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Political Purpose and the Development of Mediatisation: Considering Media Representations and News Management During the Coal Dispute of 1984-5

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Abstract

One major contestation of mediatisation is insufficient empirical historiography of its development, particularly in light of claims for its value in understanding political and social change and the processes of change. This article seeks to add to evidence on concept development by considering a single transformation from mediation towards mediatisation in public communication processes as an example of its phased development at the juncture of press and politics. Using a historical case framework from the British Coal Dispute of 1984-5 to consider political change agency, it explores print media representations of union activity and union leadership to examine how the Conservative government used the media as a proxy in seeking to change public attitudes toward industrial relations. Using three themes from the 1977 *Stepping Stones* strategy, the article discusses how media outlets were used as a vehicle for purposeful political communication.

Keywords

mass-media, mediatisation, political studies, historiography, coal dispute

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Introduction

Mediatisation has become a common yet contested term in political communication research (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 31). Debated topics include portability and conceptual rigour (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1033), temporal development and historical specificity through different sociological and cultural perspectives (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 315) or validity as empirical framework, (Lundby, 2016). Whilst its potential in encapsulating reach, diversity, and transformative capabilities of communication media (Ekström et al., 2016, p. 1091) have been recognised, it continues to be critiqued on term definitions, and being over-favoured and 'casually invoked' (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1034).

Understanding active choice behind term selection is important, as mediatisation has rapidly proliferated against two other long-standing concepts, contributing to applied inconsistencies. Firstly, as part replacement for that 'old descriptive workhorse' of mediation (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1033). Separation of these two ideas into overlapping but distinct areas is accounted by Hjarvard (2013). Here, traditional mediation often focuses on specific communication instances, whereas newer ideas on mediatisation relate to '*long-term* (author's italics) structural change in the role of media at the junction of politics and society, in which the media acquire greater authority to define social reality and condition patterns of social interaction', (Hjarvard, 2013, pp. 2–3). Secondly, whilst mediatisation's popularity at the juncture of media-political relationships is only indirectly related to the fading of ideology as a ubiquitous term (Corner, 2011, p. 139; Philo & Miller, 2000, p. 832), troubles from its application as catch-all for exploring power and communication are not dissimilar. Dwindling of ideology as analytic frame left a vacuum; whilst the huge growth in scale and diversity of new media discourses have generated need for new concepts of value, making empirical analysis of mediatisation's development necessary.

This article is therefore written largely in response to Strömbäck (2008, pp. 230-1), who conceptualises mediatisation for a modern state as a process with four dimensions, highlighting how dynamics of mediatisation also imply processes of change, varying by time and country (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 34). For Strömbäck, phase one of mediatisation is the most significant as it is a prerequisite for any subsequent evolutions, and directly 'corresponds to the concept of mediated politics' (p. 236), hence establishing a point of commonality. Here, media is recognised as constituting the most important conduit between governor and governed, and political actors need to account for its impact in messages that help shape and retain institutional order. Media logic is that 'process through which media transmit and communicate information' (Altheide, 2013, p. 225). During phase two (p. 237), both journalists and political actors undergo increased professionalism, and a corresponding growth in public relations (PRs) becomes important in curating political design for media judgements. Strömbäck (p. 238) describes a switching process in phase three; here outlets 'hold the upper hand' and political actors need to adapt to media need. The final phase of the continuum is phase four, where media reality is perceived to

matter more than objective reality, and media logic, rather than political logic is dominant.

Phasing organisation recognises the mediatisation phenomena as constituted in and via time, helping tackle historical change challenges and enabling debate around linearity or possible demediatisation (Ekström et al., 2016, p. 1099). However, conceptual furring for mediatisation also comes from intertwining that ‘long-term’ change dynamic (Hepp, 2013, p. 4), between a track focused on ‘institutional’ conditions from mass-media, and everyday communication practices from ‘social-constructivist’ traditions. This article specifically considers the former, examining mainstream media outputs of political purpose during transition from phase one to two (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 236); in how the Thatcher government strategy to isolate striking miners and discredit their leadership can be traced through via print media outputs during the early weeks of the Coal Dispute of 1984–5.

This paper therefore contributes to historical empiricism of mediatisation in two ways, firstly, choosing a case from the Thatcher era, which sits in the transition period between the second and third age of political communication for Western democracies as identified by Blumler and Kavanagh (1999, p. 213). During this time, communication media were proliferating, as Britain experienced huge expansion in its media industry (Curran & Seaton, 2018, p. 350). Print journalism production took advantage of technologies, with contested moves from Fleet Street to Wapping undertaken in 1986 (Eldridge et al., 1997, p. 37). News cycles accelerated as platform launches such as breakfast television and new satellite technologies facilitated increased interactions between government and populace. Secondly, taking the lens of a media-impacted crisis event that had broad consequences for political and social life, as discussed below.

Press Management and the Thatcher Administration

Changing media-political interactions during the Thatcher years provided ideal conditions for shaping mediatisation in UK politics. The period is identified by Philo and Miller (2000, p. 831) as a ‘high point in the development of news management and of state and business public relations’, corresponding closely to phase two of Strömbäck’s (2008) continuum. The idea of active news management as a moving mechanism for transforming political and social practice was visibly supported in two major ways.

Firstly, rapid change to news cycles accompanied amalgamations in media ownership. The Murdoch-Thatcher ‘axis’ (Eldridge et al., 1997, p. 34) provided mutual reinforcement and encouragement, including Murdoch’s politically charged acquisition of *The Times* without referral to the monopolies commission, and Maxwell’s active interference in editorial decisions once taking over the Mirror group in July 1984, (Jones, 1986, pp. 128–30). Dissenting journalists were weeded out from many outlets (Curran & Seaton, 2018, p. 121). Increased patronage of partisan media owners was further supported through direct intervention for preferred media appointments

where possible; Philo (1995, p. 2005) reports that Conservative sympathies were required for BBC governorship roles. Jones (2009, p. 86) sees a 'profound' effect on reporting from consolidation and rapid expansion of media influence.

Secondly, political actors came to appreciate benefits of collaborating with PR professionals, (Herkman, 2010, p. 701), fitting closely to the second phase of mediatisation (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 237). PR grew in influence through maximising opportunities from consistent messaging, with Miller and Dinan (2000, p. 6) commenting on their role as power and influence 'mechanism'. Packaging politicians for media promotion was one PR tool; Thatcher's PR team adopted an intense personal marketisation campaign to capitalise on the Falklands victory (Haines, 1984, pp. 16-17) based on US strategies that elected Nixon (McGinniss, 1969). The lynchpin role of Bernard Ingham as Thatcher's press secretary made significant contributions here. Under his tenure, PR capabilities were fashioned into a governmental 'orchestra' (Harris et al., 1988, p. 15) of synchronous messaging. *The Authorised Version* highlights his 'hidden hand' as 'political hit-man', through increasing interferences with media sources and politicising civil service activities.

Gamble (1988, p. 217) contemporaneously comments on the impact of visible collaborations between media and politics; 'under the Thatcher government the British press has been more one-sided in its partisanship than at any time in the history of British democracy'. This concurs with Tory MP Gilmour (1992, p. 23) that the press could 'scarcely have been more fawning if it had been state-controlled'. Koller (2005, pp. 205-6) notes typical outcomes of such news management strategies, with chains of controls established between political actors and journalists. Settings, topics, participants and turn allocation are sequenced, promoting particular knowledges and ways of understanding as authoritative and truthful.

However, active news management was also supported covertly. Although pre-1979 election proposals were never publicly acknowledged (Dorey, 2014, p. 114), the now-declassified *Stepping Stones* (Hoskyns, 1977) provided systematic strategy and political communications programme to create a 'rising tide of public feeling' and persuade the electorate to 'explicitly reject' (S-1) socialism and politicised trade union leadership once the Tories were in power. All tactical elements of 'communications activities' including 'speeches, newspapers and television interviews, conferences, newspaper articles' have 'purpose, content, and style' (p. 1) for Conservative messaging. Together, these support a strategy to 'instil into the emotional majority', (described as 'the Feelers') a 'sense of shame and disgust' at socialism and a 'Sick Society', replaced by 'a sense of hope' in the 'Healthy Society'. The 'rational minority' (described as 'the Thinkers', 'especially the media') require education to avoid a 'false dawn' (p. 18). The role of media thinkers is explained as necessary to motivate 'feelers' through slogans, and 'thinkers' via 'educational' messages. Hoskyns summarises his strategy; 'no single piece of data will in itself make much difference. It is a question of assembling them ... that as a whole they build up a "cumulative dose"' (p. 36).

One key aim of this *Stepping Stones* blueprint was handling union leaders towards less political futures. They were classified in three categories: positively as 'potential allies', neutrally as educable and/or persuadable, and those to be publicly 'isolated and discredited, unless their power can be reduced in some other way' (p. 14). Success may be evidenced through subsequent declining collective representation in the workplace and falling union memberships.¹

This paper then discusses mechanisms for tactical discreditation of both striking miners and their leadership via media outlets as demonstration of the juncture between government and press at the start of the second phase of mediatisation (Strömbäck, 2008, pp. 236-7). Here political actors increase resource directed at news management to direct and 'educate' media logics to preferred judgements, and interdependencies between politicians and news media begin to grow.

'The NCB/NUM problem'

The coal dispute of 1984-5 developed into a major political, material and social crisis of late twentieth century Britain. It also became the spearhead of a series of oppositions to government policies and ideologies, including successive Employment and Trade Union Acts (1980, 1982 and 1984) which facilitated the sequestration of union assets, and requirements for secret balloting. Change mechanisms were supported through increased police recruitment (Darlington, 2005, p. 71) and tactical training (Wallington, 1988) for potential civil protest. Other oppositions played out via media outlets during this period included abolishing the GLC (Greater London Council), Greenham Common protests, Section 28 legislation, and the rise of Militant in Liverpool. All these contestations required active news management of political and moral ambiguities and preferred media interpretations to maintain government legitimacies around changing policy frameworks. Chief among these legitimacy strategies was active management of public feeling against socialism, which was an important element of Thatcherite rhetoric (see Phillips, 1996; Charteris-Black, 2005).

For the coal industry specifically, the government had been quietly preparing for conflict since a 1981 'humiliating' (Arnold, 2016, p. 104) climbdown on proposed pit closures (Helm, 2004, p. 8). Material preparations included recommendations from the leaked Ridley Report (1977); investment in North Sea oil, stockpiling coal supplies, refitting power stations and strategic appointments of trusted personnel; Nigel Lawson as Energy Secretary (prior to Peter Walker), and the nemesis of British Steel, Ian MacGregor, to the NCB. Much hard evidence of practical preparations alongside parallel removal of politicised union representation in the industry has come from memoirs and recent emergence of Cabinet papers under the thirty-year rule (Phillips, 2014, p. 120). Anti-union media reporting has also been recognised in the literature, particularly in relation to television coverage (e.g., Philo, 1995; Harcup, 2014). What has not yet been directly considered is how the *Stepping Stones* strategies were directly funnelled to the public through active media management during the early weeks of the dispute.

The strike began on March 6, 1984, triggered by an initial spontaneous walkout following the announcement of the closure of the Cortonwood colliery, and ending a year later when miners voted to return to work. Striking miners were unconvinced by NCB (National Coal Board) statements of a ‘modest’ (Felton, 1984a) closure programme for market efficiencies. They believed the government ‘planned for further closures and ultimately the complete dismantling of the UK coal industry’ (Hart, 2017, p. 4), based on (now confirmed) union claim of a secret closure ‘hit list’ (see Phillips, 2014). Due to reach and complexity of the dispute, press representations of government strike management can usefully be organised into three strategic phases (Phillips, 2014, pp. 117–9). First, early weeks of distancing and containment; second, open conflict with the National Union of Mineworkers (NUMs) following the Battle of Orgreave in June 1984; and a final phase of moves toward unconditional defeat through return-to-work discourses (Jones, 1986, p. 146). This study focuses on media processes for isolation of the miners and their leadership during the initial distancing and containment phase, where the government publicly stated their refusal to intervene in what they referred to as management investment in economic mines (*The Times*, 1984a).

In terms of NUM leadership, Arthur Scargill had a long-standing reputation as professional ‘hate figure’ for the right-wing press (Crick, 1985, p. 69). This had developed since the 1972 siege at Saltley Gate where flying pickets were used to tactical advantage against the police. He was a well-known figure, particularly through a public persona as ‘voice of the Left’ on Yorkshire TV (Crick, 1985, p. 50). As such, by the time of his ascent to the NUM presidency in late 1981, Routledge (1993, p. 109) was able to comment that ‘much had already been written about him, flattering, analytical and damning’.

His election was not disappointing to the government; a secret letter from Hoskyns to Howe and Thatcher in May 1981 claims potential ‘advantage if Scargill was the public (and apparently much disliked) symbol of the NUM’.³ Public sympathy for miners seeking to protect jobs (identified in the letter as ‘salt of the earth’) could be minimised if their leader was discredited (Arnold, 2016, p. 105). The letter asserts discreditation might be a ‘key factor in mobilising public opinion to face a strike’ and to call him an ‘ideal NUM figurehead’ before going on to explore options for altering ‘the balance of power bit by bit, in a clandestine way’. Whilst many contributors have acknowledged media intent to create Scargill as ‘public enemy No.1’ (Jones, 2009, p. 71), there has as yet been ‘little discourse-analysis research’ (Hart, 2017, p. 5) into representations of media process at textual level supporting a ‘cumulative dose’ in discreditation and isolation. Nor discussion of linking mediatisation development and government design to the active isolation of an individual and the group he represented.

Methodology

This study focuses on print media depictions of striking miners and union leadership during the early weeks of the Coal Dispute of 1984-5, using Fairclough’s (1996,

pp. 110-1) critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach and media-language framework. This grounds 'intertextual chains' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 288) of discourse produced as enactments of political and economic decision-making within social structures and processes. It focuses on the interaction between text and processes of production and interpretation, where it is not the single text that is significant, rather that the approach is designed to be cumulative, 'working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency' (p. 54).

The Coal Dispute case was chosen as an example of purposeful transitioning between phase one and two of mediatisation; how political agency intends to shape media coverage, but different outlets respond according to respective norms and values (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 237). Three themes were directly taken from the *Stepping Stones* report strategies to see if/how these were represented in press outputs; *socialism as 'shame'* (p. 18), *'the right sort of industrial relations'* (p. 17) and *isolation and discreditation* (p. 14): each article was then considered for examples of 'purpose, content, and style' (Hoskyns, 1977) to see if output might 'promote and coordinate the interests of a group' (van Dijk, 1998, p. 24), either in support of government PR or applied alternative media judgement on the approach.

A complete set of 963 articles discussing either the dispute or its leaders were initially manually transcribed (due to inconsistent digitisation) from online databases of *The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Daily Mirror* during March 1, 1984 to May 31, 1984 to provide a comparative qualitative analysis. Data collection provided a broadsheet Left representation from *The Guardian* and *The Times* for the Right. *The Daily Mirror* was also included as a second Left learning source, given tensions between the parliamentary Labour party and union activism during the dispute. Initial coding instances included grammatical choices, word frequencies, collocation and metaphor (Fairclough, 1996, p. 111). For example, the word 'militant' to describe strikers is collocated and contrasted with 'moderate' non-strikers on 77 occasions during March 1984 in *The Times* and 69 occasions in *The Guardian*. However, in five articles during the month, *Times* writers reword 'militant' for 'left-wing'. In one, 'Moderates dampen left-wing hopes of all-out pit strike' (Routledge, 1984a), the headline is repeatedly threaded in body-text; 'Left-wing hopes of an all-out national miners' strike have been blasted by heavy votes against action from moderate coalfields', 'Miners in the moderate areas yesterday delivered a body blow to left-wing ...' and 'traditionally moderate ... after picket-line violence'. Examples from 33 articles are discussed below, broadly balanced between expected 'left-wing' sources represented by *The Guardian* and *The Mirror* (15) and 'right-wing' via *The Times* (17) and one inclusion from *The Sun*.

Socialism as 'shame'

Representations of trade unions and socialist policies as the root cause of Britain's problems were highly visible throughout Conservative rhetoric (Phillips, 1996), so unsurprisingly align with dispute coverage. However, metaphors of threat appear

both within and without. In terms of outside threats, (e.g., USSR), Charteris-Black (2005, pp. 25, 93-4) applies Edelman's myth of the *Conspiratorial Enemy* to Thatcher's rhetoric on hostile out-group socialists. Using the metaphor of 'political opponents are enemies'; he demonstrates how socialism is presented as an 'enemy state that has undertaken an invasion and occupation' (p. 94) Miners agency in striking are a tangible reminder of this, and matching metaphors of 'Scargill's hordes at the gate' (Fleet, 1984b) and 'still on the rampage' (Congdon, 1984) feature widely in *The Times* during the period, with Scargill wielding the 'strong arm' of the miners to assist socialist revolution (Butt, 1984).

Hodges (1984) pushes the enemy state metaphor further in directly connecting striking mineworkers with Russian values; 'a reign of terror among miners ... under Mr Scargill's leadership ... the union was run by democratic centralism, a form of ruthless organisation more akin to the Soviet system than to British democracy'. Similarly, only a week into the dispute, a *Times* editorial (1984a) comments that 'even the most socialist-minded miner must see Mr Scargill's insistence that there are no uneconomic pits as no more than Stalinist newspeak ...'. Soviet references were a common tool for minimising Scargill's points on pit closures in *The Times*, due to known links with Communism and Russia (see Routledge, 1993), with these shared between media outlets and Parliament. Mr. Geoffrey Dickens MP (C, Saddleworth) is quoted directly as saying 'Mr Arthur Scargill is a confessed Marxist, surrounded by communist aides and advisers, and, much more serious, support for him is coming from the Kremlin' (*The Times*, 1984b).

However, *The Times* pushes the out-group metaphor further. Miners are positioned not only as enemy, but a source of shame for the parliamentary Labour party. This allows the government to make extra gains from conflating socialist/communist links. In one article, *The Company they Keep Times* (1984c), the paper refers to Mr. Scargill and his deputy Mr. McGahey by communist affiliation on seven occasions, for example, '... campaign has been fully orchestrated by Communist Party spokesmen', and 'at every station along the line the Communists have been with him. It cannot be wise for the Labour leadership to keep such company'. Mr. MacGregor, by contrast, is praised with an oppositional archetype (Fairclough, 1996, p. 30) of 'impressive qualities of industrial leadership'. The article concludes directly conflating socialism with a stigma of communist association; 'Mr Kinnock and his colleagues have been skilfully manoeuvred into following the militants rather than leading the party away from militancy. They now share a platform with the Communists though that surely cannot be what they intended'. Here, hostile agency is seen as duping the mainstream opposition with socialism providing a gateway to more extreme positions. Such descriptions encourage readers to consider socialist values negatively.

Visible attempts by Labour party PR to counter whilst supporting miners' aims to defend jobs appear over subsequent weeks through *The Guardian*, culminating with an in-depth interview with Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley identifying with a muddled centre ground. Here he identifies as 'self-confessed moderate, tarred and feathered with the moderate brush', (White, 1984b), deliberately aiming to emphasise

moderate rather than militant, and minimise reader association with the socially shaming Militant Tendency (see Thomas-Symonds, 2005).

Dangers of socialist activity as a source of shame in the community even filter to the left-wing press. *The Daily Mirror* reports a scare on militant councils indoctrinating children, with a socially shaming headline of *Pupils being brainwashed*, and a headmaster protesting against local authority permission for a striking miner to lecture in class, ... 'I work in the Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire' (Lyte, 1984). Presented as simplistic choices of good and bad values; right-wing, and by proxy, Conservative values are conflated with democracy, whereas the socialist mineworkers and local authority are associated with inappropriate Russian values.

However, journalistic presentations of the dispute also reflect that second stage of mediatisation where messages are filtered through 'their own medium, its format, norms and values, and its audiences' (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 237). This aspect can be explored through an article by Wintour (1984) for *The Guardian*, where he stresses the importance of NUM right to reply, criticising the *Daily Express* for its choice of language in the dispute, highlighting two pieces from 19th April, one front page headline; '*Scargill's Red Army moves in*', that continues with 'militant Red Guards responsible for most of the pit strike violence will attack again today ...' and a commentary piece warning of 'similarities in the fascist techniques of Mr Scargill and Adolf Hitler'.

Such descriptors were an important aspect of generating a 'rising tide of public feeling', highlighting negative associations toward socialism, and systematically using metaphor and association to target miners and their leaders' actions as hostile and morally wrong.

'The right sort of industrial relations'

The second press theme from *Stepping Stones* and visible as active strike management considers the eventual aim to depoliticise trade unions through modifying members 'existing values and attitudes' (p. 36). As noted by Charteris-Black (2005, p. 93) Conservatives always look to manage their working-class base carefully. It was important to maintain a government construction of defending the weak (i.e., nonunionised) and legitimate (shareholders) to support a contrast that conceptualised strikers as bullies rather than defending jobs and communities. The aim here was educative and promoted differently to messages crafted to develop a 'rising tide of public feeling' of shame against socialism. *Stepping Stones* required union realisation they must 'modify their behaviour to as to be less combative, more flexible and genuinely helpful' (A-1) as part of promoting 'Good society with good unions'. Media outlets were considered vital in promoting what 'good' unions might do – and a list is provided including shareholding activity, and representation on company boards.

Aims in modifying behaviour were carried out through the press in two main ways, firstly by dividing striking miners from those not taking industrial action. Keeping people thinking about the eventual outcomes of disputes was not difficult, with the tail end of the 1970s characterised through protracted workplace unrest and strike

action that had already benefited the incoming Tory administration. The Conservatives had 'accumulated capital' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 156) through existing press tropes here. Thomas (2007, p. 268) refers to this 'remembered time' as 'a period of backwardness, anarchy and industrial militancy' with the Winter of Discontent as the 'centrepiece of this mythology'. His paper notes media success in maintaining Labour party 'baggage' around mass strikes and economic incompetence (p. 276) as a real and continued success for the Conservatives.

Careful rhetoric around the ballot issue was key to media attempts to re-educate striking miners and the public. Whilst area strikes were permitted in the NUM rule book (Crick, 1985, p. 149) media outlets focused on a misleading necessity for a national ballot before strike action. The factual legitimacy of local area strikes is only mentioned on two occasions in the dataset, whereas pleas for a ballot appear on 89 occasions in *The Times*, 150 in *The Guardian*, and 51 in the *Daily Mirror*. These reports circulate around an interview with Ian MacGregor given to Felton (1984b) for *The Times* entitled *Defy Your Union*, where MacGregor argues that miners have been 'denied' a vote by union management. This is echoed by other *Times* writers, for example, Routledge (1984c) 'deprived of a secret pithead ballot'. Whilst that was the NUM leadership position, press discourse minimised the nature of the spontaneous walk-outs following closure announcements.

Crick (1985, p. 119) notes 'misleading' press coverage that Nottinghamshire was against the strike per se, rather than wishing to ballot before undertaking industrial action. Nottingham miners were reported as 'besieged' (Winter & Pithers, 1984) by 'hundreds of militant miners from Yorkshire' (Routledge & Clement, 1984). News reports were therefore able to tap into existing tropes of Britain 'under siege' from 'militant trade unionists' (Hay, 1996, p. 254) with little differentiation from press outlets in negative reports of picketing. The government gained from actively managing this discourse; denial of a ballot amplified union activity as wrongful, were leaders to concede demand for a ballot they would lose impetus.

The second strategy in educating miners and the wider public in discrediting politicised union action came from value-laden discussions of real or manufactured NUM interactions with other controversial, or taboo political associations. These included Argentina, the IRA, and South Africa; such links not only politicised and stigmatised ordinary miners (Butler, 2020) but prepared the public to conflate strike activity with other hostile groups, promoting a moral panic (Cohen, 1987, p. 9).

Margaret Thatcher's rhetorical associations between striking miners and the then recent Falklands conflict have already been studied in relation to the oft-quoted 'enemy within' speech to the 1922 committee,⁴ (e.g., Milne, 2014; Collins, 2014) which took place later in 1984. Early links to that conflict as an expression of Conservative struggle for 'democracy on the one side and violent extremists (or terrorists) on the other' (Reicher & Hopkins, 1996, p. 363) also appear in Parliamentary reports. The aim by associating miners with the known Argentine enemy from the 1982 war is in producing a similar threat response, legitimising government approaches

to the dispute. *The Times* reports on Tony Marlow (C, Northampton North) describing Scargill as ‘the Galtieri of the coalfields’ (Brown, 1984a). These conflicts are replicated in binary terms in the press, for example, Goodman (1984a) ‘... as determined to win this fight as she was against Galtieri and the Falklands. To her it is a kind of industrial Falklands ...’

Linking striking miners with the Falklands conflict is not the only contested political association. Former Conservative MP Bruce-Gardyne (1984) writes for *The Times*, conflating Arthur Scargill’s leadership of the miners with the historical South African overseer:

By this evening we should have a clearer idea of whether the miners of the Midlands and North-west have been brought to heel by the crack of Mr Scargill’s sjambok. If they have ... we shall be shaping up for a head-on collision between elected government and unelected union warlords ...

Here the narrative of ‘brought to heel’ provides a submissive attribution for ordinary miners, strengthened with the South African term for a whip, and accompanying negative agency for Scargill. Mis-attribution of ‘unelected union warlords’ also reaffirms struggle for democracy against the violent Other.

Routledge (1984b) similarly offers an oblique connection to the IRA for *Times* readers through careful selection of vocabulary and its experiential values (Fairclough, 1996, pp. 116-7). Public fear of IRA activity was high at the time following bombing of Hyde Park in 1982 and Harrods in 1983, and this extract aims to highlight lawless behaviours:

Miners and their allies appear to be forming themselves into a ‘provisional’ wing of the labour movement, leaving the ‘official’ TUC on the sidelines in a guerrilla struggle with the state ...

In each case, the text aims to produce a feeling of negativity for politicised trade union activities and create systems of association of how that ‘healthy society’ is threatened by the actions of these associated groups.

Isolation and Discreditation

One consistent feature of media reporting, noted at the time, was a focus on ‘high politics’ (Phillips, 2009, p. 156). This approach personified the story around named individuals, largely Arthur Scargill, Ian MacGregor and Margaret Thatcher, giving an impression of a top-down struggle, obscuring ordinary workers’ agency. Harcup (2011, p. 32) quotes a Leeds-based journalist who recalled: ‘The mainstream press concentrated on Scargill and what he was doing, but when you went out on picket lines he was rarely mentioned. It was their struggle rather than his’. Similar reflections come from Allen (2009, p. 282) on an interview with Jack Taylor (NUM Yorkshire president)

who comments that he would have been 'murdered' if he had attempted to stop initial walkouts.

This high politics media approach was complementary to the *Stepping Stones* agenda of isolation and discreditation, contrasting named union leaders under its three classifications. Mr. Eric Hammond from the Electrical workers (EEPTU) could be positioned in the first category of 'potential ally', with Adeney and Lloyd (1986, p. 147) analysing active denials of 'cosy' power industry relationships. In May, Hammond made a speech that the power workers would not support the miners, saying that 'the muzzle of the law' should not be removed 'from these hounds' (Harper, 1984). He further criticised Scargill by recalling 'General Hindenburg's description of the British Army of the first world war: "lions led by donkeys"'

In terms of historic Triple Alliance partnerships from the General Strike of 1926, Bill Sirs' position as the leader of the Steelworkers union was much more difficult. The neutering of British Steel and halving of its workforce in 1980 under Ian MacGregor had left him in a bind; practical help for mineworkers would be tantamount to 'suicide of their own decimated industry' (Adeney & Lloyd, 1986, p. 137). His comments to Pattinson (1984c) at *The Mirror* are sympathetically reported; that he was 'not here to see the steel industry crucified on someone else's altar' is an indication of 'persuasion' via the need to defend jobs, particularly at the threatened Ravenscraig Steelworks.

Paul Foot further indicates the *Daily Mirror* (1984) is choosing not to be led toward government-preferred judgement on unions. He reports how the government 'bought off' railworkers through generous pay rises, persuading them not to assist the miners. Management jointly pursued a 'soft line' for any railworkers' infractions in supporting striking miners, they were sent home, but allowed to quietly return to work the following day (Adeney & Lloyd, 1986, pp.134-5).

By personalising stories around union officials who typified the kind of relationships the government were seeking, press outlets could contrast with discrediting 'the most disliked and feared of all union leaders' (Smith, 1984). This was positive for the Conservatives, as the left-leaning *Guardian* and *Mirror* reported division between unions around the strike. Jones (2009, p. 69), then a BBC journalist, reflects on a 'near-unanimous view of the press' of danger to the State from Scargill. Hostile coverage came from government management but also reflected filtration from journalists and editors' personal relationships with Scargill. Both Routledge (1993) and Jones (2009, p. 70) consider public hostility to journalists as 'calculated' and separate from their private relationships.

Reports that associated Scargill with Nazis was one major area of discreditation despite known Communist links. Misinformation here is an indicator of attempted government management and the independence of a responding press. The *Daily Mirror* (Goodman, 1984b) is the only outlet that covers NCB comments about fascist behaviour,

Last night – for the second time this weekend – National Coal Board bosses accused miners leaders of behaving like Nazis. Commenting on claims made by Mr Scargill in the TV interview, a board spokesman said: ‘This is the Goebbels technique’.

However, such comparisons continued to circulate in press reports, some of which appeared to be communicating with each other more than the public – what we might informally refer to as the Westminster bubble today. Comments from Wintour for *The Guardian* on *Daily Express* coverage have been made above, but the paper also took the time to report extensively on a scheduled front page for *The Sun* (Pallister, 1984) that their own printworkers refused to print. A photo of Scargill, arm aloft with the headline *Mine Fuehrer*. Pallister also suggests a single agency behind intended headlines, by writing that in the *Daily Star* ‘the picture appears under the headline “Mine Fury!”’ Journalists were not unaware of how Nazi metaphors were being pushed for political advantage to describe both dispute and Scargill, with Waterhouse (1984) noting; ‘to compare police tactics in the coalfields with stormtrooper tactics in Nazi Germany, – or, on the other side of the fence, to compare Arthur Scargill with Dr Goebbels ... is dangerous codswallop’.

Similarly, discreditation via personal attacks on Scargill’s behaviour appear in *The Times*, where descriptors such as his ‘antics’ (Fleet, 1984b) ‘pompous lectures’ (Leeson, 1984) and ‘rancour’ (*The Times*, 1984e) appear frequently. However, discreditation seems not just government work, it is also possible to pick out potential counter-briefings from factions within the parliamentary Labour party, located in both broadsheets. Here Aitken (1984b) reports on ‘developing paranoia in the Kinnock camp’ in *The Guardian* alongside a conflation from *The Times* (Smith, 1984) that both benefited the government and damaged Labour unity; ‘... fear was linked with two names, Benn and Scargill: one representing militancy within the party, the other militancy with the unions ...’

Such personalisation, via both isolation and discreditation, helped promote moral judgements on Scargill, supporting that ‘cumulative dose’ aimed to move public sentiment. These were strengthened in *The Times* by warm words for the Prime Minister where her leadership is described on 15 occasions as ‘firm’ in the dataset, or in agentic ways that convey robust handling of the dispute, for example, ‘Mrs Margaret Thatcher declared that the rule of law must prevail over the rule of the mob ...’ (Clement & Tandler, 1984).

Discussion

Explicit government strategies for managing strikers and leaders were furthered with varying success through media outlets, corresponding to the second phase of mediation in a number of ways. Firstly, that media outlets independently weigh the appropriateness of both their own, and their peers’ outputs, to readers. *The Guardian* in particular asserts that autonomy noted by Strömbäck (p. 237) as typical of that phase. This is both via direct critique of tabloid output from *The Sun* and *Daily*

Express, and in ensuring right-of-reply, if not from the NUM but at least from the parliamentary Labour party to associations of militancy and communism promoted by *The Times*.

Secondly, though autonomy is defended in some outputs, we can also see not only trace evidence of interactive links between the Conservatives and *The Times* through PR and that single agency steering tabloid headlines reported on by Pallister (1984) but also pragmatic (p. 237) support for the government and their owners. *The Times* is independent in that it is in control of its own content, but reports are filtered in negotiation with 'those who are attempting to influence the news' (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 237). There appears an open recognition of similar negotiated processes underway at *The Guardian*, not only is Hattersley offered a detailed interview, but Langdon's (1984) article quotes his comments accusing the government of 'organised operation to manipulate the presentation of news by offering rewards to sympathetic newspapers. He attacked what he called the ruthless management of news by this means, and the way in which, he claimed, the Govt has harassed its critics in the press'.

As such, MacGregor's reported hopes to 'exploit fully' (Beckett & Hencke, 2009, p. 107) media outlets in alienating the NUM from public sympathy does not appear fully realised despite significant news management resources from the government. Whilst government discreditation of Scargill as a radical and dangerous leader, and a need for less political unions was successfully promoted through all outlets studied, the proposed presentation of mineworkers as misguided and uneducated traditionalists unable to accept necessary progress was hindered in some outlets by media actors excising their independence. This also fits with the third expectation of 'growing professionalism' (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 237) as journalists present their readership with more nuanced discussions. As such media logics supported the case for depoliticization of unions as a moral issue. All presented Scargill as a synecdochised representative of political trade unionism, promoting that 'right sort' of union leadership instead. Different takes on a wider social turn away from socialism were dependent upon outlet approaches.

Conclusions

Whilst this paper in considering aspects of the early weeks of the Coal Dispute of 1984-5 is a study of a 'single transformation' in the mediatisation process (Hepp, 2009, p. 140) at the juncture of media-politic relationships, it offers an opportunity toward binding this contested concept. The lens of a period of intensive socio-political change and empirical starting point demonstrates practical application for political and structural transformation through a specific encounter. The nature of the Coal Dispute as a crisis event, and release of Cabinet papers thirty years later have created particular conditions of visibility suitable for empirical study, as tracings of retrospectively visible linkages that furthered policies.

This article concludes that a historical view of mediatisation processes is essentially actor-led, promoted by narrative media techniques and Public Relations steer toward

cumulative processes. Mutual interdependencies show a balance of media outlets acting as both representatives of the political ‘will’ behind stories but as active change agents in their own right, but not yet having that pervasive ‘upper hand’ (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 238), characteristic of phases three and four. This is significant for future work in exploring path dependencies where mediatisation and media dominance became tied to inflammation of sensitive issues such as immigration (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018) or construction of Brexit representations (Ridge-Newman et al., 2018).


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Notes

1. Office for National Statistics, (2019) Trade Union Statistics 2018, Trade Union membership statistics 2018 tables, Table 1.1: Trade union membership, Unions registered, listed, or scheduled in Great Britain1, 1892 to 2016–2017, via <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2018> (accessed 16 03 22)
2. Source Hoskyns, 1981 May 22 Fr Archive; Prime Ministerial Private Office Files, PREM19/540, via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/126073> (accessed 10 03 22)
3. Source Hoskyns, 1981 May 22 Fr Archive; Prime Ministerial Private Office Files, PREM19/540, via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/126073> (accessed 10 03 22)
4. Document 105563, 19 July 1984, Available via The Margaret Thatcher foundation, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105563> (accessed 03/06/21)

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