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HOW THE WAR MADE THE MIRROR

We should remember that one war had already made the Daily Mirror given that it reached its zenith as an illustrated daily newspaper as it emerged from World War One. However this did not translate into continuing success as by the 1930s it was in steep decline. Re-launched in the mid-thirties, to appeal specifically to what may be described as the non-political left, the Daily Mirror was able to reinforce its editorial identity as a populist organ of considerable appeal to the working classes of Britain during World War Two. The letters from the start of the Mirror's campaign on June 25 1945 to the final day of the election campaigning on July 5 will be considered as contributing to the maintenance of a carefully considered editorial approach to politics as well as an equally astute consolidation of reader identification at the heart of that editorial project. This article will explore how the emergent editorial strategy of the newspaper was enhanced by drawing popular attention to the plight of the ordinary soldier and the ordinary citizen in the midst of war. Its ground-breaking contributions to shaping both the popular memories of the years preceding the war, as well as expectations of what might emerge as a political settlement after the war, are most clearly articulated in its deployment of readers' letters.

KEYWORDS *Daily Mirror*, readers' letters, 1945, General Election, World War Two, editorial strategy

Introduction

Readers' letters have been a fairly constant presence in a wide variety of periodical publications over centuries. In the first printed periodicals of the seventeenth century they were indistinguishable from news and contributed most of the reports that were

not officially sanctioned by government sources. Later they became vital channels for the expression of opinion that bypassed official censorship and were the main driver of reader interest. With the commercial development of newspapers, letters became more systematically demarcated from reporting but retained their importance as gauges of public opinion and as the conduit for many editorially orchestrated campaigns. While newspapers such as the *Times* [1] and the *Daily Telegraph* [2] had prided themselves on the influence of their letters pages on both government policy and their readers in the nineteenth century, the *Daily Mirror*, in the very different context of the twentieth century, chose letters as one of its main strategies in constructing a connection with an entirely new readership as it shifted its appeal from a staid middle-class and middle-aged readership to a younger and more left-leaning constituency. The use of letters to create this identity was well established by World War Two but, even so, their deployment in the last weeks of the war not only guided readers in their electoral preferences but also began to lay the foundations of popular memories of the conflict. It is claimed here that the work begun in 1934 in rebranding the newspaper, in part through its use of letters in appealing to a sense of social and political solidarity with its readers, was completed in the two week letter campaign in the run-up to the election of July 1945. This piece looks neither at the writers of the letters nor the editorial processes of selection as Wahl-Jørgensen [3] has done for her contemporary study. Instead it analyses the rhetorical positioning of letters in a particular paper at a pivotal moment in the history of the nation and the paper itself.

Letters and political voice in the press

Letters have taken on many forms in both attracting the interest of readers and in the establishment of editorial identities. Yet even prior to the development of printed periodicals, news evolved as a genre with letters very much to the fore. Hand-written copies of correspondence often featured as part of the bundles circulated to wealthy

patrons in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. [4] Once printing provided more systematic layout and content for the emerging periodical press, there was still little to distinguish letters, often presented verbatim from correspondents across Europe, from reports compiled out of those letters by publishers or editors. After the generic experimentation of the English Civil War and its 'mercuries' where opinion and polemic took central stage [5], the Restoration saw the return of a restrained form of officially sanctioned reporting under the watchful gaze of the Surveyor of the Press, L' Estrange, from 1660. This left little room for the publication of opinion or unsolicited correspondence. Thereafter, letters came to characterise both liberal moments as well as more contentious periods in the development of the press in Britain and to a large extent it is their persistence through the history of newspapers that justifies the claim of Schudson that, 'The newspaper is the historically central source of democratic conversation'[6]. Letters to newspapers are a major contribution to the development of democracy and public participation in the news media as part of that process. The emergence of Habermas's public sphere [7] in the English periodicals of the early eighteenth century was very much dependent on the contributions of letter writers. Steele and Addison's *Tatler* and *Spectator* (1709-1712) allowed professional opinion brokers to mask their identity behind stock names while also including contributions from a wider public on political and cultural topics. Newspapers and other periodical publications came to depend on the content of letters for spicing up their appeal to their readers beyond the relaying of routine information on trade, commerce and the official cycle of sanctioned political announcements. For example, weekly publications in the early eighteenth century such as the *London Journal* with its letters from 'Cato' and letters to the publisher of *Mist's Weekly Journal* were providing commentary on contemporary events which would appear to have more in common with leading articles of today. The letter became one of the strategies which enabled the publisher to disassociate himself from the views of the writer and the writers, in turn, could hide

their identity through the use of learned-sounding *noms-de-plume*. Letters thus became the medium through which controversial views could be expressed within the editorial format of the periodical and as a consequence these contributions were anonymized on account of the political wrath they could bring down upon the authors. In 1722, for instance, the *London Journal* was bought up and run by Prime Minister Walpole, chiefly on account of the Cato letters that criticised the government's handling of the South Sea Bubble while Nathaniel Mist spent his later years in exile in France on account of the content of the letters and opinion pieces in his Jacobite journal [8]. Later, from the late eighteenth century writers as varied as Franklin, Paine and Robespierre and into the early nineteenth century, publicists with political intent such as Emmet, Carlile, Wooler and Cobbett used epistolary techniques to address readers and drive public opinion towards radical political change.

It was however from the mid-nineteenth century that the letter became more packaged within a particular function and location within newspapers. This coincides with a clearer demarcation from reporting and the rise of a professional distinctiveness in journalists who prided themselves on being better able to provide news that could be distinguished from opinion. [9]

The rise and fall of the *Daily Mirror*

The *Daily Mirror* was designed to complete Alfred Harmsworth's dominance of the popular daily market by winning over an exclusively female readership. Launched in 1903 as a paper for 'gentlewomen' with a female editorial staff it indicated that Harmsworth had perhaps become somewhat complacent about the success of his publishing ventures as it failed to match early expectations. [10] In 1904 it was relaunched as a pictorial newspaper and in this guise it proved to be a highly successful new addition to the popular market. It was during World War One that it reached its greatest

success in terms of circulation. Its photographs included images of the war and of those involved in the war effort at home or abroad. Its popularity peaked in 1919 when it was on occasions exceeding one million sales and was able to boast on its front page that it had a 'Certified circulation larger than that of any other daily picture paper' [11].

However, the attractiveness of its photographs which had provided much of its early distinctiveness became compromised as more popular daily newspapers were relaunched amidst increased competition in the early thirties [12]. In order to match changing audience demands, Wickham Steed argued that newspapers in general at this point needed to find a way which was acceptable to their own readerships of providing a faithful presentation of modern life with due regard for public affairs. [13] This observation was compounded by the fact that the *Daily Mirror* while certainly needing to find its own mode of representation was aimed at a segment of the market which was already overcrowded by newspapers trying to find ways to address their increasingly demanding constituencies. It was recognised that there were too many right-of-centre popular newspapers to maintain profitability for all of them [14] and the content of the *Daily Mirror* was criticised in retrospect as being more in tune with a newspaper that might well have been better called *The Daily Sedative*.[15] In that context it was perhaps not surprising that the American advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, commissioned by the failing *Daily Mirror* in the early thirties to advise on its editorial direction, recommended that it should target a younger, more left-leaning audience.

The *Daily Mirror* makes its tabloid mark

Editorial director Harry Guy Bartholomew was an ideal person to drive forward the new identity. A man with radical instincts and an innate hatred of snobbishness and privilege, he had, for some time, along with advertising director Cecil King, admired the

style of the American tabloids, the New York *Daily Mirror* and the New York *Daily News*, so when

J Walter Thompson advised them in 1934 to develop their paper as a British blue-collar, non-partisan tabloid they took the advice on board with considerable enthusiasm. By late 1934 Bartholomew was experimenting with bold type and large, sensational headlines. However, beyond the format of the tabloid, it was the readers that the paper needed to win over if it was to regain its circulation success. King is quoted as saying that the relaunch was: 'a technical adventure in journalism' conceived in 'cynicism' only later 'dissipated by the waves of affection and loyalty which came welling up from the band of readers' [16]. Bartholomew began to create a style that encapsulated its new target audience. Colloquial and irreverent, sensational and honest, 'pugnaciously populist' [17], it forged a new form of demotic populism [18] This ambition was supported politically by the socialist polemic of Richard Jennings and working class features assistant Hugh Cudlipp and William Connor (as 'Cassandra') who began work for the new *Daily Mirror* on the same August Bank Holiday in 1935. Smith [19] has claimed that it was this particular editorial combination that enabled the newspaper to find the finely tuned representation of the lived experience and voices of its audience.

The *Daily Mirror*'s managed to combine the appeal of the Sunday popular papers – miscellany, pictures and sensation - with serious political reporting that was less didactic than its rivals. As a contrast, the *Daily Herald* 'packaged' the news for its Labour/Trades Union Congress audiences, but its approach was more didactic, and unlike the restyled *Daily Mirror* it slipped less easily into a more informal mode of address. [20]

Human interest was becoming an increasingly popular component in the British press and even the elite press had a particular approach to this category with Hannen Swaffer

arguing in 1936 that there needed to be more of this material across the board. [21] The personalisation of material was a key strategy in generating such human interest and in the letters of the *Daily Mirror* we find an interesting approach to personalising of content. From the mid 1930s, the re-launched *Daily Mirror* began to encourage participation of its growing readership and the chief instrument in this participatory project was the letter.

Integrating Readers' letters into the tabloid strategy

The number of letters and the variety of topics they covered allowed for an expansive style of engagement with readers' actual interests, tested for relevance by reference to its own postbag. Beyond the mail the newspaper received, newspapers were certainly able to complement this feedback beyond hazy idealizations of their readership with a greater appreciation of how many were actually reading the paper after the launch of the Audit Bureau of Circulation in 1931. This increasing sophistication of advertising agencies to gauge more precisely who was reading them was enhanced by engagement with the readers themselves in projects such as Mass Observation from 1937.

The *Daily Mirror* set out to capture the readers who were being missed by existing newspapers. They did this in large part by trying to identify the tone of these readers' voices and the substance of their concerns through their multiple editorial experiments with letters. In doing so, the *Daily Mirror* became famous for being, 'loud-mouthed and radical,' [22] as an articulation of the presumed style of working class discourse. Although certainly not the only popular newspaper to seek audience involvement via the letters pages, it was the quantity of letters and the strategic use of the form in order to create a dialogue with these readers which was the great innovation. [23] The letters supplied not only a crude form of opinion poll on matters of interest to its target audience but also a guide to the vernacular of the readers which the paper was astute enough to feed back

in a successful editorial circle. During this boom period for the popular press in the 1930s, none of the *Daily Mirror*'s rivals including the *Daily* Express, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Herald* were experimenting in the same way. We can assume, given their healthy market share, that they were already confident who their readers were and they were more inclined to give them familiar editorial lines. The *Daily Mirror*'s shift in address was determined by an urgent commercial need to shift its political and demographic appeal; a problem of no concern to the other mass newspapers. For them inclusivity was less important than the persuasive and didactic tone of communication, their 'representational ideal' [24] whereas the *Daily Mirror*, certainly not in the process of reverting to a more 'educational position' were in the active process of finding an audience to map onto and to find a voice with which they could best represent their worldview.

As part of this strategy of reinvigorating its market appeal, the *Daily Mirror* moved on quite quickly from the standard of editorially themed letters as the main forum for answering its readers' concerns. It used the correspondence it received and often deliberately provoked, to weave a sustained editorial engagement, supplemented by commentary from its journalists on the letters themselves and the issues they raised. This enabled the journalists to match the linguistic style of the audience embedded within them. This involvement aimed to ventriloquize the language of the working classes in their patterns of consumption: 'four-ale bars, works canteens, shopping queues, fish-and-chip saloons, dance halls and jug and bottle departments.' [25]

Beyond encouraging readers to feel that they were involved in the sensational, irreverent splash of this new dynamic publication, the paper also deployed editorially constructed deliberation and participation to position readers relative to the political choices the newspaper felt matched the constituency it was aiming for and constructing

as it went. For example, in the run-up to the General Election of 1935 the anti-Establishment credentials of the newly re-launched paper were clearly expressed in a piece which launched a series of letters, sceptically defying positive preference for any political candidates, choosing instead to stress the negative sentiments of readers to the deficiencies of politicians:

'The Man Who Won't Get My Vote.' [26]

Epistolary Momentum

There had of course been letters before in the paper, clustered around rather predictable editorial themes, occasionally using a letter as a prompt to a longer feature on a particular topic. [27] The dramatic launch of THIS IS MY LIFE on Saturday January 12 1935 was to signal the start of a major sea-change. The original letter rooted in the daily, even banal experience of the writer was answered by a series of related contributions all of which formed part of the inclusivity around topics of significance to the target readers. They provide, week-by-week, an update on the melodramatic narratives of the mid-nineteenth century Sunday newspapers, [28] reading as they do as didactic assessments of the trials and tribulations of ordinary life. As if to reinforce the commercial motivation behind their publication, all the letters printed are rewarded with prize money. During a period of intense rivalry and economic competition, the lure of prize money was familiar to readers of the mass popular press. The *Daily Mirror*'s distinctive take on this was to weave the financial reward more intimately with the ideal reader in a much more consistent fashion than other papers. The reward for the newspaper was in ever-rising circulation figures and a growing bond within a demographic which, as we have seen, had been identified as being neglected by other popular dailies. The irreverent spirit of these articulations of audience is captured in an example on the theme of 'embarrassment'. This was presented as somewhat of an ice-breaker between the shared experiences of the reader and the writer from 3 September

1935 entitled: I COULD HAVE FALLEN THROUGH THE FLOOR. The nine contributors all narrate an embarrassing event in their daily lives, characterized by an everyday normality which other readers were invited to identify with.

Identifying the Reader

The paper developed a space which claimed to be designed by the readers of the paper themselves. Claiming to be 'By the Readers of the Daily Mirror' the whole page from Saturday 8 February 1936, is devoted to their views: 'Today They tell **You What They Think** on Politicians, Film Stars, World Conferences and – NUTS.' There are sub-sections categorized as: Opinion, Information, Grumbles, Advice. Although clearly driven by editorial preferences, the assertion that it was the readers who were generating the topics to be aired became more explicit as the editorial strategy gained confidence. Working class readers, seeing their own language and interests presented to them as part of their daily newspaper reading experience were being asked more consistently than ever to contribute to what the *Daily Mirror* was confident they took increasingly as 'their paper'.

In early 1936 we see another innovative way of providing structure to the opinions solicited from readers. This particular feature foregrounds the allegedly argumentative nature of the paper's working-class readership. The styling of the debate as 'Dog Fights' and the selection of both topics and contributions to maximize that aspect of the discussion adds to the rhetorical construction of popular discussion as a space of heated, no-holds-bar debate much in line with the projected self-image of the newspaper in general and its equally strong assertion of the character of its readers.

No 1 in this series was: 'Should Psychology Rear Your Child?' [29]

From 25 April 1936, these letters become an even more significant attraction in the paper in a column which is entitled: 'Our Live Letter Box', the title of the feature stressing their topicality and with the usual level of interaction with the newspaper. These take on a familiar assertive tone as they assure readers:
'…. If you want to know where you're wrong too – write to……' [30]

'Our Live Letter Box' moves the appeal of its strategy forwards by its alerts to readers on forthcoming issues elicited from them. One example of this comes in a selection of views sent in on the topic of dreams on 4 May 1936. The interaction with readers becomes more of an editorial fixture as on 1 June 1936 'Live Letters' includes, 'Replies to letters from Old Contemptibles.' From 3 June 1937 this becomes more formalized in the replies to readers from the institutionally cantankerous and very successful 'Old Codgers.' The post box illustration for the column comes to be depicted with a human face and a pair of arms with boxing gloves on, as if challenging all-comers. The illustration becomes a more confident and graphic expression of the sort of jovial engagement in argument which the paper assumes is attractive to its readers in its identification with 'the proletarian personality.' [31]

Letters and the war to win the peace

The conference, *Newspapers, War and Society* organised by Aberystwyth University's Centre for Media History in April 2014, correctly pointed out how newspapers' representations of war are often foregrounded, to the detriment of studies of how newspapers respond structurally and editorially to the challenges of military conflict. This article contributes to that very necessary revision by providing an in-depth assessment of how the use of letters helped shape the proletarian appeal of this particular newspaper while preparing the ground for a post-war success which was grounded in its war-time appeal.

Given that paper rationing in the war meant that only 4-6 pages could be used in the production of a daily newspaper and with the necessity for reserving a certain amount of space for news from the war and for public service and government announcements, the fact that the *Daily Mirror* still chose to prioritize readers letters within these restrictions is a clear indication of the continuing importance of letters to an overall editorial strategy of engagement with audience. This was not the case throughout the popular press as the *Daily Express* eschewed letters in the main and while the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Herald* did feature letters they were of a very different tone to those in the *Daily Mirror*; more politically dogmatic and less inclusive of readers' views.

Having begun the process of establishing itself as a paper for ordinary people through the late 1930s, [32] the tabloid entered World War Two flexing its populist credentials, losing no time in announcing on 13 September 1939 that 'we cannot endure fools in high places as we did after 1914'. Its 'War on Tomfoolery' had begun. The paper continued to shape its editorial identity to great effect through the years of the war. Having called the appeasement debacle correctly, it was in the foreground of aggressive demands for the resignation of Chamberlain and subsequently the inclusion of Churchill in the War Cabinet. It cast a retrospective critique at the political culpability of the late 1930s in general, in particular the impact of harsh Conservative measures on employment and welfare, successfully reading the popular mood of frustration with the established political class and using this as fuel to sustain its appeal through to the end of the war. The language that it used, a mixture of sensation and plain-speaking, proved an integral part of its appeal; forthright, bold headlines, using the tabloid traditions of brevity and wit to strike a chord and draw working class readers into the stories it promoted. Staunchly patriotic but always on the side of the ordinary soldier while providing entertainment and a window for women readers. It developed its appeal to women

readers into a Home Front approach and ultimately its 'war to win the peace'. The paper gained in credibility by sustained criticism of what it considered bad political decision-making, and by presenting this criticism as inclusive of a reader that should be trusted and included in the political conversation. These editorial decisions were rewarded by increasing reader loyalty and commercial success. This bond was ultimately reinforced in the choice to strategize its postbag.

It quickly became the 'paper of the rank-and-file, easy to read, uncomplicated in its politics. It was on the side of the underdog, and that meant, psychologically, almost everyone who had to take orders in war-time.' [33] It broadened out its target category of the ordinary people in an increasingly democratic arc as the war progressed to include the personnel in the Armed Forces, factory workers supporting the war effort and the wives and mothers of those fighting. Its importance in representing the views of service personnel in particular was underlined in a Mass Observation report of 1942 which noted that the newspaper was, 'probably the biggest source of opinion forming.' [34]

Letters and the election campaign 1945

We will now turn our attention to a brief analysis of the various uses that letters from readers were put to in the newspaper during the crucial period running up to the 1945 General Election. Immediately following the announcement of the election date, the *Daily Mirror* mobilised the first movement of its epistolary strategy:

> From now until the election we shall be publishing your letters about how you are going to vote and what you think of the parties you are voting for. Here are some letters from people who support …
>
> Labour and Liberals [35]

First, we should note that here, as throughout the electoral campaign, the *Daily Mirror* does not endorse any single party but it does omit the Conservatives from the dialogue with its readers. This party is often mentioned, but in a negative fashion and readers explain why they will not be voting for it. The heading of the column emphasizes this, excluding consideration of the Conservatives. Second, we can see in the introduction to this column, the triple repetition of the word 'you' and a reinforcement of that address by the possessive adjective 'your'. This combines in a powerful assertion that this column is handed over to the views of the readers and moreover to explanations how those views have been arrived at. This column lasted until the election with frequent mentions of the numbers of letters addressed on the topic each day: 'hundreds each day…' [36]

'Labour and Liberals' and 'Live Letters' with comments from the 'Old Codgers' are the mainstay but there are lots of other interesting cross-referencings of letters and editorial opinion in the run-up to the election, drawing on much of the repertoire of the confidently evolving tabloid genre. On 13 June we can read a letter expressing dissatisfaction at both major parties which draws a withering put-down from the 'Old Codgers', remarkable for its aggressive antipathy towards women's views of politics very much in contrast to the appeal to women to get involved in the election amplified elsewhere in the paper over this crucial period. This may indicate, if nothing else, the continuing, provocative, curmudgeonly nature of the 'Old Codgers' as part of their longer projected personality. The letter runs:

> Re the coming election: personally, I think every Conservative and Labour member of the former Government should be clapped into prison immediately, for disservice to the nation.

> It is a disgrace to the boys who have fought, and those still fighting, that these two parties should be cutting each other's throats simply for power and position while there is still a war to be fought; During the last six years people have been imprisoned for less serious offences against the nation than this.

In response the 'Old Codgers' reply:

> Lady, lady, sometimes we despair of your sex. We aged gents don't know your age; but you must be of last-war era, since you're a married woman. Do you remember the poverty, the millions of unemployed; the calamities which followed the last war? BECAUSE NO PLANS WERE MADE towards the end of the war for post-war times. Do you want that to happen again? Do you think you can leave post-war planning until after a war is over? And do you suppose that parties so diverse as Capital, Labour and Liberal can plan together policies of peace ? There are times, lady, when we despair of women in politics. This is one of 'em! If you don't want the conditions of after the last war repeated, you've got to plan now - in fact - it's been left dashed near too late. [37]

Much of the 'Old Codger' commentary is used to deflate and counter populist views that the paper does not approve of, for example on 16 June when a reader is admonished for suggesting that a Labour government would see the introduction of 'Gestapo methods'. On another occasion they use their voice to give a 'warts-and-all' self-justification which tallies with the projected image of their paper:

> We have no ulterior motive; we are not bound hand and foot to any proprietor or Party. We stand aloof, and choose our way as we think best. Nobody gives us Old Codgers any orders; no 'interests' give this paper any orders—only what we believe to be the interests and the welfare of the Common Man. [38]

Not all letters however are focused on the election as the Readers' Review, claiming to be 'your page, with your views and opinions' is still a regular feature and largely apolitical. Elsewhere though the resources of the paper are being increasingly aligned to the election campaign. Cicely Fraser, a regular columnist on women's issues is drawn upon on 18 June to provide a composite advice section specifically to women voters. This has the function of abbreviating the process of analysing a substantial number and variety of letters from readers and condensing their concerns into tangible and accessible advice.

Above all strategies, it was the letter of 25 June that ushered in a new level of intensity to the campaign around the letters which had the aim of conducting the 'war to win the peace.' [39] A Mrs C. Gardiner from Ilford, Essex, concludes that, 'I shall vote for him' and this becomes, first, the headline on the page, '*I'll vote for him*' with italics and underlining to emphasise its significance. The letter draws upon many continuities with the poverty and political dissatisfactions of the 1930s and incorporates these memories of the 'bad old pre-war days' into the experience of the sacrifices of the war years and the run-up to the General Election, expressing disgust for 'politicians who are trying to scare us and stir up our fears'. It may well be that this letter, promoted to page one and destined to become the lynch-pin of a concerted fortnight's campaign, may have had more than a little of the editorial construct about it. The *Daily Mirror* is quick to exploit the content of the letter and reinforce something which had been emerging in its correspondence columns over the preceding weeks and months. The call from a woman to vote on behalf of the values fought for by her husband is not an individual cry from the heart but a collective expression of opinion. Mrs Gardiner had become Everywoman and the paper reinforces that perspective:

> The 'Daily Mirror' believes that this letter expresses something more than the intention of one woman.
> It offers wise advice to all women. [40]

The campaign matches the same editorial style as the regular Readers' Review which had continued through the war and whose heading gives us a strong sense of the philosophy and approach to letters in the paper:

> This page gives an airing to your ideas and opinions – and your grumbles [41]

The paper gives 'an airing', a significant metaphor indicating freshness and a refusal to closet things up even if they risk offending received opinion or the views of those in authority. There is also the additional hint that ' your grumbles' can have a place, indicating that no matter how seemingly trivial or personal, these complaints can also have their place here as the page can truly claim to represent the readers. As if to confirm the tone of the page, it continues with a separate section on 'This Week's Argument' which is totally unrelated to political matters and queries on this particular day whether modern girls are too outspoken.

Further inside this edition, on page 7, Cicely Fraser takes aim at a Conservative Party election booklet aimed at women voters. It carefully crafts her own reading into an expression of what she claims is the view of the general readership and exploits subtle modalities to express her political views of the Conservatives:

> It's no good people making you promises, unless you know they'll be kept.
> And you wouldn't have much faith in the promises of people who, in the past, had possessed the power to grant them, but had always refused to do so.

> You'd say: 'Thanks for these fine words – but coming from you I JUST DON'T BELIEVE THEM.'
>
> And that's how I felt when I read a Conservative Party booklet written by women for women – for you and me. [42]

The piece concludes with a repetition of the call to remember what had preceded the war. 'I hope that the coming election will prove that they (women) have good memories'

On the following day, as if to confirm the editorial strategizing implicit in the publication of the Mrs Gardiner letter, 'I'll vote for him' is taken up as pledge on the front page; a 'nationwide slogan' as the piece puts it. [43]

The selection from the letters 'Labour and Liberal' is continued on page two and is deployed in implicit dialogue with the political column opposite where a hypothetical question and answer routine is rehearsed on the theme of the headline referring to the lack of movement on granting postal votes for all troops still overseas. It starts with its headline: **WHY NOT POSTAL VOTES?** [44]

What increases is not only the quantity of letters but also the diversity of editorial presentation of the letters and the dynamism of the exchanges between letters and other features in the newspaper over the ten day period of the campaign. The 'I'll vote for him' slogan is dominant above the main headline on the front page on 27 June: 'CALL IS TAKEN UP ON RADIO AND PLATFORM' with quotations from letters threaded into the main story together with answers to readers' questions on the Canadian election and direct linkage with the words of politicians Ernest Bevin in Wandsworth in explicit support of the campaign.

On page 2 of the same edition we have more letters on the theme 'Labour and Liberal' where the tone continues to stress an anti-Conservative consensus rather than a specific endorsement of one of the other two main parties. The pattern of presenting the political commentary in a column opposite on the same page is exploited to encourage the impression of furthering and even democratizing the debate by the use of gentle imperatives directed at Conservative minister Butler, 'tell us, now if you please…' [45]

On 28 June 1945 on the front page there is a response to an implied question which lets the readers know that a Labour majority was the outcome in the New Zealand election, directly under the running headline, 'I'll vote for him'. The political commentary opposite the 'Labour and Liberal' letters on page two on this day is this time explicitly linked to the letter from Mrs C. Gardiner.

On 29 June on the front page 'I'll vote for him' is supplemented by the latest declarative headline **A SACRED TRUST FOR WOMEN OF BRITAIN – Says Morrison** indicating once again how a leading politician (of the Labour Party) is agreeing with the voice of the ordinary voter and the campaign of the newspaper.

On page 2 the commentary makes interesting use of possessive adjectives and personal pronouns, clearly constructing fascists in terms of electoral preference: 'OUR IMPUDENT FASCISTS **"We know which political party they fear"** ' [46]. Here the rhetoric is more emotive, implying that there is only one political party in Britain that the fascists fear - the mortal enemy of the World War. It is a strong gambit but still one restrained by editorial pragmatism. The newspaper remains equivocal in referring to its own political preference. This is partially pragmatic, as nobody really knew who would win the election and with what sort of majority and certainly no newspaper wanted to be remembered as backing a loser; partially populist, putting people's actual material

concerns before raw political allegiance and asking voters to vote along those materialist lines.

By the 30 June there was a shift of emphasis that the *Daily Mirror* claims is driven by readers' preference. On the front page is the headline: 'I'll vote for them':

> Wives, mothers sweethearts from all over Britain have written to the 'Daily Mirror' to say that they are going to 'vote for THEM'

This sense of responsiveness to a collective outpouring of emotion is reinforced by the inclusion of extracts from letters, with the newspaper stressing that they come from voters intending to vote for all parties and remaining non-partisanship in this context.

On 2 July the established churches are aligned on the front page with both the campaign and the 'people' of Britain as part of that campaign:

> CHURCHES CALL ON PEOPLE OF BRITAIN –
> The fighting men depend on you – Vote for Them

At this point we see an increase in typographic and layout strategies beyond the use of headlines *per se* in emphasizing the various calls to voters with for example, a boxed column of instructions on 'How you can vote for Them' on 2 July on page 2.

The graphic tradition of the newspaper had always been strong under the editorial eye of a former artist and cartoonist, Bartholomew, and remained a strong element in the development of an American-styled tabloid identity in its use of cartoons throughout the mid-1930s and the war years despite paper rationing. Now we see it extended over the next four days with a cartoon illustration spread across the top of two pages,

maintaining in multimodal fashion the theme of letters as a pilot reads and writes in response to a letter from home:
'Dear Pop' he writes, echoing the campaign already established in more conventional journalistic form: 'Vote for me!' [47]

On the next day, the power of the image is once again deployed, this time in the form of a photograph. The front page picks up the election theme in oblique but graphic fashion. Under the headline: The REAL ISSUES, we are presented with a photograph of small children huddled together in a bed, tended by their mother, captioned:

> Family – no home
>
> Father – no vote

As if to emphasize the plight of the family and the best way to resolve such distressing situations, instructions on how to transfer the rhetoric into action are highlighted once more in boxed column form on page one:
'How you can vote for them.' [48]

A shift of page and tone two days before polling day is signalled with Cicely Fraser drawing upon conversations she has been having with ordinary men in the street and encouraging women to get to the polls in encouraging fashion:

> You've got an important <u>DATE</u>
>
> There's no romance in this date. And it doesn't matter if you're in need of a hair-do, or if your best dress is at the wash.
>
> But it's a date you must keep because you've been working up to it for months now…..

> I've heard women say that their menfolk discourage them from taking an interest in politics. But the men I've been talking to recently don't take that line at all. They are worried in case the women won't bother to vote…..
> And a bricklayer I met on the train, a keen politician, said:
> 'If the working women would realise that they've got to help on their men in getting a better world for ordinary people the whole lot of us would be better off.'
> You know the old phrase where a husband calls his wife his 'better half.'
> Well as far as numbers go women are the better half of the community because in almost every constituency in the land there are more women voters than men which makes it all the worse if they don't recall their vote. [49]

As the campaign is approaching its close, the letter-variations continue to find ways to catch the attention in new forms of presentation. On 4 July on page 2 on the top half of the page a letter from a mother is presented in a printed version of handwritten script as if to emphasise its authenticity. Once again the letter stresses the future with multiple mentions of the babies and children whose lives will be influenced by the votes cast. The *Daily Mirror* is at this point pulling out all the rhetorical and typographical stops to press for a vote to support what it considers will be progressive social change for the country.

In the 'Labour or Liberal' letters on 4 July it expresses its gratitude to the readers who wrote to the newspaper and even those whose contributions could not be printed because of lack of space, thus amplifying the role of the readers in the political debate which has been constructed and orchestrated on this page and in the multiple spin-offs from it.

> This is the last batch of election letters we shall be publishing. To the many hundreds who wrote to us, but whose letters we had no room to print, we say, 'Thank you for letting us read them.' [50]

Self-referentially, we see the newspaper citing support from readers and most importantly
from writers of letters and emphasising explicitly for once how little support has been expressed by its readers for the Conservatives:

> Of the hundreds of letters received in glowing support of the 'Daily Mirror' campaign to vote 'for them,' the serving men and women abroad, here is a selection.
>
> All reveal the burning desire to build, at this fateful hour, foundations of the new happy world for the fighting man, the serving woman, the widow and the fatherless.
>
> It is a feature of the correspondence that only one letter reveals that the writer will vote for a return of a Conservative Government. [51]

Letters are becoming more and more frequent even within the limited editorial space and have at this point spilled onto the final eighth page. This letter shows the political awareness intruding into the routines of rationing and the daily chores of a busy mother:

> 6 tons of coal
>
> I am leaving my washing because I have to get this off my chest…
>
> I have two babies and less than a year ago I was queueing up for coke and they calmly shovel six tons of coal into Mr Churchill's train. Please will you publish

> this and remind the public that the world never stopped for one man yet. America didn't stop for Roosevelt and he was as good a man as Churchill. Indignant. [52]

On the front page of the final edition before voting, readers are for one final time reminded to 'Vote for them'. Although it is stressed that the issues are 'national not personal' the power of the campaign has been to personalize the national election issues so successfully in terms of the concerns shared by large swathes of family and friendship groups:

> Remember the issues. They are national not personal. Your own interest, the future of your children, the welfare of the whole country demand that today you do your duty and VOTE. [53]

There is a significant if rare letter from a former Conservative voter, a gunner in hospital in Essex presumably recovering from wartime heroics who is '.. disgusted by the tactics adopted by the Tories.' [54] This amplification of explicit hostility to the Conservatives at the last is also seen on page 3 where there is a very different sort of letter referred to. A *Daily Mirror* reporter has provided news that Lord Iveagh has sent the tenants on his estate a letter encouraging them to vote and strongly suggested that they should cast their vote in a way that he would approve of. This letter fits in with the view of a world which the *Daily Mirror* and its readers have consistently expressed a desire to move on from; a world of privilege and deference, a world of class snobbery and the assumptions of the rich that they know best.

On the same page, perhaps as a final contrast we read a letter sent to Herbert Morrison, the Labour leader, by a soldier in Germany under the headline:

Conclusion

By the end of the war, the *Daily Mirror* had become, 'the newspaper of the masses, the Bible of the Services' rank and file, the factory worker and the housewife.' [55] The role of the letters in the formation of its editorial character had been significant. It was a key component in its 'successful projection of personality' [56] and in its language and address to readers the paper was considered by A.J. P. Taylor as giving: 'an indication as never before what ordinary people in the most ordinary sense were thinking. The English people at last found their voice.'[57] Perhaps we might limit that enthusiastic endorsement a little by stressing the editorially constructed and commercially viable version of the British people's voice that was at the heart of the paper's success. It has been noted that the letters to the editor are not an open channel of communication between individuals in a public space of rational, two-way debate, but a complex social space mediated by the routine practices of editorial staff; [58] very much therefore an editorial construct. However, there are many things that are striking about these letters especially their gendered nature, their obvious class and party partisanship. In addition, there is also a sense more broadly of the newspaper acting to reinforce the validity and potency of working class men and women as political agents but also to reflect their hopes and fears about what lies ahead and connect with a political constituency.

As has been noted elsewhere, [59] journalism is not just about politics, it is about reinforcing and reflecting culture and cultural forms and this form of popular journalism arguably provides real spaces for deliberation at certain historical junctures – like Britain emerging from the war. Beyond that aspect, and returning to the claims of the conference, journalism is first and foremost the creation of a public not a manifestation of a public and here we see evidence that the prototype of the twentieth century tabloid

is a most successful example of Hampton's 'representative ideal.' [60] The ultimate success of the *Daily Mirror* is ultimately more likely to have been a measure of its brand of tabloid technique than its socialism [61] and the careful editorial construct of its epistolary engagement might be proof of that.

Letters came to act as an essential indicator of the revised identity of the *Daily Mirror*. They worked in two-way fashion: allowing the paper sight of the ideas and opinions of their target readership and allowing the newspaper to become a space where those ideas could be expressed. The increasing column inches dedicated to the views of actual readers were skilfully structured to show that the paper was on the side of these same readers and allowed the paper to mesh other aspects of its coverage and features towards the tone and content of the letters. The letters gave a level of interaction to the newspaper rarely seen in a popular publication before and subsequently became the biggest single driver of the new editorial identity. It's also not just the fact of the letters but additionally the tone and concerns of their content which so clearly marks the class orientation of their intent.

What the *Daily Mirror* did was to allow itself to be guided in its commercial endeavours by the input of its readers. The flow of communication in the letters is from the outside to the inside of the paper. No longer were the letters restricted to asking for the views of the paper alone. The voices of real readers are incorporated in letters that act as a constituent of the appeal of the newly reformed newspaper. It is this rhetoric of the ordinary reader – no matter how constructed in nature – which had become the signifier of association between reader and newspaper institution. It was the key innovation that enabled the popular newspaper to continue its successful commercial articulation of the voice of those who felt they were located outside the confines of elite political culture and society. The voice of the letters becomes firmly established as the core principle in

creating a popular identity and at the moment when the readership of the *Daily Mirror* were addressed most fully in the terms that the newspaper had learnt were their authentic concerns, during the election campaign of 1945, it was popular memories of the sacrifices of the working people of Britain in the war and political memories of the inequalities of the pre-war era that were drawn upon in the form of the letters to the paper that provided the most striking exemplification of the success of the campaign both politically and editorially. The *Daily Mirror* may not have won the war nor the election but it had won the hearts and minds of its readers and expressed confidence by giving the editorial space to them in the form of their letters.

Notes

1 Woods and Bishop, *The Story of the Times.*

2 Robson, *Marriage or Celibacy?*

3 Wahl-Jørgensen, *Journalists and the Public.*

4 Levy, "How Information Spread among the Gentry, 1550-1640."

5 Frank, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper*; Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper*.

6 Schudson, "Why Conversation is not the Soul of Democracy," 305.

7 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

8 Conboy, *Journalism: A Critical History*, 60-84.

9 Hampton, *Visions of the Press*; Schudson, *Discovering the News*.

10 Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century,* 9.

11 *Daily Mirror* Monday 6 January 1919

12 Conboy, *Press and Popular* Culture,113-133

13 Wickham Steed, *The* Press, 246-248

14 Pugh, "The *Daily Mirror* and the Revival of Labour 1935-1945," 426

15 Cudlipp, *Publish and Be Damned!* 64

16 King, quoted in Smith, *Paper Voices*, 104

17 Hopkins, *The New Look: A Social History of the Forties and Fifties*, 23-24

18 Bingham and Conboy, "The *Daily Mirror* and the creation of a commercial popular language: a people's war: a people's paper?"

19 Smith, *Paper Voices*, 64

20 Bromley, "Was it the Mirror wot won it? The development of the tabloid press during the Second World War.",114

21 Richards, *The Bloody Circus*,154-155

22 Williams, *Dangerous Estate*,201

23 Cudlipp, *Publish and Be Damned!* 78-91; Smith, *Paper Voices*, 98-99

24 Hampton, *Visions of the Press*.

25 Richards, *The Bloody Circus*, 170-171

26 *Daily Mirror* 4 November 1935

27 Wahl-Jorgensen, *Journalists and the Public.*

28 Berridge, "Popular Sunday Newspapers and Mid-Victorian Society."; Conboy, "Residual radicalism as a popular commercial strategy: beginnings and endings."

29 *Daily Mirror* 7 February 1936

30 *Daily Mirror* 25 April 1936

31 Fairlie, "Brilliance Skin Deep," 14

32 Bingham and Conboy, "The *Daily Mirror* and the creation of a commercial popular language: a people's war: a people's paper?"

33 Edelman, *The "Mirror": A Political History*, 141-142

34 Mass Observation File Report 1173, 24-3-42, p. 1

35 *Daily Mirror* 1 June 1945

36 *Daily Mirror* 16 June 1945 p. 2

37 *Daily Mirror* 13 June 1945

38 *Daily Mirror* 27 June 1945

39 Smith, *Paper Voices*, 118; Cudlipp, *Publish and Be Damned!* 230.

40 *Daily Mirror* 25 June 1945

41 *Daily Mirror* June 25 1945, 2

42 *Daily Mirror* June 25 1945, 7

43 *Daily Mirror* June 26, 1945, 1

44 *Daily Mirror* June 26, 1945 2

45 *Daily Mirror* 27 June 1945, 2

46 *Daily Mirror* 29 June 1945, 2

47 *Daily Mirror* 2 July 1945, 4-5

48 *Daily Mirror* 3 July 1945, 1

49 *Daily Mirror* 3 July 1945, 7

50 *Daily Mirror* 4 July 1945, 2

51 *Daily Mirror* 4 July 1945, 5

52 *Daily Mirror* 4 July 1945, 8

53 *Daily Mirror* 5 July 1945, 1

54 *Daily Mirror* 5 July 1945, 2

55 Cudlipp, *Publish and Be Damned!* ,136

56 Fairlie, "Brilliance Skin Deep," 11

57 Taylor, 548-549

58 Gregory and Hutchins, 187-188

59 Steel

60 Hampton

61 Bromley, 123

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