barbara Harmes and Meredith A. Harmes
University of Southern Queensland

INTRODUCTION

The current constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom have been in place for over three hundred years, in the case of Scotland since 1707, but the union of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom is still under exceptional pressure. While under the current arrangements many decisions remain reserved for the United Kingdom Parliament in Westminster, Scotland's jurisprudence, its Church, and its education system were never united with their English counterparts and since 1999 Scotland has had devolved government. Nevertheless, throughout the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first, there have been successive demands for separation from England. Across Europe, State unions and federations are under similar pressure. In 2013 Jose Manuel Barroso, then President of the European Commission, had spoken of the coming of intensified federal unity and a fully-fledged European federation with fiscal unity. This comment now seems premature, as political and cultural ties have broken rather than intensified, including the Catalanian rejection of Spanish political unity. In the United Kingdom, a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 failed, as had a 1979 devolution referendum. However, a 2016 referendum for the entire United Kingdom to leave the European Union narrowly succeeded (the 'Brexit'), to be followed by further demands from Edinburgh for independence from England. Scottish independence, should it happen, would disrupt a union that has been on the Statute Book since 1707. This mirrors the tensions within federated European states but also the nationalist or devolutionary impulses in Wales and Cornwall.

Devolution, Home Rule and Independence are not synonymous, but they are on a shared trajectory from loosening ties to outright abandonment of the Union; they also testify to the fact that members of Scottish Nationalist parties often hold divergent political and cultural priorities.¹ The Scottish National Party (SNP) was formed in 1934. Its predecessors the National Party for Scotland and the Scottish Party, formed in 1928 and 1931 respectively, hoped to promote independence. Their fusion as the SNP caught conflicting left and right wing positions within the one party.² Impulses for Scottish Home Rule, devolution and independence have drawn inspiration from what are arguably predictable sources, namely Scottish history and national legends. The names of William Wallace and other medieval heroes sprang easily from the lips of nationalist

¹ I. McLean, 'The Rise and Fall of the Scottish National Party', *Political Studies*, 18, No. 3 (1970), pp. 357-372.

² A. Ichijo, *Scottish Nationalism and the Idea of Europe: Concepts of Europe and the Nation* (Psychology Press, 2004), p.44.

campaigners. However, understanding Scottish nationalism merely in terms of attachment to national legends is problematic. As Klaus-Jürgen Nagel points out, Scottish cultural symbols are often local rather than national and often more from the Highlands than the Lowlands and they are not a common Scottish heritage.³ It is unwise to reconstruct nationalism as preoccupied with these cultural symbols.

As such, this article situates expressions of Scottish nationalism in a dialectic between a regional origin and a wider internationalist set of parameters. We will demonstrate that perspectives originating from regional settings interacted with wider international horizons. The principal source base for this study is the reports on Scottish nationalist activity in the regional press at key moments in twentieth century history. These are: the 1907 anniversary of the Act of Union; the reforms to the House of Lords and concurrent Welsh and Irish nationalist pressures before World War One; the establishment of the Scottish Nationalist Party in the early 1930s (later to be renamed the Scottish National Party); the theft from Westminster Abbey of the Stone of Scone in 1950; the failed 1978 devolution referendum; and the passing of the Scotland Act in 1998 followed by the emergence of the ‘new politics’ in Scottish political and public life.⁴ These contextualise the still potent constitutional uncertainty in Scotland following a further referendum on independence and the United Kingdom’s Brexit negotiations. Doing so presents a century-long study of nationalist impulses, with a focus sharpened by specific flashpoints of nationalist yearning and agitation. This article considers the insights gained from regional journalism, whereby Scottish nationalism could be encouraged, shown up by, or contrasted with wider political activity in London, Ireland and further afield from New York to Scandinavia.

Two approaches therefore require explanation and justification: the use of the regional press; and the identification and use of these defining periods. In terms of their status and impact as print media, the regional papers including those circulated in Dundee and Aberdeen, sit underneath the two major Scottish dailies, the *Herald* and the *Scotsman*. Scottish journalism has attracted limited scholarly scrutiny, in particular of the regional papers. Some Scottish news media have recently attracted a larger body of analysis, but this has focussed on different print and electronic media since 1999.⁵ By virtue of their smaller scale and their regional identity, the regional papers present an opportunity for analysis of perspectives often distinct from the more monolithic dailies. Larger papers, in Scotland and England, were susceptible to the demands of their proprietors, such as Lord Rothermere and Lord Northcliffe.⁶ Regional papers often

³ K.-J. Nagel, *Transcending the national/asserting the national. How stateless nations like Scotland, Wales and Catalonia react to European integration* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2002), p. 5.

⁴ P. Schlesinger, ‘Scottish Devolution and the Media’, *Political Quarterly*, 69 (1998), p. 68.

⁵ M. Higgins, ‘Substantiating a Political Public Sphere in the Scottish Press: A Comparative Analysis’, *Journalism*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2006), pp. 25-44; E. Crawford, ‘A new sort of democracy? The opinion pages in the Scottish daily quality press’, *Journalism*, 10, No. 4 (2009), pp. 451-472; M. Dekavalla, ‘Issue and game frames in the news: Frame building factors in television coverage of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum’, *Journalism* 19, No. 11 (2018), pp. 1497-1516.

⁶ A. Bingham, *A. Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 111, 113.

robustly editorialised current issues. Scottish newspapers proliferate in response to a high readership demand.⁷ This source base has made available multiple titles and thousands of articles across decades. It is therefore impractical to use their contents in their entirety; it is more effective to sample key terms at key moments where public discussion of Home Rule, devolution, independence and the future of the Union was intensified. These moments provide a means to access regional interpretations and to interpret their intersection with a wider frame of reference.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: NATIONAL AND REGIONAL JOURNALISM

Like England, Scotland has a long history of print journalism including eighteenth-century developments in the circulation of daily print newspapers. Many earlier newspapers had explicit political sympathies, whether Liberal (not to be confused with current usage) or opposed to the Stamp Acts. Many papers also had high literary pretensions derived from Enlightenment thought shaped by writers based in Edinburgh.

Hierarchies exist within British print journalism and the label ‘quality press’ differentiates the larger papers from others.⁸ There are also English papers (meaning papers whose principal editorial staff are in London) which may be ‘editionised’ for a Scottish readership.⁹ Then there are the regional papers including titles such as the *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, the *Falkirk Herald*, the *Motherwell Times* and the *Courier and Advertiser*. They are regional in that they are published beyond the capital, Edinburgh, or Glasgow, Scotland’s largest industrial city. They are not, however, instances of ‘local journalism’. The regional papers were not metropolitan, but their horizons were broad. Political developments in Westminster, New York, Dublin, Scandinavia, and Central Europe as well as Edinburgh all fed into their editorialising and reporting. Historically, events from centuries earlier as well as current events informed their discourse on Scottish identity. They were regional in location, but what they said intersected with what Schlesinger, following the theoretical trajectories established by Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, and Benedict Anderson, described as the “social communications” of a nation talking to itself.¹⁰

⁷ I. G. C. Hutchinson, ‘Scottish newspapers and Scottish national identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, in Hartmut Walravens and Edmund King (eds), *Newspapers in International Librarianship* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003), p. 215.

⁸ M. Brown, ‘The Scottish morning press and the Devolution Referendum of 1979’, *Scottish Government Yearbook 1980* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1980), pp. 65-66; Schlesinger, ‘Scottish Devolution and the Media’, p. 63; Crawford, ‘A new sort of democracy?’, p. 451.

⁹ D. Hutchinson and H. O’Donnell, *Centres and peripheries: Metropolitan and Non-metropolitan Journalism in the Twenty-First Century* (Newcastle on Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 3.

¹⁰ Schlesinger, ‘Scottish Devolution and the Media’, p. 55.

In many instances, the reports carry no by-lines; as such, we do not know the individual writers and no meaningful information exists for reconstructing their sympathies, their editorial choices, what role they may have felt they occupied as events unfolded, or their writing strategies in terms of what they chose to report or emphasise. In the absence of this information, there are two significant points: one is that the journalism in any newspaper's reports is a patchwork of what editors and journalists have chosen to include. Marina Dekavalla's study of Scottish broadcast journalism during the 2014 independence referendum reminds us that journalists are "interpretative packages" based on the input they receive from their sources and on social values and expectations, organizational pressures, professional routines, and their own ideological stances'.¹¹ The other point however is that newspapers earlier in the twentieth century were text heavy and covered events in a level of detail unthinkable to twenty-first century print journalism. As such, they provide access to a number of different and often competing 'voices' from the putatively objective news to the opinion pages.¹² These include not only letters to the editor and the editorial opinions of the papers themselves but also much direct speech of public and political figures repeated in the text-heavy and detailed news sections of the papers. Their sense of 'place' was wide ranging and the voices sometimes unexpectedly diverse. One edition of the *Fife Free Press* even had input from an Australian commentator, who from a distance of thousands of miles interpreted the Scottish demands for independence following on from Irish demands for Home Rule.¹³ A broad and lively interest in a wider world could paradoxically however reinforce a sense that Scottish identity could retreat in on itself; hence, there was an impression of a dialectic between the national and the international that regional papers so clearly reveal. These impressions emerge from their reporting of Scottish nationalist activity, meaning those incidents or episodes prompted by dissatisfaction with union with England, and which were intended to agitate for independence or at the least cause affront to the reality of union.

NATIONALISM AND THE REGIONAL PRESS: 1907'S BICENTENARY

The journalist and commentator Maurice Smith summed up the relationship between Scottish nationalism and the press as 'schizophrenic'.¹⁴ Smith's monograph on Scottish newspapers and journalists, however, was focussed on the larger dailies, as was Ewan Crawford's more recent study (2009) of Scottish journalism as it was shaped by the 1999 creation of the Scottish assembly. Underneath these larger papers are responses to nationalist political priorities, including initially enthusiasm for a Scottish nationalist party matched with an aggrieved disappointment that Irish nationalism seemed both more mature in terms of what it had achieved and to be taken more seriously at

¹¹ Dekavalla, 'Issue and game frames in the news', pp. 1498-1499.

¹² Crawford, 'A new sort of democracy?', p. 456.

¹³ *Fife Free Press*, 26 April 26 (1930), p. 3.

¹⁴ M. Smith, *Paper Lions: The Scottish Press and National Identity* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), p. 101.

Westminster. More generally, academic commentary on Scottish journalism has pointed to the medium's generally high emphasis on national identity. 'The Scottish press clothes itself in the symbols of national identification and allegiance' says Michael Higgins.¹⁵ Yet Higgins is also referring specifically to what he calls 'major newspapers' rather than the regionals. These regional opinions, often expressed in the editorial pages, initially emerge from what was essentially a political vacuum or the absence of political power from Scotland: all Scottish politicians sat at Westminster and voted there, but as a minority group within the chamber and within their respective parties although the chamber gave little attention to Scottish affairs. Events in 1907 returned attention to Scotland and the history of its Union to England over the last two hundred years. This anniversary took place before the formation of specific nationalist or pro-independence parties including the Nationalist Party of Scotland (in 1928) and the Scottish Party (in 1932) and before the Home Rule bills in the 1920s had failed to gain legislative traction.¹⁶

It is useful to calibrate by commencing not with a regional paper but with the perspective from a metropolitan: the *Scotsman* editorialised in January 1907 that the date of the Union in 1707 was a 'momentous one'; it was the 'end of the auld sang'.¹⁷ The *Scotsman's* editorial struck a positive tone regarding the Union. It had meant that the Scots 'were admitted by it for the first time to a share in the government and in the trade and fortunes of the Outer Empire.' Among its extensive reflections on the Union published in January 1907, the *Scotsman* also promoted an interpretation of Union in which little was lost; according to its editorial stance while the Scottish parliament ceased to exist 'its Church and legal system were far more vital institutions than its Parliament and these remained.'¹⁸ In April 1907, the *Scotsman* was still reporting and editorialising on the bicentenary of the Union and memorialising 'our obligation to the group of Scottish statesmen, the least remembered, or, rather, the best abused in our history, to whose 'steady virtue' we owe the settlement of 1707.'¹⁹

In other newspapers published outside the capital, however, the commemoration of events two centuries years earlier took a different path. They were less positive than the metropolitan paper, but while regional they were also informed by wider ranging and more current developments. In the pages of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* memories of two hundred years of official union with England were shaped by reports on the revival of Irish Home Rule campaigning. The demands of Irish Nationalists were characterised as:

¹⁵ Higgins, 'Substantiating a political public sphere in the Scottish press', p. 635.

¹⁶ J. Mitchell, L. Bennie and R. Johns, *The Scottish National Party: Transition to Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 12; P. Lynch, 'The Scottish National Party', *Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek* (Wien: Wilhelm Braunnmuller, 2011), p. 235.

¹⁷ *Scotsman*, 16 January (1907), p. 8.

¹⁸ *Scotsman*, 16 January (1907), p. 9.

¹⁹ *Scotsman*, 3 April (1907).

that they should have a Parliament and an Executive emanating from that Parliament, as independent of any interference on the part of Imperial Legislature at Westminster as the Government of Norway was of the Government of Sweden before the Disruption of the Scandinavian Union.²⁰

Readers of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* (which was here also drawing on the *National Review*) were reminded therefore not only of the demands of Irish Nationalists but the recent (1905) separation of the Norwegian state and its monarchy from union with Sweden, a union contracted nearly a century earlier. The commemoration of two hundred years of British Union was therefore an event that was part of a more complex dialogue with current events.

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PRESS: REFORM OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The commentary on the 1907 anniversary continued to resonate for some years afterwards. The impending reform of the House of Lords in Westminster featured in Scottish papers and the reform itself was achieved in the 1911 Parliament Act. The reform (or rather the limitation) of the House of Lords' legislative authority in relation to the House of Commons was a complex issue, achieved through an alliance of the Liberals and the Irish Nationalists, and did not precisely intersect with the Scottish nationalists. Where it did however connect was in the editorial urging its readers to seize the initiative while changes were happening to the Westminster legislature. Reform of the House of Lords seemed to open up the opportunity for further change to legislatures and according to the *Daily Journal*, a meeting of Scottish nationalists 'strongly emphasised the closeness of the connection between the reform of the House of Lords and the devolution of Parliamentary powers alike.'²¹ Such at least was the editorial perspective of the *Dundee Courier* in April 1910. 'Scotland is legislatively neglected,' it pronounced, referring to recent acts the Education Bill and the Children's Act, as well as the Temperance Bill and overdue rental and land reforms.²²

Importantly, what also emerges from this regional perspective is a preoccupation with concurrent Irish nationalist sentiments and agitation. In particular, the editorialist was affronted by how Ireland received more money from Westminster yet 'the population of Ireland is less than that of Scotland!'²³ In 1910 the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* also reported on nascent Scottish nationalist agitation but significantly, it also located this activity within a wider international framework. In October 1910 the Scottish National Committee met but also interacted with 'Welsh Liberals suggesting co-operation on certain lines for the advancement of the devolution movement.' At the

²⁰ *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 16 January (1907), p. 2.

²¹ *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 October (1910), p. 5.

²² *Dundee Courier*, 27 April (1910), p. 4.

²³ *Dundee Courier*, 27 April (1910), p. 4.

same time, it reported that the campaign for Irish home rule was well advanced and well-funded, including strong financial support from expatriate Irish in the United States.²⁴

The regional situation of the newspaper intersected with a wider outlook, and the goals of Scottish nationalists were engaged in a complex set of relationships with wider forces. That is not to say that periods of national or even international trouble caused an upswing of nationalist activity; nationalist support declined in times of economic hardship in the 1930 and 1980s.²⁵ Yet it is clear that print journalism took inspiration from a wider cultural and political matrix to make strictly insular points. The better funded, better organised Irish cause was an affront to the Scottish ambitions, while political controversy at Westminster about the Lords' rejection of the 1909 budget opened up a vision of wider change to the British legislature.

NATIONALISM AND THE 1930s

By 1928 the Scottish Nationalist party was preparing to contest seats in the General Election. In the campaign description in the *Falkirk Herald* one strictly insular source of inspiration was the medieval Scottish hero, William Wallace. Another came from a far wider horizon; the paper reported on the impact of European events from hundreds of miles away on Scottish affairs. Speaking to a local crowd in West Renfrewshire, the local candidate, R.E. Muirhead, reflected on 'the countries of central Europe, which he had visited recently. He had found that each nationality was self-contained.'²⁶ There is in fact a striking tension, in that the wider internationalist outlook encouraged a sense that Scotland should retreat from union and return to a self-contained identity. Scottish nationalists visited and noted what they experienced in places far beyond Scotland, with the consequence that their horizons narrowed. The bicentenary of 1707 therefore participated in a complex discourse; from Scottish history the inspiration of William Wallace was apparent, but these medieval and eighteenth-century events in Scottish history interacted with a wider internationalist perspective, in which events in central Europe clarified and provoked the ambitions of Scottish nationalists.

The 1907 bicentenary continued to provide a locus for discussion of the implications for the identity of the Union; similarly, a constellation of events before World War One including the dissolution of the Scandinavian Union and agitation for Irish Home Rule were noted in the regional press as part of wider dialogue around the Union. During and after the 1930s there was an actual Nationalist Party (to become the National Party) to provide the substance of newspaper reports. The *Motherwell Times* provides an early glimpse of the grassroots party seeking public support, but doing so on several levels, including an intersection of the local and the national. Locally, a meeting of the National Party in the town of Bothwell included the promise that local

²⁴ *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 October (1910), p. 5.

²⁵ M. Keating, 'The strange death of Unionist Scotland', *Government and Opposition*, 45, No.3 (2010), p. 366.

²⁶ *Falkirk Herald*, 8 August (1928), p. 15.

rates and taxes would be improved by home rule. Nationally and even internationally, the early campaigning of the Nationalist Party intersected with (by 1929) the global crisis of the Great Depression and party campaigners urged that home rule would enable Scotland to institute projects and works to give employment to thousands of men.²⁷ Nationally, the aims of the party also spoke to an electoral context where some hope for Scottish home rule rested with the British Labour Party, which had failed to achieve this aim.²⁸ Candidates therefore stood in opposition to Labour candidates.²⁹ The mobilisation of local branches in small towns could proceed on the appeal not simply of bringing about home rule, but doing so through Scottish disobedience to English authority. A party meeting in Bellshill debated whether the Nationalist members should be 'refusing to pay local rates and taxes.'³⁰

Regional press reports provide documentary traces of nationalist sentiment that was simultaneously puny in its localism and international in its vision. A meeting of thirty people in Kirkintilloch called expressly for a Scottish parliament and was preoccupied with the welfare of the entire country.³¹ Regional papers recorded the routine meetings of the Party and its fledgling participation in elections but other actions were more attention grabbing.³² At times Nationalist activity was visibly disruptive, such as the march (reported in the *Edinburgh Evening News*) on Stirling Castle by the SNP activist Wendy Wood who pulled down the Union Jack and replaced it with the Lion Rampant.³³ Less dramatically, a core objective was to campaign for home rule by campaigning against the British Labour Party. Municipal elections in Clydebank included the campaign declaration that 'you cannot achieve success through the Labour Party... if you wish self-government for Scotland.'³⁴ The emergence (or re-emergence) of independent nations in Europe continued to captivate Scottish Nationalists. By 1937 the Nationalists around Falkirk heard a presentation which was a synthesis of national legends in Scottish history (in this instance the battle of Bannockburn in 1314) with entirely contemporary and up to date interpretation of European affairs, including the sorry comparison between Scotland and 'the go-ahead nations of Scandinavia.'³⁵

The wider events of World War II shaped the reception of the Scottish National Party (SNP). By 1942 the *Perthshire Advertiser* reported on disunity in the Party, but also considered the possibility that after the end of the war there could be Scottish

²⁷ *Motherwell Times*, 1 November (1929).

²⁸ *Scotsman*, 16 October (1925), p. 5.

²⁹ See, for example, the *Londonderry Sentinel*, 16 June (1932), p. 5.

³⁰ *Bellshill Speaker*, 5 September (1930), p. 1.

³¹ *Scotsman*, 20 May (1931), p. 6.

³² *Scotsman*, 16 June 1 (1932), p. 7.

³³ *Edinburgh Evening News*, 27 June (1932), p. 8.

³⁴ *Evening Telegraph*, 26 August (1932), p. 3.

³⁵ *Falkirk Herald*, 3 July 3 (1937), p. 10.

independence. Its editorial stance was cautious however and remarked ‘two legislatures, each working on its own lines, might spell chaos.’³⁶ Earlier criticism of the Nationalist Party was more strident. A Unionist meeting in Inverness in 1932 was reported in detail in the *Courier and Advertiser*, including the scathing comments from Unionist speakers about there being a Scottish parliament in Edinburgh: ‘The majority of Highland electors are wholly opposed to the retrograde and costly step of setting up a separate Scottish legislature.’³⁷ These comments spoke to local concerns and local prejudices; they were, however, within a broader matrix. The appeal to the highlanders pitted a specific type of Scottish identity against others.

NATIONALISM, DECOLONISATION, THE COLD WAR, AND THE THEFT OF THE STONE OF SCONE

A further perceived affront to Scottish national identity was the continued English custody of the coronation ‘Stone of Destiny’ or Stone of Scone. The medieval artefact had been sequestered in England since the thirteenth century. Its theft by Scottish National students in December 1950, the resulting press coverage and the police investigation, by necessity prompted dialogue between England and Scotland. A recurring complaint made by Scottish Nationals reported in regional newspapers was the failure of the Westminster legislature to give due attention to Scottish issues. The theft of the Stone was therefore an opportunity to see Scottish issues for once actively discussed in London. Debate in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords on its theft, its whereabouts, and what to do with it once recovered, received widespread reports.³⁸ Regional presses in Scotland also found opportunities to make the theft an international issue. The Aberdeen paper *The Evening Express* reported on the recent tour of the United States by the Scottish singer Mary Garden and her forthcoming South African tour by finding an angle on the theft. ‘In an account of her latest American tour Miss Garden told how she was constantly asked “Have you got the Stone of Scone?”’³⁹

The theft of the Stone also led to newspaper commentary that tied together multiple threads of discourse from 1907 onwards. Reports that a Scottish Member of Parliament, David Kirkwood, had attempted to introduce a Bill to bring the Stone to the Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh but that the Bill had ‘died in its Parliamentary infancy’ in the House of Commons testified to earlier reports that Westminster paid insufficient regard to Scottish concerns.⁴⁰ Similar complaints had been aired before World War I and the reform of the House of Lords. In Dundee, the *Courier and Advertiser* made clear efforts by Scottish Nationalists to control the ‘narrative’ of the theft. The theft prompted

³⁶ *Perthshire Advertiser*, 29 July (1932), p. 4.

³⁷ *Courier and Advertiser*, 14 October (1932), p. 10.

³⁸ *Courier and Advertiser*, 13 April (1951), p. 3.

³⁹ *The Evening Express*, 28 February (1951), p. 5.

⁴⁰ *Scotsman*, 26 December (1950), p. 5.

commentary that aligned with the earlier reports on the 1707 bicentenary and the implications of Scotland losing its own parliament. The theft raised up Nationalist commentary:

For a long time Scotland had got along fairly well without her Parliament. But in the last 50 years there had been ever-increasing centralisation of government and concentration of powers of government. It had now reached a stage where Scotland had no control, political or economic, over their own affairs.⁴¹

Newspaper reports created accounts of the theft that wove together multiple narrative threads regarding tensions between Scotland and England. By April 1951, when Scotland Yard had located the Stone, the *Courier and Advertiser* reported the latest news of the Stone together with renewed attention to ‘the self-government issue’ and the refusal of the government in Westminster to allow a plebiscite on Home Rule.⁴² The theft also permitted interpretation of English journalism’s neglect of Scotland by Scottish newspapers, including the commentary that ‘this type of thing is the only type of Home Rule story that gets a break in the English newspapers.’⁴³

By virtue of being a dramatic story with opinions on it provided by everyone from King George VI downwards, the theft of the Stone, in journalistic terms, was a moment in time in which Scottish regional journalism interacted with a wider international set of perspectives. In part this interaction was between England and Scotland, with English reactions including the King’s distress at the theft and the astonishment of the Dean of Westminster Abbey reported in regional papers such as the *Courier and Advertiser*.⁴⁴ The inherent drama of the theft, including the well-coordinated night-time operation in Westminster Abbey and the Britain-wide police search, also attracted international attention. As such, regional Scottish papers were able to provide commentary to their readers from around the globe including the *Baltimore Sun*, the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald Tribune*.⁴⁵

Such international commentary however returned attention to frustrated efforts at Scottish Home Rule and the international insights spoke of ‘Scottish extremists.’ The emphasis at the regional level gained coherence and sharpness from international events. The theft occurred in the year before the Conservative Party returned to office, during the Labour government that had commenced de-colonisation of the British Empire. The international strains besetting the British Empire, the pressure from the United States to continue with this process, and the possibility of nationalist and Communist insurrection in British colonies provided a *schema* within which to place not only the theft but also the Nationalist impulses that inspired it. The *Courier and*

⁴¹ *Courier and Advertiser*, 9 April (1951), p. 2.

⁴² *Courier and Advertiser*, 19 April (1951), p. 2.

⁴³ *Scotsman*, 26 December (1950), p. 5.

⁴⁴ *Courier and Advertiser*, 28 December (1950), p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Courier and Advertiser*, 28 December (1950), p. 3.

Advertiser drew attention to the pressures undermining the British Empire when reporting on the opinion of the Scottish National Party conference that 'If England doesn't accede to Scotland's wishes she may soon have a rebellion on her hands, as she has had in other of her Colonies.'⁴⁶ It was also a means of differentiating Scottish concerns from English. It may have been the British Empire, but its impending dissolution became very much an English problem, with Scotland located in rhetorical terms as yet another political entity wishing for independence from England.

The theft of the Stone was also an act susceptible to interpretation according to the international crises of the Cold War. The Labour government, like any Labour Party in the 1950s (including the Australian Labour Party), was vulnerable to allegations of Communist sympathies. A Labour government in Westminster and the theft and recovery of the Stone provided the substance of newspaper reports on tensions between England and Scotland, reports that gained meaning and urgency from wider Cold War paranoia. The *Courier and Advertiser* carried reports of Scottish political agitation regarding the insistence that 'The Government bring home to the people the factual truths about Communism in Russia and in the Soviet-dominated countries' and that the Scottish Unionists 'deplored the continued presence in high office of men who, in the past, has been Communist sympathisers.'⁴⁷

THE FAILURE OF INDEPENDENCE IN 1978

Scotland's Assembly in Edinburgh came into being in 1999 but there had been an earlier effort, flowing from a Royal Commission on Devolution in 1978, during the Labour prime ministership of James Callaghan. The narratives and analysis of the Scottish independence referendum of 1978 has several contrasting threads in its journalistic accounts. One area that was receiving emphasis was not the tension between Scotland and England, but the tension within Scotland. As 1978 began, the *Evening Express* reported on the postman of a small and remote Scottish community in the Shetlands making a special trip to 10 Downing Street 'asking that the islands be considered a special case in the Scottish devolution proposals.'⁴⁸ The article further reported that the community, represented by their postman, wanted to tell Prime Minister James Callaghan: 'We don't want to be taken over by a lot of lowland Scots.'⁴⁹

While the newspaper reported and valorised this small-scale statement not only of Scottish independence but Northern rejection of Southern Scottish *mores* and influence, the 1978 Royal Commission and the resulting referendum can be reconstructed as a complex interplay between large-scale forces. The Scottish National Party and the Labour Party had not been allies during the twentieth century. The Labour Party itself, both at Westminster and in Scotland, began to fragment. Although the drafting of the Bill to bring about the referendum was in the hands of a senior English Labour minister,

⁴⁶ *Courier and Advertiser*, 2 April (1951), p. 3.

⁴⁷ *Courier and Advertiser*, 18 May (1951), p. 2.

⁴⁸ *Evening Express*, 19 January (1978), p. 1.

⁴⁹ *Evening Express*, 19 January (1978), p. 1.

Michael Foot, and supported by Callaghan, Scottish journalism reinforced the division between Labour members.⁵⁰

Smaller scale newspapers, in particular, the *Evening Express*, noted the division between Scottish and English parliamentarians but also within Scotland itself. Political discord emanating from Westminster, however, also divided campaigners who had support for the ‘No’ campaign in common. The Labour MP Bob Hughes, while campaigning for the No case, refused to campaign with Conservative opponents of devolution ‘for the simple reason that I speak from a Socialist point of view and have nothing in common with the Tories.’⁵¹ New reports synthesise a complex interplay of factors, in which Scottish politicians of the same political party divide amongst themselves, then find themselves naturally allied with an opposition party but in turn reject that alliance. Via the press, the Scottish National Party also circulated commentary on the Labour Party’s situation in relation to the referendum. The *Evening Express* quoted the SNP politician Donald Stewart on Labour MPs ‘running around like beasts disturbed under a stone until their London bosses ordered them to reverse their anti-devolution stance.’⁵²

As the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ campaigns for devolution continued to be reported in the Press, reports indicated tension between Scottish devolution and the impulse to interconnect with a wider world. That tension, according to press reports, was particularly acute for Labour politicians. The *Press and Journal* reported the warning by Labour politician Robert Hughes of an ‘inward looking country which would hinder the progress of socialism.’⁵³ The observation and its report reveals the complex relationships between nationalist aspirations and international outlooks, as refracted through regional reporting. In earlier decades, external influences from Scandinavia, from Ireland and from the United States had encouraged nationalist enterprise; on this occasion, however, the concern was that nationalism would cause a retreat from broader international engagement, in this case with socialist politics. Running through reports on the devolution debates was a set of competing definitions of Scottish nationalism. Somewhat paradoxically, support for Devolution was upheld as a means of opposing the SNP; the Liberal politician Colin Luckhurst was reported as warning: ‘Any failure to provide an Assembly will see an SNP resurgence,’ an outcome he associated with ‘narrow nationalism.’⁵⁴

According to some reports, the SNP laid claim in the press to putting Scotland first and that included not simply foregrounding Scottish interests but repudiating the demands of a wider world. Many decades prior to Brexit, the regional press gave a platform to rejection by Scottish Nationals of the EEC (as it then was) with the SNP member Colin Bell issuing what it reported as ‘an uncompromising call for an

⁵⁰ *Press and Journal*, 1 December (1978), p. 13.

⁵¹ *Evening Express*, 28 March (1978), p. 3.

⁵² *Evening Express*, 27 May (1978), p. 1.

⁵³ *Press and Journal*, 24 August (1978), p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Press and Journal*, 23 June (1978), p. 11.

independent Scotland to walk out of the Common Market.⁵⁵ The press also conceived of the possibility of an Assembly in wider terms, with reports on suggestions that England, Scotland, and Wales should all have their own assemblies.⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

Scotland, along with Wales and Northern Ireland, gained a devolved assembly in 1999. It did not however gain independence from England and for the time being the United Kingdom remains intact. This article has offered a study of a century of nationalist agitation as refracted through a regional press. This regional press however was simultaneously attentive to its immediate surroundings but informed by international developments. Following the 2016 Brexit referendum, similar circumstances prevail, as the complex process of exiting from the European Union is a major international issue that has once more ignited Scottish nationalist discussion. While there was a narrow majority verdict across the United Kingdom to leave, the Scottish vote was a majority to remain.⁵⁷ The disjunction leaves open to question Scotland's relations first with England and then the remainder of Europe. These frictions place in perspective a previous century, whereby regional preoccupations could be both insular (meaning focussed on Scotland and Scottish issues) but also interacting with vastly wider international concerns.

⁵⁵ *Press and Journal*, 27 May (1978), p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Press and Journal*, 27 November (1978), p. 9.

⁵⁷ *Scotsman*, 31 January (2018).

