

Parochialism, politics and the Tasmanian Press:

A study in the politics of Journalism.

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Department of Political
Science, University of Tasmania, for the Degree of
Master of Arts.

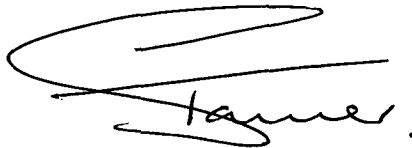
Department of Political Science
1990

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DECLARATION:

This dissertation represents my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, or any copy or paraphrase of material written by another person, except when due acknowledgement is made.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James", with a large, stylized flourish above it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In researching and writing this dissertation, I was given invaluable and timely assistance by a number of people, and it is to them that I express my sincere thanks.

To my wife, Kath, for her encouragement, understanding and assistance, particularly in the months following the change of government when I was able to commit myself totally to this project.

To Dr Richard Herr of the Political Science Department, for his encouragement, patience and advice through this and the Masters (qualifying) Program. He was very understanding of my other commitments and did all he could to assist me.

To those interviewees - Mr Bryan McKendrick and Lloyd Whish-Wilson of the Examiner and Mr Jim Harris and Mr Henry Catchpole of the Advocate - whose personal involvement added an important dimension to this study.

To Mr Terry Newman and Mrs Heather Thurstans of the Parliamentary Library for the use of facilities and research material.

To Mrs Sandy Wittison for typing a great deal of the draft information.

And finally, to those many people who provided the back-up, the advice and the encouragement, particularly my colleagues at work who were very understanding while the paper was being researched.

To all these people, I am indebted and again thank sincerely.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter	
1. REGIONALISM - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE....	30
2. THE NEWSPAPERS AND REGIONALISM.....	75
3. THE STATE BANK DISPUTE.....	142
4. STATEWIDE FOOTBALL - PAROCHIALISM ANSWERED OR INFLAMED?.....	213
5. BRIDGING THE STRAIT.....	268
CONCLUSIONS.....	320
APPENDIX.....	349
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	354

INTRODUCTION

Newspapers are generally ascribed an important role within the community. With media attention becoming increasingly focussed on the reporting of conflict, this role can be an influential one. A great deal of research has been conducted into the relationship between the media and the broader community. Michael Gurevitch et al. have described the relationship as symbiotic - that media organisations draw on their environment both for economic survival and for the raw data needed to fulfill editorial requirements.¹ The media is said to be a powerful influence on the formation of public opinion. According to Tod Gitlin the earliest studies have demonstrated that the media played a central role in, "consolidating and reinforcing the attitude of people."² Newspapers

¹Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran and Janet Woollacott, eds. Culture, Society and the Media (USA: Methuen, 1982), 20.

²T. Gitlin, "Media Sociology: the Dominant Paradigm," in Mass Communications Review Year Book, eds. G. C. Wilhoit and H. Boch (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1981). Quoted in John S. Western, "The Role of the Media in Politics," Current Affairs Bulletin 63, no. 9 (February 1987): 15.

have been said to, "both reflect public opinion and influence public opinion."³ Said Hertz: "People identify closely with their newspaper and actively use it."⁴ It is a two-way relationship; one in which media content may influence our behaviour and our behaviour may influence the content that is offered.⁵

Researchers have posited a number of theories to explain this relationship. One popular theory - the agenda-setting theory - draws extensively from the tenet that the media largely controls the formation of public opinion. It has the ability to select certain issues for discussion and to ignore others. Emory Bogardus summed up this belief when he said that the media's, "... choice and treatment of news decides whether favourable opinion on a subject is to be made or unmade."⁶ Marie Curnick gave it a slightly

³Emory S. Bogardus, "Reading Newspapers," in The Making of Public Opinion (New York: Association Press, 1951), 47.

⁴Leon Hertz, "The Case for Newspapers," in A Forum on Australian Media: Current Views (Pope and Kiernan and Black, n.d.), 59.

⁵W. Phillips Davison, James Boylan and Frederick T. C. Yu, eds. Mass Media: Systems and Effects, 2d ed. (New York: Rinehart and Winston, CBS Publishing, 1982), 1.

⁶Bogardus, 44.

different emphasis when she said, "part of this agenda-setting function is to treat conflicts of interest as manifestly proper material for news and others as too complex, too marginal or too unmanageable."⁷ However it was John Western who put it into perspective with the comment: "while we can argue with some force ... that the media sets the agenda, we need to ask, on what basis is this agenda set and who determines what gets on the agenda and what does not?"⁸

In discussing the relationship between media organisations and the broader community, researchers generally accept that the former's influence is substantial. According to W. Blood: "... there is a positive causal relationship between the media agenda, what the media emphasize and the public agenda, what the public thinks important."⁹ This belief is supported by others, including Donald Edgar, who argued that the media helped structure our view of the

⁷Marie Curnick, The Coding of News in the Australian Press, New South Wales Institute of Technology, Media Papers, no. 11, (April 1981), 2.

⁸Western, 16.

⁹W. Blood, "Agenda Setting: A Review of the Theory," Media Information Australia 26, (1982): 5; cited in Western, 16.

world.¹⁰ Michael MacKuen said that while the mere observation of a coincidence between media and citizen agendas hardly establishes a direct causal connection, its existence could be substantiated by research.¹¹

In seeking to adopt an agenda-setting role, the media has a number of tools at its disposal. It is widely recognised that it can influence the formation of public opinion through the interpretation and presentation of news. That is, the media can present news in a biased fashion; it can influence an individual's interpretation of events by colouring news. It is able to omit particular arguments, or to give priority and undue coverage to articles representing the views it supports. Having selected particular articles for publication, it is able to enhance their readership and thus further its own agenda-setting role by positioning the articles in a prominent position within the newspaper.

In recent years a great deal has been said and

¹⁰Donald Edgar, "Mass Media as Legitimizers of Order," Introduction to Australian Society: A Sociological Perspective (Sydney: Prentice Hall Pty Ltd, 1980), 252.

¹¹M. B. MacKuen and S. L. Coombs, More than News: Media Power in Public Affairs (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981), 22.

written about the influence of the media. There has been a general questioning of media responsibility. There has been much discussion of its role in shaping, guiding and moulding public opinion. A great deal has been written about media bias, of the differences between fair reporting and propaganda and of the media's role as censor. These discussions have produced claims that there is bias in every newspaper, admitted or not.¹² Furthermore, that readers should be protected against the colouring of their judgment by, "... propaganda disguised as news and by wrongful emphasis through the one-sided presentation of argument."¹³ Not all researchers agree that bias is all pervasive, with at least one arguing that it has lessened over time.¹⁴ However there does appear to be widespread acceptance among researchers that the media not only sets the agenda by deciding what is printed or

¹²Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis," Social Forces 37 (1958):209-216. Cited in William A. Tillinghast, "Slanting the News: Source Perceptions After Changes in Newspaper Management," Journalism Quarterly 61 (1984): 311.

¹³D. McClelland, "The Press in Australia," Australian Quarterly (December 1962): 28.

¹⁴Tillinghast, 311.

omitted, but can also influence the way in which issues are presented. According to Bogardus, the media is able to both color and suppress news:

Most people do not read critically. They do not weigh words and sentences. They are more or less relaxed when reading a newspaper and hence susceptible to the suggestions which characterize coloration.¹⁵

Other writers are not so convinced that the media does play an influential role, arguing that both general and specific constraints exist. According to A. F. Davies, "there is still an enormous unresolved doubt about the general influence or power of the mass media."¹⁶ It has even been suggested that, "... media influence will be in inverse proportion to the importance to the community of the issue involved."¹⁷ Certainly there are instances where authors have claimed that deliberate attempts by the media

¹⁵Bogardus, 49.

¹⁶A. F. Davies, "Mass Communications," in Australian Society: A Sociological Introduction, 2d ed., eds. A. F. Davies and S. Encel, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1970), 526.

¹⁷Raymond Bauer and Alice Bauer, "American Mass Society and Mass Media," Journal of Social Issues 16 (1960): 3-66. Quoted in Davies and Encel, Australian Society, 535.

to persuade people have produced disappointing results.¹⁸

The general constraints on media influence can be simply stated. Despite all the tools at a newspaper's disposal, there is no guarantee that news items published will be read. The information derived from a newspaper is determined by a number of factors. These include: (1) the information presented and (2) the news items which the reader selects. It is generally accepted that as an issue gains momentum in a community and additional articles on that subject are published, the prospects of it being read by an increasing proportion of the population are enhanced. But again this can be influenced by a number of variables, including pre-existing issue sensitivities. It should also be recognised that issue concerns can and do arise from sources other than media exposure, notably from personal experiences.

In Australia a number of specific constraints are evident. For example, the media is coming under increasing criticism, both from within and outside of the profession. This may be due to a number of factors,

¹⁸Davies, Australian Society, 535.

including the uncertainty which has surrounded the restructuring of Australia's media organisations during the 1980s. It may also be attributed to the general regard in which journalists are held.

Criticism of the media and the role it plays is not new. For example, Henry Mayer, the doyen of Australian media researchers, wrote in the 1970s that the Australian press was in decline.¹⁹ His sentiments have been echoed by others. While delivering the 1977 Arthur Norman Smith Memorial Lecture at Melbourne University, distinguished Australian newspaper editor and critic Max Suich said there was widespread dissatisfaction with the Australian press and that journalists were generally held in low esteem.²⁰ Suich said that people had a "fundamental misunderstanding about what their papers can and will do."²¹ His comments have been reinforced by others following Murdoch's takeover of the Herald and Weekly Times,

¹⁹Henry Mayer, "Media Images and Arguments," in Australian Politics: A Fifth Reader, eds. Henry Mayer and Helen Nelson (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1980), 569.

²⁰Max Suich, "Changes in Australian Journalism," Arthur Norman Smith memorial lecture, University of Melbourne (1977), 1.

²¹ibid.

including Sam Lipski,²² Graham Perkin,²³ and David Bowman.²⁴ Perkin wrote of the, "... great chasm of credibility that separates press and people."²⁵ He said: "increasingly reporters tell the reader what the reporter thinks about what the man said or what his audience thought of it, and less about what the man actually said."²⁶ D. F. Colquhoun, a former editor of the Adelaide Advertiser, said that with television and radio taking, "... the punch out of newspaper headlines," there has been a tendency for the press to move away from the long held practice of keeping the facts and comment separate towards backgrounding and interpretation.²⁷ He said that this had helped to

²²Sam Lipski, Bulletin, May 26, 1987, 70.

²³Graham Perkin, "Massaging the Medium," in The Message and the Medium: the Future of the News Media in Australia, ed. Derek Whitelock. University of Adelaide, Department of Adult Education, Publication No. 20 (April 1970), 6-16.

²⁴David Bowman, "The Responsibility of the Media," Australian Media in the 1990s, Australian Press Council Conference Papers 1989, Regent Hotel, Melbourne (March 30, 1989), 43-50.

²⁵Perkin, 7.

²⁶ibid.

²⁷D. F. Colquhoun, "The Credibility Gap: Are the Newspapers Telling the Truth," in Whitelock, 38.

keep the community informed.²⁸ "If it [the press] is doing its job, it is talking to the people and on behalf of the people," he said.²⁹

Thus in terms of this debate, it can be seen that there are strongly diverging views among students of the media. On one hand there are the theorists who argue that the media does play an influential role in helping to set the public agenda and on the other those who believe its clout to be limited. Despite the obvious differences of opinion that exist, resolution of the debate is not important to this paper, given that there appears to be a general acceptance among researchers that the media does have some influence. Furthermore, that this influence can be traced to the mechanisms outlined.

This thesis will deal with one potential consequence of media influence - that arising from newspaper coverage of regionally located conflict. Regionalism provides an ideal study in conflict reporting. Over time, it has been the basis of disputes at various levels. In this instance the study will be confined to regional conflict at a sub-

²⁴ibid.

²⁵ibid.

national level and will be based on Tasmania. Over time, Tasmania has developed into a highly regionalised state and also supports three daily newspapers - the Hobart-based Mercury, the Launceston Examiner and the Burnie Advocate. All three have adopted a high community profile and enjoy a virtual monopoly on circulation and readership within one of the three regions. In fact there is a clear link between the three clearly defined regions and the newspapers' prime circulation areas.

That regionalism should be an issue in a State which covers a mere 68,300 square kilometres and boasts a population of just 436,000 people is somewhat surprising. However regionalism is pervasive; it is said to touch all aspects of Tasmanian life - social, political and economic. Conflict, when it occurs, is often of an inter-regional nature. In such a small community, inter-regional conflict also tends to rate considerable coverage in the State's three newspapers.

The thesis of this work is that Tasmania's three daily newspapers do enjoy a position of considerable power within their respective communities and that their treatment of specific issues can help to

set the public agenda, maintain the salience of regional loyalties and help to maintain the vitality of parochialism in Tasmania. To demonstrate such a thesis it is necessary to establish not only that regionalism exists in Tasmania, but that it plays a significant role in the State's political and social fabric. It is also necessary to establish the precise nature of the relationship between the newspapers and the communities they serve. By adopting such a course the thesis will shed some light on the role of newspapers in reporting conflict situations which have the potential to involve whole communities and their relations with adjoining communities. In so doing, this thesis will reinforce the argument that newspapers, under appropriate circumstances, do have significant influence over the publics they putatively serve.

The present study adds to work undertaken or touched on by others. For example, Ken Inglis has argued that the press may affect regional disputes in two ways. In his own words: "the press reflects and may contribute to a provincial outlook."³⁰ Inglis'

³⁰K. S. Inglis, "The Daily Papers," in Australian Civilisation, ed. P. Coleman (Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1962), 145.

comments have been echoed by others such as Jack Haskins and M. Mark Miller, who found that: "... the local newspaper's contents may affect a reader's attitude toward and image of the community."³¹ Other studies have found that newspapers play an integration role, not only within communities, but also between the local community and the larger social system of which it is a part.³² Furthermore, that local newspapers enjoy greater trust than do others. According to Charles Salmon and Jung Sook Lee such trust is necessary if the newspapers are to operate effectively.³³

This study effectively tests Inglis' comments by seeking to tie them in with later observations made Leonie Kramer. She wrote of an Australian society which, "... while sharing some common experiences, is

³¹J. B. Haskins and M. Mark Miller, "The Effects of Bad News and Good News on a Newspaper's Image," Journalism Quarterly 61 (Spring 1984): 3.

³²George A. Donohue, Clarice N. Olien, and Phillip J. Tichenor, "Leader and Editor Views of Role of Press in Community Development," Journalism Quarterly 62, no. 2 (1985): 367.

³³Charles T. Salmon and Jung Sook Lee, "Perceptions of Newspaper Fairness: A Structural Approach," Journalism Quarterly 60 (1983): 663.

nevertheless scattered and diverse, and influenced by strong regional and local loyalties and affiliations."³⁴

METHODOLOGY

In attempting to test the hypothesis that Tasmania's daily newspapers have contributed to the maintenance of parochialism, a two-pronged approach has been adopted. The first involves tracing the emergence of regionalism as a politico-geographical movement within Tasmania. Having established the importance of regionalism to Tasmania from socio-political and politico-geographical perspectives, the paper seeks to explore the relationship between the State's regions and newspapers. To achieve this, three studies of specific inter-regional conflicts were undertaken. Each study was chosen because it involved a dispute featuring two, if not all three regions. The studies involve both an historical assessment of each dispute and an analysis of the treatment it received in each of the State's daily newspapers.

The thesis is divided into five substantive

³⁴Leonie Kramer, "The Media, Society and Culture," Daedalus (Winter 1985): 294.

chapters. Chapter one covers the emergence of regionalism as a politico-geographical movement. It also provides a theoretical and definitional framework of such terms as region and regionalism. It explores the emergence of regions within Tasmania and the criteria by which they can be defined. Also, it canvasses the political and historical factors which have contributed to their maintenance over time. This chapter shows how regionalism impacts on all aspects of Tasmanian life and how it is becoming increasingly entrenched.

Chapter two deals specifically with Tasmania's three daily newspapers - the Mercury, the Examiner and the Advocate. It considers their successes, their relationships with each other and with the communities they serve. The chapter uses circulation data to demonstrate the regional distribution of the three newspapers. Accordingly, it seeks to determine whether there are similarities between the regions as defined by newspaper circulation figures and those based on statistical, Telecom Australia and local government boundaries. In exploring this angle the study looks not only at the daily newspapers, that is Monday to Saturday readership and circulation data, but also the

weekend newspapers as well. These include the Mercury-published Sunday Tasmanian, the Sunday Examiner, and the State's only Saturday evening newspaper, the Weekender, which is published by the Advocate.

To fully appreciate the relationship between the newspapers and between the newspapers and the communities they serve, it is necessary to explore their respective histories and to document the exploits of some of their proprietors and editors. It has often been said that the Tasmanian newspapers developed with the communities they serve. By analyzing the connection between the newspapers and their presentation of regional disputes, it is possible to determine whether that has been so or not. It also provides important background data for a later discussion of parochialism and the role Tasmanian newspapers have played in promoting, exploiting or even seeking to overcome it. Chapter two builds on the discussion of regionalism contained in chapter one, while at the same time completing the framework necessary for a discussion of specific issues.

Chapters three to five inclusive are each devoted to the study of one specific topic. Chapter

three looks at the State bank dispute. This developed from attempts to merge Tasmania's two trustee banks - the Launceston Bank for Savings (LBS) with the Hobart-based Savings Bank of Tasmania (SBT) to form a bank that could compete in a soon-to-be deregulated Australian financial market. Despite the fact that both banks favoured amalgamation, the proposal fell apart because they could not agree on the terms of the merger - basically the division of functions between the cities of Launceston and Hobart.

Chapter four looks at the decision to establish a statewide football competition, headquartered in Hobart, and including teams from each of the three regions. The Tasmanian Football League, as it was to be known, had adopted the name of the Southern competition which it replaced. All teams which had previously competed in the Southern competition were included, whereas only a number from each of the Northern Tasmanian Football Association (NTFA), the Launceston-based competition, and the North-West Football Union (NWFU), the North-West Coast competition, were invited to participate. This decision provided an ideal subject for such a study.

There were concerns that the formation of the TFL would lead to the centralisation of football authority in Hobart, the downgrading, possibly even the dismantling, of the Northern and North Western competitions and also the transfer of the State's top footballers to Hobart. This was an ideal study for another reason too; for it did not involve just one region against another. It involved all three regions.

Chapter five studies the most recent of the regional disputes covered in this thesis, that is the competition between a North-West Coast port and a Northern port for a proposed fast catamaran service between Tasmania and Victoria. The success of the state Government-owned Abel Tasman, a Bass Strait passenger/vehicle ferry, had provoked a new interest in shipping service connecting Tasmania with the Australian mainland. A company was established to ascertain whether a second ferry service utilising a Hobart designed and built fast catamaran would be viable. Its task was to determine which was the shortest, fastest and cheapest route - between the North-West Coast and Victoria or between Northern Tasmania and Victoria. This study shows that

parochialism in Tasmania is not simply confined to North-South rivalries. It is also evident in relations between the North and North-West regions.

The newspapers were studied during three time frames - between January 1, 1986 and September 30, 1987 (State bank), June 7, 1985 to September 20, 1988 (Statewide football) and March 5, 1987 to October 7, 1989 (fast catamaran ferry). As the dates show, there was some overlap between all three issues. That is, the first of these disputes had not been resolved when the newspapers directed their attention to the other two.

The research produced 1,127 relevant articles and editorials. There were 316 on the State bank dispute, 589 on statewide football and 222 on the fast ferry service. In each chapter general news articles and editorials were dealt with separately. So too were relevant cartoons and letters to the editor, if they appeared in sufficient numbers. There were a number of reasons for this. General news articles may be written by one of a number of staff journalists, depending on the time and the day on which the story broke, rostering and the availability of staff to undertake a

particular task. The same constraints dictate which of a number of sub editors may deal with the article once it has been submitted for consideration. Also, the prominence a particular article is accorded in the newspaper depends to a large extent on the availability of other articles that may compete with it for newsworthiness. Articles submitted early in the day tend to be laid out within the bulk of the newspaper, unless they look promising and then they are held back for consideration in the afternoon editorial conference and a possible placement up front.

Editorials, on the other hand, tend to be written by only a small number of staff within the three newspapers. Accordingly, it is easier to maintain a constant argument with editorials than it is with general news articles which may, because they are written and subbed by one of many possible combinations of journalists and sub editors, show a number of different biases. The cartoons are much like the editorials. Given the small size of the newspapers in employment terms, they are limited by the number of cartoonists they have on staff. By using regular cartoonists they are able to maintain thematic continuity throughout the course of a dispute.

There was another reason too for distinguishing between general news articles and editorial comment. Much of the research on media effects suggests that editorials have waned in influence; that they are no longer considered authoritative and are not as widely read as they once were. This has been attributed in part to changes in newspaper ownership, which have seen many smaller papers absorbed by chains. According to Ralph Thrift, chain ownership has had the effect of, "decreasing involvement in local affairs and increasing blandness."³⁵ He said that it had also led to a slight decrease in argumentative editorials on controversial local issues. Even so, there are still some researchers who argue that editorials do play an important role in defining community issues and are more effective in this role than the news columns. In a 1976 study Roy Forward posited the following:

... one is justified in concluding that the community issues aired in the editorials have in some sense been the issues facing that community,

³⁵Ralph R. Thrift Jr., "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Vigour of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly 54 (1977): 327-331. Cited in W. Phillips Davison, James Boylan and Frederick T. C. Yu, eds. Mass Media, Systems and Effects, 2d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston; CBS College Publishing, 1982), 93.

if only because the newspaper itself has confronted the community with them. For an editorialist does more than merely report on community issues that others have raised: to some degree the editorialist himself is creating the community agenda.³⁰

If, as Forward has argued, this is in fact so, then it is important to differentiate between editorials and general news in such a study.

A number of research techniques have been adopted. For each dispute specific questions were framed. Each was designed to provide an accurate assessment of the newspapers' coverage through individual articles. The data were tabulated according to whether the article supported, opposed or was neutral in its coverage of a particular proposition.

The three newspapers were compared according to a number of criteria. Initially, all articles were counted and measured in terms of column centimetres, irrespective of column width. The results were then converted using a simple formula to a constant em width (em being the accepted newspaper measure of width). The formula was total column centimetres multiplied by actual em width, divided by required em width. This

³⁰Roy Forward, "Local Press and Community Issues," Politics XI, no. 2, (November 1976): 214.

was to overcome differences between the three newspapers in column sizes used. The standard was set at 11 ems. Using this width there would be seven columns 11 ems wide by 50 centimetres on a standard Mercury page. This would give 350 centimetres of text at 11 ems per page. Both the Examiner and the Advocate, which are tabloid and not broadsheet like the Mercury, would show five columns at 11 ems by 45 centimetres on a standard page, allowing 225 centimetres of text.

Having established (a) the total number of relevant articles and (b) the contributions of all three newspapers to the debate in terms of articles and column centimetres, the data were assessed to produce a break-down of articles per page. For example, the number of relevant State bank articles which appeared on page one of all three newspapers during the study period. A further break-down produced comparisons between the number of articles for a proposition compared with those against. The comparisons were drawn on a newspaper by newspaper basis as well as collectively. All articles were also collated on a monthly basis to see if there were any detectable

changes in a newspaper's coverage of an issue over time as new variables are introduced.

To enable the comparisons to be as comprehensive as possible an additional criteria of analysis was employed. Each page was divided into four (see figure 1), with two sections in the top half and two in the bottom. The diagram was based on an interpretation of the Gutenberg Theory as expounded by the American typographer Edmund Arnold. According to Arnold, when people are taught to read, they are told to start in the top left hand corner of the page and work across and down, going from left to right and back again until the bottom right hand corner is reached.³⁷ Arnold interpreted this and presented it diagrammatically (see figure 2). He said that the eyes are drawn to the top left hand corner, which he has labelled the primary optical area (POA).³⁸ The eyes then move across and down the page in left to right sweeps, returning to an axis of orientation at the

³⁷Edmund C. Arnold, Designing the Total Newspaper, (New York: Harper and Row, 1981). Cited by Colin Wheildon, Communicating or Just Making Pretty Shapes, rev. ed. (Sydney: Newspaper Advertising Bureau of Aust. Ltd, 1986), 8.

³⁸Wheildon, 8.

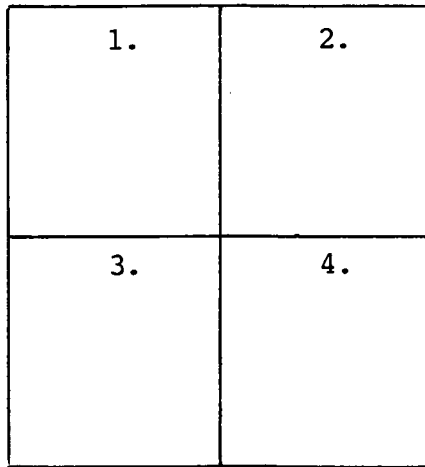


Figure one.

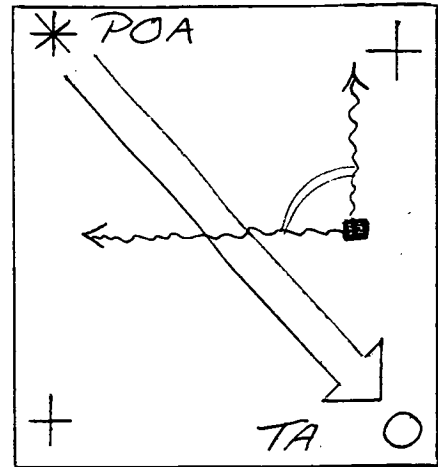


Figure two.

beginning of each line, before finishing in the bottom right hand corner, which has been termed the terminal anchor (TA).³⁹ Arnold's hypothesis was tested in an Australian study undertaken by Colin Wheildon between 1982-86.⁴⁰ Wheildon's research confirmed Arnold's findings and showed that certain typographical elements interrupt reading rhythm. Both Arnold and Wheildon argued that newspaper design which encourages readers to work against reading gravity detracts from the readability, comprehension and consequently readership.⁴¹

This study does not set out to replicate Wheildon's findings, rather it applies Arnold's

³⁹ibid.⁴⁰ibid.⁴¹ibid.

Gutenberg diagram to another purpose - that is to prioritise articles according to their positioning on the page. Accordingly, it is suggested that articles positioned in fallow corners may not be as comprehensible or readable as those beginning in the primary optical and terminal anchor areas. It may be that if a newspaper is seeking to influence a particular debate its chance of doing so may be enhanced by beginning articles in quadrant one. The importance of the top left hand position, for the editorial page at least, was recognised by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw.⁴² They also acknowledged the importance of placement within a newspaper. "Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position," they said.⁴³ The placement of articles has been subsequently highlighted by others, including H. G. Kariel and L. A. Rosenvall.⁴⁴

⁴²Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media," Public Opinion Quarterly 36 (1972-73): 179.

⁴³ibid.

⁴⁴H. G. Kariel and L. A. Rosenvall, "Circulation of Newspaper News Within Canada," Canadian Geographer 22, no. 2 (1978): 85-111.

Obviously the placement of articles both within a newspaper and on the page are just two of many tools an editor can use to help ensure that a story is read. Likewise, there are many typographical measures which can be used to draw the eye away from the obvious starting point on a page, including photographs, catchy headlines, boxing, and shading. However the inducements would have to be strong to work against the natural tendency to begin in quadrant one. And, as Arnold and Wheildon maintain, such practices do affect the comprehensibility, readership and readability of articles.

In all case studies the significance of an individual newspaper's results are influenced to a certain extent by the nature of the issue, that is whether it affects all three regions or just two. As it will be seen in chapters three to five, the State bank and ferry disputes were really only two-way from a regional perspective. The former was clearly North-South and the latter between the North and the North-West. The State league football dispute, on the other hand, involved all three regions. Accordingly, if no regional bias were raised by the issue, one would

assume an equal division of coverage between the newspapers. So, for example, in a two-sided issue, one would assume that pattern of coverage to be divided 50:50 between the two newspapers concerned. If there were no regional bias involved in an issue in which each of the three regions were equally involved, such as the football amalgamation dispute, for example, one would expect each newspaper's share of the coverage to be closer to 33:33 percent. As the figures in each of the three issues canvassed will reveal, in very few instances did the results approximate that required for an unbiased pattern of coverage.

There are in fact four possible outcomes of this inquiry. It may be that the newspapers are influential and parochial, in which case they would tend to maintain and strengthen parochial attitudes within the State. A second possibility is that the newspapers are influential, but not parochial. If so, their influence would be used to promote statewide interests and to oppose the regionalist sentiment. A third possibility is that the newspapers are not influential, yet pursue a parochial line. Fourthly, the newspapers may be neither influential nor

parochial. Given that a certain degree of influence has already been accepted as a parameter for this inquiry, only the first two categories are of interest. Thus the inquiry will focus on the extent to which Tasmanian newspapers have used their influence to promote a regional focus in Tasmanian state politics.

CHAPTER 1

REGIONALISM - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The concept of regionalism is a familiar one to political scientists and geographers. Regionalism as a political and social movement has existed since the 1890s, although the phrase was coined somewhat earlier.¹ Despite the popularity of the term 'regionalism' it has been suggested that there is a tendency to use it as a "utilitarian device".² According to James McDonald 'region' has been interpreted so flexibly that now it "... can mean virtually what anyone wishes."³ Further, that words such as 'regionalism' and 'regionalization' were of questionable scholarly utility because they had become politicized and acquired an "emotional charge".⁴ Another authority has argued that 'regionalism' as it developed in Australia was, "... a complex and multi-

¹E. W. Gilbert, "The Idea Of The Region," Geography 45 (1960): 169.

²James R. McDonald, A Geography of Regions (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm C. Brown Company Publishers, 1972), 3.

³ibid., 6.

⁴ibid.

faceted term" which had been interpreted differently by State and Commonwealth governments.⁵ In discussing regionalism, geographers tend to differentiate between 'natural' regions and 'functional' regions. Early researchers sought to divide the earth into 'natural' regions, which showed a, " ... certain unity of configuration, climate and vegetation."⁶ However later theorists found that there were very few natural regions; that human occupation had transformed almost all areas, wholly or at least in part. They found that it was more appropriate to divide the earth into 'functional' regions, based on a community of interest. According to F. W. Morgan: "the idea of human activity and its results has become inseparable from the idea of a region."⁷ Recognition of the relationship between man and his environment has led political scientists to use regionalism as a means of explaining the organization of space for political and administrative

⁵R. Paddison, The Political Geography of Regionalism: The Processes of Regional Definition and Regional Identity (Glasgow: n.p., 1977), 2.

⁶A. J. Herbertson, "The Major Natural Regions," Geographical Journal XXV (1905): 309. Quoted in Gilbert, 158.

⁷F. W. Morgan, "Three aspects of Regional Consciousness," Sociological Review XXXI, no. 1 (January 1939): 77.

purposes. As K. W. Robinson has said: "the single most important fact underlying the relationship between people, politics and place in Australia is the coincidence of political space with geographical space."⁸ This relationship is central to discussions about regionalism.

So too is the question of boundaries. As will be seen later in this chapter, the drawing of boundaries is not necessarily a straight forward exercise in either cartography or political science. One researcher has argued that politics and regional boundaries cannot coincide, except in a general way.⁹ It has also been suggested that natural regions, with the exception of islands and some remote mountain areas, unlike political regions, do not have hard and fast boundaries.¹⁰ "... The units themselves exist, even if the lines that separate them must always remain

⁸K. W. Robinson, "Space, Politics and Territorial Organization," in Australia: A Geography, ed. D. N. Jeans (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1977), 366.

⁹A. De Grazia, "Local Institutions," in Politics and Geographic Relationships: Towards a New Focus, eds. W. A. Douglas Jackson and Marwyn S. Samuels (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971), 314.

¹⁰Lewis Mumford, "Regionalism and Irregionalism," Sociological Review XIX, no. 4 (1927): 284.

a convention - justifiable only as a convenience of thought or of practical action."¹¹ A. De Grazia has even claimed that regionalism, "... can never be a standard for the construction of human boundaries that will please everyone."¹²

Consideration must also be given to those regions which are neither natural nor the result of political or administrative decisions. This includes the Tasmanian regions which have evolved partly as a result of historical factors and partly as a response to political and administrative decisions which could not be tackled at a local level. Such regions do not necessarily have clearly defined boundaries, but owe their existence to, "... the community forming tendencies of geographical proximity, functional interdependence and a homogeneity of attitudes and values."¹³ In many respects these regions are fostered by the development and maintenance of "territorial

¹¹ibid.

¹²De Grazia, 315.

¹³Edward W. Soja, The Political Organization of Space, Association of American Geographers, Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper No. 8, (Washington, D.C.: 1971), 15.

loyalties."¹⁴ People have been conditioned to think of themselves as members of different units - their city or town, electorate, region, state and country. Depending on the circumstances they will identify themselves accordingly, for example, as a Hobartian, Tasmanian or Australian depending on whether they are intrastate, interstate or overseas. According to Edward Soja, this territorial organization of space is important because it, "... both expresses and helps to maintain the integrity of the group."¹⁵

Parochial loyalties, however, are difficult to measure and in many instances difficult to maintain. Individuals can vary greatly to the degree with which they feel involved in the events of the region or locality.¹⁶ Also, within regions local areas may differ in their attitudes to issues.¹⁷ This is as a result of the differing social and economic interests between local government units within the broader

¹⁴Paddison, 50.

¹⁵Soja, 20.

¹⁶De Grazia, 321.

¹⁷J. W. Fesler, "The Reconciliation of Function and Area," in Jackson and Samuels, 286.

regions. In fact these differences have, in some instances, caused attempts at regionalism to fail.

Despite these problems, researchers and other authorities tend to agree in broad terms on how regions can be defined. They have been described as "containers",¹⁸ and areas which are, "... homogeneous in respect of some particular set of associated conditions, whether of the land or of the people."¹⁹ In a 1974 report the Municipal Commission of Tasmania said that while it was difficult to precisely define a regional area, it suggested the following: "... an area situated within certain geographical confines, or possessing a unity of interests, or where the inhabitants look to a common centre for their economic or recreational requirements."²⁰ While any number of definitions of regionalism could be applied usefully to Tasmania, the Municipal Commission's is probably the

¹⁸R. Simeon and J. Elkins, "Regional Political Cultures in Canada," Canadian Journal of Political Science 7 (1974): 399.

¹⁹R. E. Dickinson, City and Region: A Geographical Interpretation, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1964), 3.

²⁰Tasmania. Municipal Commission of Tasmania, Report on Matters Relating to Local Government, House of Assembly, Papers and Proceedings, vol. 191, pt. 1, no. 14 (1974), 57.

most appropriate. It provides for Tasmania's rather unique, in regionalism terms, historical circumstances, while also catering for the other preconditions.

REGIONALISM IN TASMANIA

In Australia there have been a number of experiments with regionalism in which Tasmania has been a willing participant. In 1944 the States and the Commonwealth agreed to work together to plan development and decentralisation on a regional basis throughout Australia. Three states, including Tasmania, even put the mechanisms in place to support a regional structure. Ninety seven regions were established throughout Australia, including six in Tasmania. The Tasmanian regions were referred to simply as North-West, North, West, Midlands, South East and South and were considered "self evident and discrete."²¹ They were said to be, "complete economic units oriented towards their own shipping ports and having their own particular problems."²²

²¹Canberra, Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs, Australian Regional Developments: A Regionalisation of Australia for Comparative Economic Analysis (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1988), 6.

²²ibid.

The experiment was short-lived and was abandoned in the late 1940s. According to one observer the Tasmanian Regional Committees were ill-equipped to perform the tasks expected of them.²³ He said that the regions cut off from Hobart and Launceston had few resources.²⁴ Furthermore, very few of the development proposals submitted to the Committees were regional in nature; most were local in character.²⁵ "No results were observable and procrastination increased with the years as the State Economic Planning Authority recognized its own impotence."²⁶

The concept was revitalised by the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 as a means by which local government could have a greater say in regional development. According to Whitlam:

The ALP's proposals envisage a framework of consultation and co-operation between the three tiers of government. The Commonwealth would have a greater share of administrative responsibility in those activities where increased government expenditure is required. The semi and local government authorities would be directly involved

²³Norman J. Holland, "Regional Planning in Tasmania," Public Administration, n.s., XII, no. 3, (September 1953): 159.

²⁴ibid., 160.

²⁵ibid., 159.

²⁶ibid., 161.

in the financial decisions which the Commonwealth and States have hitherto made on their behalf.²⁷

The Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD) which was set up to co-ordinate the program, said that it wanted local government, "... to assume greater responsibility for the reduction of inequalities between regions and ... progressively to administer programs of regional planning and development."²⁸

Whitlam's plans addressed many of the grievances local government had expressed over time. It was intended to provide a solution to the supposedly inequitable distribution of funding and resources - the question of territorial equity; it proffered the carrot of greater accessibility to the decision-making process and ultimately increased decentralisation. However as an exercise in devolution it failed. In many respects it suffered from the same problems which beset the 1944 Labor experiment. The regional organisations set up to co-ordinate the program were not given sufficient

²⁷E. G. Whitlam, "A New Federalism," Australian Quarterly 43, no. 3 (September 1971): 12.

²⁸Canberra, Department of Urban and Regional Development, A Suggested Delimitation of Regions for the Purposes of S. 17 of the Grants Commission Act. Parliamentary Paper No. 246 of 1973, p. VII.

authority and they had great difficulty in engendering enthusiasm for the proposal from within their regions. The traditional parochial rivalries that existed between local government units proved too entrenched, despite DURD's attempts to encourage them to: "... think and act in concert on some sort of regional scale."²⁹

From a regional perspective, the failure of both programs is understandable. The division of the State into six regions for the Post War Reconstruction Program was based on historical municipal groupings introduced some 50 years earlier.³⁰ According to one researcher, the regions were based on "... general knowledge and did not in any sense result from painstaking research."³¹ When the Whitlam Government introduced its plan in the early 1970s, there was a clearer understanding of Tasmania's regional breakdown. In fact, DURD made a point of seeking State Government advice in the delimitation of boundaries. In Tasmania's case it even agreed to a late change in the proposed boundaries after a submission from the West Coast

²⁹ibid., 1.

³⁰Holland, 160.

³¹ibid.

Councils, supported by the State Government.³² This resulted in the creation of a fourth region comprising the municipalities of Gormanston, Queenstown, Strahan, Waratah and Zeehan.³³ Previously the intention had been to include the West Coast Councils in the Greater Mersey-Lyell Region. The decision to give the West Coast a separate identity in the proposed program was due to the, "... quite different climatic, topographic and communication characteristics of the area."³⁴

By accepting Tasmania's recommendations, DURD had avoided the trap of "becoming bureaucratic rather than democratic."³⁵ In fact it fulfilled its own requirement that the regions should be, "a combination of 'functional' regions, emphasising the linkages between people and activities, and 'uniform' regions, emphasising socio-economic similarity."³⁶

Whitlam's plan met with considerable resistance at a local level. The concern was that the program was

³²Canberra, Department of Urban and Regional Development, Australian Government Regional Boundaries (Canberra: AGPS, 1975), 12.

³³ibid., 29.

³⁴ibid., 12.

³⁵Paddison, 20.

³⁶DURD, Suggested Delimitation of Regions, VII.

being imposed from above. Commentators have claimed it would have had a greater chance of success if the impetus for change had come from within the regions themselves. For example, Ronan Paddison argues that "regionalism developed by the State has been by emphasis more bureaucratic than democratic."³⁷ He said that the establishment of regions takes place within a politico-administrative environment and that a number of factors must be considered before regional boundaries can be constructed. "What, for example, may be rational socio-geographically, may be impractical administratively or unacceptable politically," he said.³⁸ According to J. M. Power and R. L. Wettenhall, few of the participating local government organisations were as committed to regionalism as Whitlam.³⁹ Many saw the program as an "exercise in grantsmanship."⁴⁰ This was understandable. Federal Government funding to local government had increased from \$4.2 million in 1972-73

³⁷Paddison, 14.

³⁸ibid., 20.

³⁹J. M. Power and R. L. Wettenhall, "Regional Government Versus Regional Programs," Australian Journal of Public Administration XXXV, no. 2 (June 1976): 123.

⁴⁰ibid.

to \$97.5 million in 1974-75.⁴¹ Also, the program was not aided by the fact that the Grants Commission appeared more interested in, "promoting fiscal equalisation between local authorities, whatever their geographical location, than in promoting regionalism."⁴²

Power and Wettenhall claim that even Whitlam changed his attitude towards the program and that during his last year in office he had increasingly come to regard it in functional terms. This was at the expense of effective regional self determination.⁴³ He had, in fact, fallen victim to the one factor he had been seeking to avoid:

By March 1975, it seemed that directly elected regional assemblies had disappeared from Whitlam's vision to be replaced by structures that could easily be orchestrated by professional conductors placed squarely in functional hierarchies peaking in Canberra.⁴⁴

Whitlam's plans were short-lived. They were not taken up by the incoming Liberal Government after it won office in 1975. The Fraser Government had its own "New Federalism" policy which proposed that the States and local government become more independent.

⁴¹ibid.

⁴²ibid.

⁴³ibid., 124.

⁴⁴ibid.

To achieve this Fraser proposed giving them a guaranteed share of personal income tax revenues and established the Advisory Council for Inter-government Relations. "New Federalism" was welcomed, as had the Post War Reconstruction program and Whitlam's grand plan before it. But there were warnings too. Said Power and Wettenhall:

It is a striking commentary on the conservatism and parochialism of Australian local governments that most efforts to establish a basis for administrative action at regional level have hitherto come either from a State or the federal capital. Almost inevitably, in the regional arrangements that follow, the interests of the functional hierarchy are dominant.⁴⁵

While successive Federal governments had addressed the question of regional development, local government in Tasmania had been working on a co-operative basis for some years. In the years leading up to Whitlam's 1972 announcement, regional planning bodies comprising local councils and port authorities had been established in the South, the North and along the North-West Coast. These were the Southern Metropolitan Master Planning Authority (est. in 1957), the Tamar Regional Master Planning Authority (TRMPA, 1969) and the North Western Regional Master Planning Authority (NWRMPA, 1971). While the authorities were

⁴⁵ibid.. 117.

successful in drafting master plans for their respective regions, they too suffered from insufficient funding and inter-council rivalries.

Despite Tasmania's willingness to support regionalism, it has enjoyed a rather chequered history. The regional planning bodies have lost support amongst member councils, resulting in the Southern body being disbanded and the Northern and North Western organisations facing a shaky future.¹¹⁷ In fact there have been moves, hitherto countered, for both the TRMPA and the NWMPA to be abolished. And yet regionalism still has considerable support. For example, the North-West Coast supports a co-ordinating body known as the North-West Municipal Region, as distinct from the North Western Master Planning Authority, and an Association of North Western Chambers of Commerce - the latter made up of representatives from the chambers of commerce from each of the Coast's cities and major towns. In the North there is the Northern Tasmanian Regional Organisation (NTRO) and in the South, the Hobart Metropolitan Councils Association.

Regionalism tends to touch all aspects of Tasmanian life. For example, regional tourism advisory

¹¹⁷ As a journalist covering such meetings, the author found that this could be attributed to the rivalry between member organisations for funds to finance local as opposed to regional projects.

and promotion committees have been established and sporting rosters are frequently planned on a regional basis, with the winners of these competitions often competing against other regional winners to determine the state champion. In fact it is suggested that regional loyalties are emphasized in the structure and membership of almost every statewide organisation in Tasmania.⁴⁶ So pervasive is regionalism, that one commentator has described Tasmanian politics as the politics of personality and region.⁴⁷

That strong regional divisions should emerge in a state the size of Tasmania is due in part to historical circumstances. On a political level, it can be attributed to one of the main defences of regionalism; that it emerged as a, "... reaction against the centralised government of the modern state and against the centralising influence of the capital city upon all cultural activities."⁴⁸ Robinson said that this reaction could be found in all Australian

⁴⁶Lloyd Robson, A Short History of Tasmania (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 92.

⁴⁷G. C. Sharman, "Tasmania - the Politics of Brokerage," Current Affairs Bulletin 53, no. 9 (1977): 15.

⁴⁸Morgan, 69.

states and had caused a distinct 'hiatus' between the capital city and other areas.⁴⁹ Certainly there is ample Tasmanian evidence to support Robinson's statement.

EARLY HISTORY - THE 42ND PARALLEL

The emergence of regionalism in Tasmania can be traced to the early years of settlement. In 1804 the colony of Van Diemen's Land, as it was then called, was actually divided into two separate regions, known as counties, each under the authority of a Lieutenant Governor. The two settlements were the County of Buckinghamshire, based on Hobart Town in the South and under the command of Lt Gov. William Collins, and the County of Cornwall under Lt Gov. William Paterson, based at Port Dalrymple in the North.⁵⁰ The dividing line, as set by the Governor of New South Wales, Governor Philip King, was the 42nd parallel of latitude, which dissected the island at a point just

⁴⁹Robinson, 369.

⁵⁰Clifford Craig, "The Printed Maps of Tasmania," Tasmanian Historical Research Association, Papers and Proceedings 16, no. 1 (July 1968): 24. Hereafter THRA.

north of Oatlands in central Tasmania.⁵¹

Over the years, the 42nd parallel has become the unfortunate butt of many jokes, cartoons and derisory comments. It has been variously portrayed as a dividing wall and a fence topped with barbed wire to discourage people from crossing.⁵² It has attracted a certain ignominy for what is simply an imaginary line on a map. Obviously this was not intended by Governor King, to whom both Collins and Paterson were answerable in his capacity as Governor-in-chief of the Colonies. However he may well have sensed that the decision to establish two administratively independent settlements at either end of the island could create problems between his two Lieutenant Governors. In Paterson's letter of appointment he referred to the 42nd parallel as, "being the line of demarcation."⁵³ This argument was accepted by Llewellyn Bethell who said that the boundary was formalised to, "... avoid any possible

⁵¹Canberra, Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia, Historical Records of Australia, Series I, vol. V (Canberra: 1915), 272. Hereafter referred to as HRA.

⁵²Cartoon, Advocate, June 17, 1987, 6.

⁵³HRA, Series III, vol. I, 600.

clash with Collins at the Derwent."⁵⁴ In accepting the appointment, Paterson made it clear to King that he did not consider himself under the jurisdiction of Lt Gov. Collins, whose predecessor at the Derwent, Lieutenant John Bowen, had been appointed Commandant over the entire island.⁵⁵ Paterson said in a letter to King that by drawing the line of demarcation, the Governor-in-chief had prevented, "... any disputes which may occur between Lieutenant-Governor Collins and myself in our separate commands."⁵⁶ He went on to say that:

in the event of Lieutenant-Governor Collins interfering with me in my Military capacity, I most certainly will not comply, except in the most urgent Necessity, where the good of His Majesty's service requires it; and as Lieutenant-Governor of this territory, I cannot conceive he will give me any orders respecting the Administration of my Government, as in that I shall be entirely guided by your Excellency's instructions.⁵⁷

⁵⁴L. S. Bethell, The Story of Port Dalrymple: Life and Work in Northern Tasmania, facsimile edition (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1980), 6.

⁵⁵E. Morris Miller, "Origin and Foundation of British Settlements in Tasmania, 1802-4," Tasmania Sesquicentenary 1803-4 - 1953-4, 2d ed., Bulletin no. 2 (February 1953): 17. See also HRA, Series III, vol. I, 599.

⁵⁶HRA, Series III, vol. I, 395.

⁵⁷*ibid.*, 599.

King may have just been trying to accommodate two ambitious and forthright officers. However it seems more than a little ironical, even tragic, that by setting out to pre-empt any possible clashes between the two settlements and their respective leaders, he set in place the mechanism by which such divisions would be fostered. His actions also beg the question of why separate commands were established, rather than placing both settlements under the jurisdiction of one Lieutenant Governor, with the other having an officer-in-charge?

As history records, the two colonies did not remain separate for long. By 1809 the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Viscount Castlereagh, had raised with Governor Macquarie of New South Wales the possibility of merging the two settlements in Van Diemen's Land. In a letter dated May 14, 1809 he asked Macquarie to consider whether the establishment of "land communication" between the two colonies, "may not render it eligible to make one of those Settlements dependent on the other, the superior Settlement to be still dependent on the Governor of New South Wales."⁵⁸

⁵⁸HRA, Series I, vol. VII, 84-85, 364. Also, HRA, Series III, vol. I, 845.

However the division remained in force until June 30, 1812 when administrative authority for the whole island was vested in the Governor, based in Hobart. The decision was ultimately made by the Earl of Liverpool, Viscount Castlereagh's successor, and conveyed in a letter dated July 26, 1811 to Governor Macquarie.⁵⁹ Liverpool told Macquarie that: "Port Dalrymple will be in future considered a dependency of the Derwent River, and will be united with it under one Lieutenant Governor."⁶⁰

Thus the initial decision to establish the two settlements and the later decision to make one subordinate to the other seem to be at least partly responsible for the animosities that have developed between the North and South. Certainly a number of writers have reached this conclusion. For example, writing in 1973, Peter Boyce claimed that the decision, "... sowed the seeds of political rivalry between Launceston and Hobart which persists to the present and costs the State dearly in terms of administrative

⁵⁹ HRA, Series III, vol. I, 845.

⁶⁰ HRA, Series I, vol. VII, 364.

efficiency and economic planning.⁶¹ He said it had provoked a regional and town rivalry unknown in any other Australian colony.⁶² John Reynolds, in his history of Launceston, said that King's decision, "laid the foundation for a strong feeling of independence."⁶³

While the two settlements retained their separate identities for just eight years, there appeared to have been little interaction between them either before or in the period following Macquarie's decree. The first overland journey between Launceston and Hobart was undertaken in 1807, the 120 mile trek taking nine days.⁶⁴ The main road connecting Hobart Town and Launceston was not completed until 1850, even though work had commenced almost 40 years earlier.⁶⁵

⁶¹Peter J. Boyce, "Two Cinderellas: Parallels and Contrasts in the Histories of Western Australia and Tasmania," THRA 20, no. 3 (September 1973): 92.

⁶²Peter J. Boyce, "Tasmania," in J. Rorke (ed.) Politics at State Level - Australia, Department of Adult Education, University of Sydney (Sydney: Griffin Press, 1970), 125.

⁶³John Reynolds, Launceston, History of an Australian City, Adult Education Board of Tasmania (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1969), 183.

⁶⁴H. W. Stancombe, "The Great North Road," THRA 4, no. 2 (July 1955): 24.

⁶⁵*ibid.*

This was despite the fact that during his first visit to the island in 1811, Governor Macquarie had directed that military posts be set up between Hobart Town and Launceston to facilitate communication between the two settlements and that the route be surveyed in preparation for work to begin on the road proper.⁶⁶ Telegraphic communication between the two centres was not achieved until 1856, just three years before the first attempt to connect Tasmania with the mainland by means of a submarine cable.⁶⁷ In the years prior to 1816 communication across Tasmania was by special government messenger.⁶⁸ From 1816 a public courier made the return Hobart Town/Port Dalrymple journey in two weeks.⁶⁹ By 1824 the journey took five days and it was not until 1829 that the mailman rode a horse.⁷⁰ The first mail and coach service between the two centres did not begin until 1832.⁷¹ By 1834 the journey between

⁶⁶H. W. Stancombe, "Communications in Van Diemen's Land," THRA 2, no. 4 (June 1953): 75-76.

⁶⁷See W. A. Townsley, "Tasmania and the Great Economic Depression, 1858-1872," THRA 4, no. 2 (July 1955): 45-46.

⁶⁸Stancombe, "Communications," 75.

⁶⁹*ibid.*

⁷⁰*ibid.*

⁷¹*ibid.*

the two centres had been reduced to two days and in 1843 the journey took just 17 hours, all in one day.⁷²

It can be seen therefore that a combination of distance, albeit slight by today's standards, and a lack of communications during the colony's early years may have contributed to the antipathy between Tasmania's two largest cities. It has even been suggested that the parlous state of the colony's road, rail and other communication links resulted in Launceston, the North-West and West Coast centres adopting stronger commercial and cultural links with Melbourne than with Hobart. According to K. A. MacKirdy, this was certainly the case with the West Coast mining centres, from which it was easier to sail to Melbourne than travel over-land to Hobart.⁷³ Writing in the 1870s, Anthony Trollope said that Launceston was only 25 hours steaming time from Victoria.⁷⁴ Hobart's relative isolation was highlighted during the 1940s

⁷² Stancombe, "The Great North Road," 30.

⁷³ K. A. MacKirdy, "Problems of Adjustment in Nation Building: The Maritime Provinces and Tasmania," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science 20, no. 1 (February 1954): 28.

⁷⁴ A. Trollope, Australia and New Zealand, vol. II (London: Chapman and Hall, 1873), 6.

when North-West Coast centres and, to a lesser extent, Launceston began to receive radio broadcasts from Victoria and yet could not listen to Hobart radio.⁷⁵

There is another element to the relationship between Tasmania's population centres too - jealousy. Van Diemen's Land was Collins' second choice as a settlement. He had been directed to establish a settlement from which to defend Australia's eastern seaboard and Bass Strait islands against possible French interest in the region.⁷⁶ When his first choice, at Port Phillip, proved totally unsuitable Governor King told him that he could settle either at a site on the Derwent or at Port Dalrymple.⁷⁷ Both men had indicated a preference for the Port Dalrymple site, and Collins sent a party to investigate that site. However before his men had returned, he opted for the Derwent.⁷⁸ Ironically, as Collins was preparing to sail from Port Phillip to the Derwent,

⁷⁵Robson, 144-45.

⁷⁶Bethell, 4. See also Morris Miller, 17-19.

⁷⁷Bethell, 4. Also Tasmanian Year Book, no. 6 (1972): 5. (Ref.)

⁷⁸Bethell, 5.

Governor King received a despatch from Lord Hobart, after whom Tasmania's capital was named, recommending that the settlement be established at Port Dalrymple, "upon the southern coast of Van Diemen's Land and near the eastern entrance of Bass Strait."⁷⁹ Whether Lord Hobart intended the settlement to be at Port Dalrymple or at the Derwent cannot be determined by the inaccurate and confusing geographic description contained in his despatch to King. All it has done is add fuel to the long running feud between Tasmania's two oldest and largest cities as to which should be the State's capital.

THE CAPITAL CITY - COUNTER CLAIMS.

Over the years, the question as to which city should be the rightful capital of Tasmania has been the subject of frequent debate. Hobart claims that prerogative by virtue of the rights bestowed on it by Governor Macquarie in 1812 when he decreed that Port Dalrymple would be the subordinate settlement. To back up these historical claims, it also argues that as the seat of government - both Houses of Parliament,

⁷⁹Tasmanian Year Book (1972), 6.

Government House and most State Government departments are headquartered in Hobart - and home to the Supreme Court, the Reserve Bank and a number of Federal Government departments, it would be wrong for the city to be divested of the status it has enjoyed for 177 years.

Launceston's designs on capital city status are based on geographic and commercial considerations. It claims to be the State's commercial capital - a boast that flows from the Depression years between 1858 and 1872 when the North developed strong trading ties with Victoria. It was then that it assumed the title of Tasmania's "Northern capital".⁸⁰ This presumption is supported by at least one relatively contemporary text. The Cyclopedia of Tasmania in 1900 described Launceston as: "Tasmania's second city but first in commercial importance, on account of its position as the centre of the principal agricultural, pastoral and mining districts of the island."⁸¹ Launceston argues that it is in a geographically strategic position, claiming to be at a midway point between Tasmania's

⁸⁰Townsley, "Great Economic Depression," 44.

⁸¹Cyclopedia of Tasmania, vol. II (Hobart: Maitland and Krone, 1900), 7.

other principal population centres - Hobart on the one hand and Burnie/Devonport on the other and also that it is convenient to mainland markets. This argument has been the cause of more than a little consternation in Hobart. It has been argued that Launceston paid less tribute to Hobart after the declaration of self-government for the colony in 1856, with relations further deteriorating with the railway riots of 1874.⁸²

There appears to be some indirect support among academics for Launceston's argument. Jean Holmes said that Southern Tasmania suffers from, "environmental and locational disadvantages" which are only partially remedied by Hobart's historic role as the centre of government and other activities.⁸³ Scott suggests that because of this Launceston has assumed some metropolitan functions not normally accorded to a city of its size.⁸⁴ The city boasts the State's mail

⁸²Townsley, "Great Economic Depression," 44.

⁸³Jean H. Holmes, "Population," in Australia: A Geography, ed. D.N. Jeans (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1977): 335.

⁸⁴Peter Scott, "The Hierarchy of Central Places in Tasmania," The Australian Geographer 9, no. 3 (March 1964): 144.

sorting and distribution centre and the railway workshops.⁸⁵ The State headquarters of the Commercial Traveller's Association are also in Launceston, as are a number of State Government departments. There are Commonwealth Government offices in the city and the Supreme Court holds regular sittings there. Launceston's significance was also recognised by the Gray Liberal Government which held regular Cabinet meetings in the city. In recognition of the State's regional structure they were held along the North-West Coast as well, although less frequently.

Over time there have been attempts to play down the rivalries between the State's two largest cities. In February 1959 the Lions Club of Launceston even arranged for the town clerk of Launceston, Charles Staubi, and his counterpart from Hobart, Henry Cole, to ceremoniously "bury the hatchet".⁸⁶ Dressed in wigs and black gowns, they buried two gilded hatchets outside the Launceston Hotel. The Lions Club also had a special plaque made to mark the occasion.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 145.

⁸⁶ John Reynolds, Launceston - History of an Australian City, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1969), 185-186.

THE EMERGENCE OF THREE REGIONS.

While the rivalries between Launceston and Hobart have been the most bitter and frequently documented, the regional division of Tasmania is not dichotomous. Over time a third region has emerged - one based on the North-West and West Coasts. Henry Reynolds attributes Tasmania's regionalism to the growth of pastoral holdings, small farming and mining.⁸⁷ After Hobart and Launceston were founded, the State was settled in a piecemeal fashion during three stages.⁸⁸ The first was when free settlers, assisted through government land grants and with convict servants, pushed north from Hobart and south from Launceston into the region now known as the Midlands. They took over vast tracts of land and established sprawling sheep grazing properties.⁸⁹ The second stage began in the 1860s, when the North-West Coast, the North East, Huon and Channel districts were settled by small scale farmers.⁹⁰ The impetus for this was the Waste Lands Act of 1858, passed to encourage settlement of the thickly timbered forest lands,

⁸⁷Henry Reynolds, "Regionalism in Nineteenth Century Tasmania," THRA 17, no. 1 (July 1969): 14.

⁸⁸ibid.

⁸⁹ibid.

⁹⁰ibid.

particularly those on the North-West Coast.⁹¹ It was during this period that Tasmania's potential as an agricultural producer was realised, with the suitability of North-West Coast and North Eastern soils for vegetable production and of the Huon and Channel districts for growing fruit becoming apparent. The third phase began during the 1870s when Tasmania's rich mineral resources were discovered on the West Coast.⁹² The impetus was provided by the discovery of tin at Mt Bischoff in 1871.⁹³ Other major discoveries were made during the early 1880s, including silver at Zeehan and Dundas and copper at Mt Lyell. Blainey refers to the period which began with the discovery of tin at Mt Bischoff as the "Age of the Prospectors".⁹⁴ He said that it lasted about 25 years and included the second major group of mineral discoveries, those which occurred between 1890 and 1893.⁹⁵

⁹¹Ernest Whitfeld, "Historical Sketch of Tasmania," The Cyclopedia of Tasmania, vol. I (Hobart: Maitland and Krone, 1900), 22.

⁹²Henry Reynolds, 15.

⁹³Geoffrey Blainey, "The Rise and Decline of the West Coast," THRA 4, no. 4 (February 1956): 66.

⁹⁴ibid. ⁹⁵ibid., 67.

Reynolds refers to the growth of pastoral holdings, small farms and mining as the three "frontiers" of Tasmania's regional development.⁹⁶ Each contributed substantially not only to the State's improving economy, but also to its changing demographic picture. During the 1800s Tasmania became increasingly decentralised. W. A. Townsley attributed this to a number of factors, including the opening-up of land in the North, the greater activity of Launceston-based immigration societies, and the natural desire of convicts to get away from their place of detention.⁹⁷ As new industries were established away from the core population centres in Hobart and Launceston so people moved. For example, by 1900 Zeehan and Queenstown had become the third and fourth largest towns in the colony and the West Coast contained one seventh of the total population.⁹⁸

Lloyd Robson argues that in the period between 1857 and 1870 there had been, "a palpable change in the centre of population gravity."⁹⁹ He said that strong

⁹⁶Henry Reynolds, 14.

⁹⁷Townsley, 36.

⁹⁸Henry Reynolds, 15.

⁹⁹Robson, 36.

regional loyalties had developed and that the, "continual friction between Launceston and the capital" was a reflection of this change.¹⁰⁰ This emerging regionalism was also having an effect on Tasmanian politics, with local issues playing an important role. This was highlighted by Patrick Weller. Writing about Tasmanian politics of the 1890s, he said: "Tasmania was a highly regionalised island and what was of interest to the Hobart members was often regarded with jealousy and distrust by country members."¹⁰¹ He said that elections were fought on local views and issues, and that the style of politics varied between the regions.¹⁰² Weller, using a phrase first coined by H. J. W. Stokes, said that a "What's in it for us obsession?" had developed; that Members of Parliament were often judged by their electors on how successful they had been in attracting public works to their region.¹⁰³ It

¹⁰⁰ibid.

¹⁰¹Patrick Weller, "Groups, Parliament and Elections: Tasmanian Politics in the 1890s," THRA 21, no. 2 (June 1974): 93, Henry Reynolds, 20.

¹⁰²Weller, 96.

¹⁰³H. J. W. Stokes, "North-West Tasmania 1858-1910: - The Establishment of an Agricultural Community," (Ph.D., ANU, 1969), 217. Cited in Weller, 97.

was this attitude which prompted the Mercury to comment: "In the Huon, people do not talk of one man, one vote, but one man, one jetty."¹⁰⁴

By the 1860s, Tasmania's regional development was beginning to create enormous problems for government. During the colony's years as "Great Britain's Gaol"¹⁰⁵ there had been unlimited labour and £350,000 a year from the British Government with which to pursue an ambitious public works program.¹⁰⁶ However the end of transportation meant that the Government had to find the funds to finance the construction of roads, railways and public buildings - all of which were necessary if the island was to continue developing its natural resources. To achieve this the Whyte-Meredith Government attempted to introduce a property and income tax.¹⁰⁷ The Government fell, its demise said to be due to two factors - the attempt to impose a tax and the expansion of central control that such a proposal would have entailed.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Mercury, August 15, 1892, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Trollope, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Reynolds, 22.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* ¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

Opposition to the Government's proposal was summed up by R. Q. Kermode in the Legislative Council when he asked: "Why should money from one district be spent in another? It was a complete setting aside of the principle of self government and an attempt to substitute a system of centralization."¹⁰⁹

Kermode's statement and one from another 19th Century Tasmanian Member of Parliament illustrate the depth of regional thinking and the influence it wielded within the island's parliament. Speaking against a proposal to construct a railway from Hobart to the West Coast, a Northern member, Mr Henry Dumaresq, argued that:

... the Hobart members will vote for anything to please the Hobart populace who care very little for Tasmania in general but very much for Hobart in particular. However I hope the country members will show their independence and commonsense, but unfortunately two of the four Northern members live in Hobart and one of them owns a newspaper so that I am afraid he will vote for the Bill.¹¹⁰

According to Weller, Dumaresq was concerned that the railway had been proposed by Southern members

¹⁰⁷ ibid. ¹⁰⁸ ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Weller, 94.

¹¹⁰ ibid., 94.

in the lead-up to the 1897 election to appeal to constituents because it would result in West Coast ore being transported to the port of Hobart for shipment, and in the process by-pass the traditional mining ports on the North-West Coast.¹¹¹ Accordingly, the port of Hobart's position would have been enhanced, with the city and its people benefiting at the expense of the North-West Coast.

THE REGIONS TODAY.

The historical "community of interest" demonstrated above continues to be evident in Tasmania today. For example, Telecom Australia divides the State into three telephone districts, the boundaries of which closely follow the historic divisions.¹¹² So too does the Commonwealth Statistician when defining the State's statistical divisions.¹¹³ Although the State is divided into four statistical divisions - Greater Hobart, Southern, Northern and Mersey-Lyell - the two southern divisions tend to be amalgamated when regional

¹¹¹ibid.

¹¹²See Appendix 1, map 1.

¹¹³See Appendix 1, map 2.

comparisons are drawn. The resulting three regions - Greater Southern (being an amalgam of the Greater Hobart and Southern Statistical Divisions), Northern and Mersey-Lyell roughly equate with the three newspapers' prime circulation areas. In 1972 the Australian Bureau of Statistics decided to adopt an urban based set of regions for the compilation of census data in Tasmania. According to Peter Wilde this confirmed the existence of a, "higher order region of commercial interaction."¹¹⁴ The foci of these regions were Hobart in the South, Launceston in the North and Burnie/Devonport in the North-West. These regions differed significantly to those used for census purposes in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At that time the State was divided into four regions which were based on electoral divisions.¹¹⁵ Subsequent regions, including those introduced in 1972, adopted local government boundaries.

¹¹⁴Peter D. Wilde, Employment Structures in Tasmania: An Analysis of the State and its Regional Labour Markets, 1986, Department of Employment and Training, Tasmania, Labour Market Research Paper no. 2, (February 1988), 38.

¹¹⁵Tasmania, Papers and Proceedings, House of Assembly, vol. XLIX, 1903, See Registrar General, Introductory Report. 1901 Census, Parts I-VIII, pp. I-XXXIII.

For the purpose of this study it is not appropriate to use political boundaries because these do not correspond closely with either the popularly recognised regions or the three newspapers' prime circulation areas. Furthermore, there is very little consistency between the electoral boundaries as they exist to cater for the various Houses of Parliament, both State and Federal. To illustrate, Tasmania is divided into five electorates for House of Representatives and House of Assembly elections, 19 Legislative Council seats and 46 Local Government areas.¹¹⁶ The State is not divided into separate electorates for Senate elections. Of all the electoral divisions, only those for the House of Representatives and the House of Assembly are the same. Therefore it would be difficult to use either State or Federal political divisions as a tool for defining the three regions. In fact the lack of common boundaries makes it virtually impossible. However, while there are no common boundaries between the statistical divisions and the Federal and State electoral boundaries, there are important similarities between the statistical

¹¹⁶See Appendix 1, maps 3-5.

divisions and the local government administrative areas. There are also important historical ties between the two which date back to Tasmania's first experiments with a regional structure when the local government areas were used for statistical purposes. The local government areas are the only political divisions which can be combined without being altered to correspond with the popularly recognised regions and the newspapers' prime circulation areas. The only overlap is in the South, where the municipalities of Brighton, Kingborough, New Norfolk and Sorell extend into both the Greater Hobart and Southern Statistical Divisions. However that does not create a problem for this paper as the two have been combined to form the more widely recognised Greater Southern Region. The Greater Southern Statistical Region contains 19 local government areas and covers 25,030 sq kms, the Northern Statistical Region 14 local government areas and 20,100 sq kms and the Mersey-Lyell Region 13 local government areas and 22,700 sq kms.

Thus it can be seen that statistical and local government boundaries are the most useful for defining Tasmania's three regions. They have a compatibility that is not evident if comparisons are sought between

themselves and the electoral boundaries. Further, they mirror the popularly recognised regions, whereas the electoral boundaries have no regard for regional affiliations. For example, Lyons, the State's largest electoral division, covers part of all three regions, from the West Coast to the East Coast, and from the far South through central Tasmania to the North.

PAROCHIALISM - A TASMANIAN REALITY?

One of the consequences of regionalism in Tasmania has been the emergence of very strong and enduring parochial sentiments. This question was discussed at a seminar hosted by the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology in Launceston on Friday, July 29, 1988. The day-long seminar featured a panel of 14 prominent Tasmanians drawn from academia, business, politics, sport and the media. The seminar was widely promoted in the media, with the Mercury devoting four pages to a somewhat irreverent and tongue in cheek look at the history of Tasmanian parochialism as a preview to the event.¹¹⁷ The Examiner covered the seminar in a more serious vein, with several pages given to a review

¹¹⁷Mercury , July 29, 1988, 3.

of the forum.¹¹⁸ Local ABC radio talkback show Becker's Broadside devoted a full 45 minute programme to this issue on the morning of the forum. However, perhaps surprisingly, the third major Tasmanian daily, the Advocate, does not appear to have covered the seminar in any significant detail.

The seminar was titled "Parochialism in Tasmania - too close for comfort?" The promotional blurb which appeared in all daily newspapers featured a map of Tasmania divided in two, as symbolic of the major rivalries which are said to have wracked the State's development.¹¹⁹ The map did not indicate the existence of a separate region based on the North-West and West Coasts - a factor which may account for the Advocate's apparent lack of interest in the seminar. While certainly a worthwhile exercise in that it provided people with an opportunity to express their views on this enduring issue, it was significant that the seminar did not provide any real answers to the parochialism/regionalism debate. It did, however, confirm what has been argued over time:

¹¹⁸Examiner, July 30, 1988, 5, 22-23.

¹¹⁹For example, see the Mercury, July 9, 1988,

that parochialism is prevalent in Tasmania and that it has resulted in part from the division of the State into regions. However, the speakers tended to differ when discussing the impact of parochialism on development within the State. Some argued that Tasmania had benefited from parochialism, particularly the parochialism of its politicians, claiming that as a result the State had gained facilities which it would otherwise have missed. Those opposed to parochialism countered with the argument that Tasmania had suffered economically; that parochialism had led to inefficiencies and wasted resources. They argued that parochialism had resulted in the duplication of some facilities which could not be justified in a state the size of Tasmania and that because of this the State had missed out on other badly needed facilities.

The seminar certainly highlighted the emotionalism surrounding this debate. A number of speakers argued that the existence of parochialism in Tasmania was due in part to the State's Members of Parliament and the media. In fact the then editor of the Mercury, Mr Barry Dargaville, said that parochialism was a symbol of pork barrelling: "the use

of public monies to buy political advantage."¹²⁰ He said that while the media encouraged parochialism for its amusement value, pork barrelling was a curse which had to be overcome. He said:

If Tasmania wants to compete, it will only do so successfully as a whole, not three zones marked only by the temporary lines resulting from the need of a political party trying to buy votes,"¹²¹

The editor of the Examiner, Mr Michael Courtney, argued that in part parochialism had grown because over the years Tasmanian governments had been southern-based and oblivious to the needs of people in the other two regions.¹²² He said it should be accepted that Tasmania does have three regions and that people should work towards encouraging healthy competitive parochialism.¹²³ It was, he argued, this parochialism which had resulted in such former southern-based facilities as the Tasmanian College of Advanced

¹²⁰Barry Dargaville, "Parochialism in Tasmania: Too Close for Comfort?" Speech given at the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology (TSIT), Launceston, July 29, 1988.

¹²¹ibid.

¹²²Michael C. P. Courtney, "Parochialism in Tasmania: Too Close for Comfort?" Speech given at TSIT seminar, July 29, 1988.

¹²³ibid.

Education (now the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology, TSIT) and the headquarters of Tasmanian horse racing being relocated to the North.¹²⁴

CONCLUSION.

Regionalism has developed in Tasmania through a combination of historical, political and economic factors. The three regions as they have developed over time are not 'natural' regions as defined by A. J. Herbertson and others, nor have they evolved as the result of decisions made by either State or Federal governments. They are more appropriately termed 'functional' regions. Having said that, however, they cannot be defined simply by drawing lines on a map, even though they do approximate the local government boundaries and administrative regions favoured by Telecom and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Tasmania's experience shows that there does not have to be a compatibility between political boundaries and regional boundaries for regionalism to exert an influence on politics. This is evidenced by the fact that regionalism has been very much a factor in Tasmanian politics since the mid to late 1800s. The fact that there is no correlation between political

boundaries (electorates) and regional boundaries, except at a local government level, does not appear to have lessened the influence of regionalism in a political sense.

The development of regionalism in Tasmania also supports the contention that certain basic ingredients are required for it to work. The Tasmanian regions certainly recognise the prerequisites of geographical proximity, functional interdependence and a homogeneity of attitudes and values. They also have their own economic and cultural foci. Tasmania's experiences also show the debilitating side of regionalism. While it is capable of uniting a small community or region, it also has the capacity to divide a State. The competition for resources which has often led to the duplication of facilities throughout Tasmania is testimony to that. Despite this, the territorial and parochial loyalties which regionalism engenders show no signs of abating. In Tasmania regionalism is a product of history - one with very enduring characteristics.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEWSPAPERS AND REGIONALISM

Tasmania's three daily newspapers have a strong tradition of family ownership. Until control of the Mercury passed first into the hands of the Herald and Weekly Times Group and more recently to Rupert Murdoch's international media conglomerate News Limited, the newspapers were controlled by three families. These were the Davies family (Mercury), the Rolph and, through marriage, Rouse families (Examiner), and the Harris family (Advocate). This chapter profiles each of the newspapers; it deals with their history, their relationships with the community and with each other. The intention is to show that each of the three newspapers has developed a close relationship with a particular Tasmanian region. Furthermore, that the newspapers have become recognised as being regionally based: that they have become an important part of their respective communities. By establishing that such a relationship exists, weight will be added to the role Tasmania's daily newspapers have played in promoting parochialism in the regional issues discussed in subsequent chapters.

THE MERCURY

Tasmania's oldest daily newspaper, the Mercury was founded in 1854 by John Davies and George Auber Jones.¹ The first issue was published on July 5, with the Hobarton Mercury, as it was then called, appearing bi-weekly.² From January 1, 1858 the Hobarton Mercury was published three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and on New Years Day 1860 it became a daily.³

The partnership between Davies and Jones was short lived; on September 13, 1854 John Davies assumed sole ownership of the newspaper he and his family would control for more than 100 years.⁴ He quickly established the Hobarton Mercury as Hobart's leading newspaper. At that time Hobart boasted a number of newspapers, including the Hobart Town Advertiser, the Courier, the Colonial Times, the Colonist, the

¹The Cyclopedia of Tasmania, vol. I (Hobart: Maitland and Krone [1900]), 292. Hereafter referred to as Cyc. of Tas. I.

²ibid., Mercury, April 28, 1923, 13.

³ibid.

⁴Mercury, "Centenary Magazine," July 5, 1954, 9. Hereafter referred to as "Cent. Mag."

Government Gazette, the Trumpeter, the Omnibus, the Church Chronicle, and the Record. Davies had previously purchased the Guardian and this disappeared with the first edition of the Mercury.⁵ The Mercury quickly absorbed all its competitors. The Colonial Times and the Tasmanian, two of the colony's oldest newspapers, were incorporated with the Mercury on August 24, 1857.⁶ The Tasmanian Daily News and the Daily Courier were likewise absorbed on June 1, 1858 and June 1, 1859 respectively.⁷ Davies continued to pursue take-over opportunities and within a few years had also absorbed two other competitors - the Advertiser and the Tasmanian News.⁸ It was not until after these take-overs were completed that the newspaper changed its name to the Mercury.⁹

The Davies family was directly involved with management of the Mercury for 131 years. The family's involvement ended in October 1985 when Mr G. F. Davies

⁵"Cent. Mag.", 9.

⁶ibid.

⁷Cyc. of Tas. I, 292.

⁸ibid.

⁹"Cent. Mag.", 9.

retired as chairman of Davies Bros. Ltd.¹⁰ He was the seventh generation of the family to manage the newspaper.¹¹ During its history the Mercury has undergone many changes. In 1895 the Mercury became incorporated as a limited company and in 1948 the first shares were issued to the public.¹² In that year 60,000 £2 4.5 percent cumulative preference shares were floated, bringing issued capital in the company to £280,000.¹³ The family gradually relinquished control of the newspaper and by the end of the 1986-87 financial year the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd group held 1,827,031 (49.98 percent) of the ordinary shares in Davies Bros. Ltd.¹⁴ Control of the Mercury changed hands again in 1987 when News Corporation Ltd won its battle for the Herald and Weekly Times against competition from Robert Holmes a Court's Bell Group.

¹⁰Mercury, October 8, 1985, 10; Davies Bros. Limited, 91st Annual Report (1986), 3. Hereafter referred to as DBL Report.

¹¹DBL, 90th Report (1985), 1; DBL, 91st Report (1986), 3.

¹²"Cent. Mag.", 12.

¹³ibid.

¹⁴DBL, 92d Report (1987), 22.

Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd made a bid for all remaining shares in Davies Bros. Ltd and the company became a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Herald and Weekly Times on March 28, 1988.¹⁵

News Ltd's take-over of the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Davies Bros. Ltd has given the company a major stake in Tasmania. Its interests are not confined solely to the production and sale of newspapers. Through Davies Bros. Ltd it acquired interest in newspapers (the Mercury, Sunday Tasmanian, Tasmanian Country, Derwent Valley Gazette and the Treasure Islander), commercial printing, colour signs, and a chain of newsagencies, stationers, Pools and Tattsлото agencies. It jointly owns Inset Transport Industries, the owner/operator of two of Australia's three largest airlines - Ansett Airlines and East West Airlines - and holds a fifty percent stake in Australian Newsprint Mills Holdings Ltd (ANM), which has mills at Boyer, near Hobart, and at Albury in New South Wales.¹⁶ These holdings place the company

¹⁵News Corp. Ltd Annual Report (1988), 77. Hereafter News Corp. Report. Letter, Mr F. M. Broomhall, Company Secretary, DBL, April 5, 1989.

¹⁶News Corp. Report (1988), 45-47.

in a very strategic position within Tasmania.

Davies Bros. Ltd has, over time, held interests in other media organisations, both within Tasmania and interstate. It was a foundation shareholder of Tasmanian Television Ltd, the company set up to operate Hobart's Channel Six and also held 50 per cent of the shares in Hobart radio station 7HO.¹⁷ It sold its interest in Tas TV in 1981-82 and in 1985 disposed of its shareholding in 7HO and its Queensland Press convertible notes.¹⁸

While Davies Bros. Ltd has undergone many changes of late, various members of the Davies family stamped their imprimatur not only on the newspaper, but also on the community. John Davies was the driving force behind the Mercury for 18 years. He was said to be so committed to the newspaper that on one occasion, when unable to pay his employees, he auctioned his services to the highest bidder to raise the necessary funds.¹⁹

¹⁷Examiner Northern Television Ltd Annual Report (1982), 2. Hereafter ENT Ltd Report. DBL, 91st Report, 3.

¹⁸DBL, 91st Report, 3.

¹⁹"Cent. Mag.", 8.

While there is little doubt as to his commitment to the Mercury, there is a great deal of conflicting evidence about his early years. According to an article in the Mercury's "Centenary Magazine", he may have gained some experience as a journalist whilst a young man, first on the Manchester Guardian, and then on a Calcutta paper, the Englishman.²⁰ However other information suggests that the Mercury may have been too kind when portraying its founder. For example, the Mercury made no mention of the fact that Davies had worked as a second class clerk before being convicted of fraud and sentenced to seven years transportation.²¹ He arrived in Hobart Town aboard the Argyle, having been described by the ship's surgeon as "audacious, incorrigible and impudent."²² The Mercury's story was that he set sail for the colony after working in India, where he was a member of one of the first expeditions

¹⁹"Cent. Mag.", 8.

²⁰ibid.

²¹George F. J. Bergman, "John Davies 1813-1872: A Jewish Convict, Journalist, Actor, Policeman, Publican, Parliamentarian," THRA 26, no. 3 (September 1979): 85.

²²ibid.

into Afghanistan and that his ship was wrecked off King Island, forcing him to swim for his life.²³

Despite the conflicting stories as to how he arrived in Australia, John Davies certainly made an impact during his years in the colonies. In fact he enjoyed a rather varied and illustrious career. At different times he was the Chief Constable of Police at Penrith, a reporter and "assisting editor" on the Port Phillip Patriot, a newspaper set up by John Pascoe Fawcner, a one time Launceston newspaper proprietor.²⁴ He later worked on the Port Phillip Gazette and also became a very keen actor and a some time legal adviser.²⁵ Before returning to Van Diemen's Land to establish the Mercury, Davies moved to Bathurst as Chief Constable and Inspector of Distilleries and Slaughterhouses.²⁶

²² *ibid.*

²³ "Cent. Mag.", 8.

²⁴ Bergman, 93. For a brief overview of John Pascoe Fawcner's contribution to the establishment of Tasmanian newspapers see Robert C. Sharman, "John Pascoe Fawcner in Tasmania," THRA 4, no. 3 (December 1955): 57-63.

²⁵ Bergman, 87-88.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 91.

Davies was a somewhat controversial character who seemed to be continually at odds with the law, even when working as a police constable. For example, in 1845, while a reporter on the Port Phillip Gazette, he was fined £15 for assault and libel; and in February 1848, while employed as the Chief Constable, Bailiff of the Court of Petty Sessions and Inspector of Weights and Measures at Wellington, he was indicted for assault and false imprisonment.²⁷ Davies was found guilty on the first charge, not guilty on the second and fined £5 and sentenced to be imprisoned until the fine was paid.²⁸

Davies' run-ins with the law continued even while he was proprietor of the Mercury. In 1852 he was hospitalised after the first of three brawls with the editor of the Daily News, R. T. C. Yates; in 1885 he was involved in a stoush with Washington McMinn, a lawyer, for which the court directed that he pay £5 damages; and in 1860 he clashed with T. C. Hall, editor of the Times.²⁹ However Davies' most serious court appearance followed a fight between himself and a former friend and editor of the Mercury, Mr Samuel

²⁷ibid., 90-91.

²⁸ibid.

²⁹ibid., 98-99.

Prout Hill. Davies was fined £100 and sentenced to one month's gaol, with the trial drawing the following response from the Hobart Town Advertiser: "... that personal squabbles between the conductors of newspapers pass for nought among the respectable part of the community."³⁰

Despite a proclivity for settling disputes with his fists, Davies was a highly respected member of the community. In 1861 he was elected to the House of Assembly as the Member for Hobart; however he had to resign soon after, following a petition which claimed he was ineligible for election because his company had printing contracts with the Government.³¹ Davies stood again, this time in 1862 when he was elected as the Member for East Devon, a northern seat.³² He represented East Devon until 1871 when he was not asked to renominate. Instead, he nominated for and was elected as the Member for Franklin.³³ By then, Davies

³⁰ibid., 99-100.

³¹D. Pike, ed., Australian Dictionary of Biography, vol. 4 (New South Wales: Melbourne University Press, 1972), 28. Hereafter ADB 4.

³²ibid; Bergman, 103.

³³ADB 4: 28. Bergman, 104.

was devoting almost all his time to his parliamentary and community affairs and leaving management of the Mercury to other members of the family.³⁴ Apart from his parliamentary responsibilities, he was also actively involved in the theatre, being a driving force behind the Theatre Royal, was Grandmaster of the Odd fellows, Captain of the 2nd Volunteer Rifles, Chairman of the Tradesmen's Club and a director of the Southern Tasmanian Quartz Crushing and Mining Company.³⁵

When John Davies died in 1872, formal management of the Mercury passed to his sons, John George Davies and Charles Ellis Davies, even though it appears that they had been running the newspaper for some years anyway.³⁶ Both men followed their father by pursuing parliamentary careers. John George Davies representing both Fingal, a northern constituency, and Denison, a southern seat.³⁷ He was Chairman of Committees in the House of Assembly and Speaker for 10

³⁴Bergman, 104.

³⁵ibid; "Cent. Mag.", 8.

³⁶ibid.

³⁷Cyc. of Tas. I, 89. "Cent. Mag.", 10.

years.³⁸ From 1885 until 1892 he was Mayor of Hobart and also served as Chief Magistrate.³⁹ He is credited with being the founder of the Southern Tasmania Cricket Association; as a Freemason he was Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge; was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Defence Forces; honorary secretary of the Federal Rifle Association of Australasia and honorary secretary of the Tasmanian Association.⁴⁰ John George Davies was knighted for his services to the community.

Like his elder brother and father, Charles Ellis Davies was actively involved in the community. He was elected to the Legislative Council seat of Cambridge in 1897, was founder of the Southern Tasmanian Agricultural and Pastoral Society and a committeeman of the Tasmanian Racing Club.⁴¹ Also a Freemason, he was appointed Grand Master of the Tasmanian Grand Lodge and District Grand Mark Master for Tasmania.⁴²

³⁸Cyc. of Tas. I, 89.

³⁹ibid. ⁴⁰ibid.

⁴¹"Cent. Mag.", 10; Peter F. Bolger, Hobart Town (Canberra: ANU Press, 1973), 90-91; 155-157.

⁴²Cyc. of Tas. I, 76.

THE EXAMINER

While the Mercury can rightly claim to be Tasmania's first daily newspaper, the honours for being the State's oldest newspaper belong to the Examiner. Established in 1842 by three congregationalists, James Aikenhead, the Rev. John West and J. S. Waddell, it was initially called the Launceston Examiner and Commercial and Agricultural Advertiser.⁴³ The Examiner began life as a weekly, with the first edition appearing on Saturday, March 12, 1842. Within six months the paper had grown in such popularity that it became bi-weekly, with editions on Wednesday afternoon and Saturday.⁴⁴ Readership of the Examiner continued to grow and from January 1853 it was published three times a week - on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It became a daily on December 21, 1877.⁴⁵

The first issues of the Examiner were printed in a room behind a Brisbane St, Launceston, bookshop on a small press secretly brought to Tasmania by James

⁴³ADB 1, ed. D. Pike (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968), reprint, 3.

⁴⁴Cyc. of Tas. II, 78.

⁴⁵Examiner, "Jubilee Booklet," n.d., reprinted from the Examiner of March 12, 1892, 13-14.

Aikenhead.⁴⁶ In 1848 it moved to Charles St and in 1854 to its current home in Paterson St.⁴⁷ These early years also saw a number of changes to its format. It first appeared as a small tabloid measuring 27 cm by 42 cm. However in January 1854 the Examiner doubled its page size and in 1868 it became a full broadsheet. It reverted to being a tabloid on January 1, 1948.⁴⁸

The Examiner didn't face the same competition experienced by the Mercury when it was established 12 years later. There were not the same number of newspapers in Launceston during the 1840s as there were in Hobart during the 1850s. The Examiner's main opposition came from the Telegraph, the Launceston Courier, the Cornwall Chronicle and the Launceston Advertiser.⁴⁹ Both the Advertiser and the Chronicle were subsequently absorbed by the Examiner (the Advertiser in 1847 and the Chronicle in 1880).⁵⁰

⁴⁶Cyc. of Tas. II, 79; Douglas Lockwood, ed. A Brief History of the Regional Dailies of Australia Limited, 1980, n. p., 38.

⁴⁷ibid. ⁴⁸ibid., 78.

⁴⁹E. Morris Miller, "A Historical Summary of Tasmanian Newspapers," Pt. 2, THRA 2, no. 2 (March 1953): 37-38.

⁵⁰ibid., 37.

Despite a number of changes in ownership, the Examiner continued to expand. In January 1872 the Weekly Examiner was introduced. The Weekly Examiner became the Tasmanian in 1881 when the Examiner bought a publication of that name and merged the two weeklies.⁵¹ The Tasmanian was published until 1895. From 1901 to 1935 the Examiner published the Weekly Courier, and for 60 years from 1924 until 1984 the Saturday Evening Express. The latter was replaced in August 1984 by the Sunday Examiner.

Most of the Examiner's growth has occurred in the years during which the Rolph and Rouse families have controlled the company. Their involvement with the Examiner dates back to 1897 when W. R. Rolph and A. T. Young took over as proprietors.⁵² That relationship continued until 1916 when Young retired and Rolph formed a partnership with his son, Gordon, later to become Sir Gordon Rolph.⁵³ In 1951 the

⁵¹ibid.

⁵²Examiner, unpublished paper, n. d., believed to have been prepared by Noel Shaw, a former Examiner sub editor, for inclusion in a forthcoming history of the Regional Dailies Association.

⁵³ibid.

current chairman, Mr Edmund Rouse, married Sir Gordon Rolph's daughter and when Sir Gordon died in 1959 he became managing director.⁵⁴

Under Rouse's supervision, the company has become Tasmania's largest non-resource group, with a market capitalisation estimated at \$120 million.⁵⁵ Diversification began in 1959 when the company was granted a commercial television licence and formed Northern TV Ltd. The station - TNT Channel 9 - began telecasting in Launceston in May, 1962.⁵⁶ In July 1965 The Examiner Newspaper Pty Ltd was formed by W.R. Rolph and Sons Pty Ltd and on July 1, 1969 the two companies were merged to become Examiner-Northern TV Ltd, now ENT Ltd.⁵⁷

ENT Ltd describes its principal activities as television, newspapers, radio, commercial printing, motels, travel agencies, picture theatres, property development and investment.⁵⁸ The 1980s have seen the

⁵⁴R. A. Ferrall, Notable Tasmanians (Launceston, Tas: Foot and Playsted Pty Ltd, 1980), 110.

⁵⁵Business Review Weekly, May 12, 1989, 160.

⁵⁶Examiner document; ENT Ltd Report (1988), 2.

⁵⁷ibid.

⁵⁸ENT Ltd Report (1988), 10.

company move further away from a dependence on newspapers as its major source of income to a greater involvement in the electronic media. In 1982 ENT Ltd bought all the shares in Hobart television station TVT 6, a move which was not well received in the South.⁵⁹ In 1985 it purchased Melbourne radio station 3UZ for \$9.2 million, although it has since sold the station.⁶⁰ In 1988 ENT Ltd underwent a major reconstruction. In a somewhat surprising move, the company sold Channel 9 in Launceston to comply with the Federal Government's regional television aggregation policy, but retained Hobart television station TVT 6. It had been widely predicted that it would retain Channel 9 and dispose of Channel 6, if only to maintain its regional affiliations. ENT Ltd used the \$40 million from the sale of TNT 9 towards the purchase of Associated Broadcasting Services Ltd in Victoria for \$76 million.⁶¹ The purchase of Broadcasting Services Ltd gave ENT Ltd two new television stations - BTV 6 in Ballarat and GMV 6 in the Goulburn Valley - as well as

⁵⁹ENT Ltd Report (1982).

⁶⁰Examiner, October 31, 1986, 37.

⁶¹ENT Ltd Report (1988), 2.

a 40 percent interest in Filmpac Holdings Ltd, a distributor of motion picture programs and home videos in Australia, South East Asia and New Zealand.⁸² It also acquired a number of Victorian radio stations as a result of the purchase, but disposed of those.⁸³ In July 1988 ENT Ltd acquired indirect control of six radio stations in the United States of America, including four in California and two in Oregon to add to the two Tasmanian radio stations it already owned - 7EX in Launceston and 7HT in Hobart.⁸⁴ During the year ENT Ltd gained control of miller and vehicle distributor Holyman, Monds Affleck Ltd and, through that acquisition, increased its holding in timber and hardware group Gunns Kilndried Timber Industries Ltd.⁸⁵ In May 1988 Australian Business rated ENT Ltd 55th among Australia's top share market performers during the previous ten years with its share price showing compound annual growth of 32.91 percent.⁸⁶ The company's expansion interstate and overseas means that it no longer relies so heavily on its Tasmanian

⁸²ibid.

⁸³ibid.

⁸⁴ibid., 5.

⁸⁵ibid., 11.

⁸⁶Australian Business, May 4, 1988, 62.

operations for profit. According to a report to shareholders for the half year ended December 31, 1988, 58 percent of the company's profit before interest and tax was derived from its mainland operations.⁶⁷

Unlike Davies Bros. Ltd, ENT Ltd is predominantly owned by Tasmanians. The Rouse family now controls 22.07 percent or 6,885,570 shares in ENT Ltd.⁶⁸ As at February 1989 20.15 million shares (64.56 percent of the voting capital) were held by Tasmanians, with 13.85 million shares (44.40 percent) being held by people from Launceston.⁶⁹ Harris and Company Ltd, proprietor of the Advocate, holds a strategic 1.11 million shares (3.57 percent).⁷⁰ Davies Bros. Ltd, Herald and Weekly Times Ltd or News Ltd do not appear to hold an interest in ENT Ltd. ENT Ltd does not have an interest in either Davies Bros. Ltd, which is now owned by News Ltd, or the privately-owned Harris and Company Ltd.⁷¹

⁶⁷ENT Ltd Report to Shareholders for the half year ending December 31, 1988.

⁶⁸Letter, B.J. Clarke, Finance Director, ENT Ltd. February 28, 1989.

⁶⁹ibid.

⁷⁰ibid.

⁷¹ibid.

Thus ENT Ltd, like News Ltd, is a diversified company - one which does not rely solely on newspaper publishing or even operations within one region or state to maintain profitability. The companies are similiar in another respect too. Like members of the Davies family, early proprietors of the Examiner were active in their local communities. For example, James Aikenhead, founder and editor until 1869 when he transferred his interest to his son, was a founder of the Launceston Bank for Savings, active in the foundation of the Launceston Chamber of Commerce, a director of the Mt Bischoff Tin Mining Company and a director of the Launceston branch of the Commercial Bank.⁷² Aikenhead was elected to the Legislative Council seat of Tamar in 1870 and was Chairman of Committees from 1876 until his retirement in 1885.⁷³ Better known is a co-founder of the Examiner, the Rev. John West, who was a preacher, missionary, historian, federationist and leader of the anti transportation movement.⁷⁴ West, who later became the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, used the pages of the Examiner

⁷²ADB 1, 3.

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴ADB 2, 590.

push those issues in which he believed. In fact it was under Aikenhead and West that the Examiner established itself as the voice of the North. The precedent established by Aikenhead and West in becoming involved in community affairs has been adopted by later Examiner executives and editors. Henry Button, a nephew of the other co-founder, J. S. Waddell, and a one time proprietor of the Examiner, was an alderman of the Launceston City Council from 1879-88 and Mayor in 1885.⁷⁵

However Button refused to stand for Parliament, arguing that he did not want to compromise his paper's ability to criticize or comment on political matters.⁷⁶ This involvement in community affairs has continued to the present, with ENT Ltd's current Director (Print) and general manager of the Examiner, Mr Bryan McKendrick, being involved with both the Tamar Regional Master Planning Authority and the Launceston Chamber of Commerce. ENT Ltd chairman, Mr Edmund Rouse, has supported the company's community involvement by accepting the chairmanship of the Tasmanian State

⁷⁵Cyc. of Tas. II, 80.

⁷⁶ibid.

Institute of Technology and was responsible for the "Proud to be Tasmanian" campaign which was designed to unite Tasmanians and to evoke a feeling of pride in the State.

THE ADVOCATE

The youngest and smallest of Tasmania's three daily newspapers, the Advocate is recognised as one of Australia's best regional newspapers. It has won the prestigious national F. J. Meacham Award for journalistic and technical excellence among regional daily newspapers on five occasions since its inception in 1969 - in 1971, 1972, 1973, 1977 and 1983. Like its Northern and Southern counterparts, the Advocate has been predominantly a family operation, but unlike the Examiner and the Mercury it has remained privately owned.

The Advocate was established by Robert Harris and his two sons, Robert Day Harris and Charles James Harris.⁷⁷ Both Robert Harris Snr and his son Charles had gained considerable experience with newspapers before establishing the Advocate. Robert Harris Snr had worked for, managed or owned newspapers in Tasmania

⁷⁷ibid.

(Launceston), Victoria and New Zealand. In 1863 he established the Auction Mart Advertiser and Commercial Record, a free Launceston newspaper.⁷⁸ This was later re-named the Launceston Times and, when Harris purchased the Cornwall Chronicle in June 1869, was absorbed into that newspaper.⁷⁹ In February 1871 Harris and his then partner, Thomas Just, launched the weekly Tasmanian.⁸⁰ Harris pulled out of the partnership in 1872 and Just later sold both the Tasmanian and the Cornwall Chronicle to Aikenhead and Button, the then owners of the Examiner.⁸¹ His son, Charles, was equally experienced, having worked on newspapers in New Zealand, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania.⁸² The Advocate is still very much a family newspaper; five generations of the Harris family have been involved in its management during its first 99 years and four generations of the Cherry family have worked on its editorial staff, three as editor.

The Advocate began life as the Wellington Times

⁷⁸Transcript, Advocate corporate video, n.d.

⁷⁹ibid.

⁸⁰ibid.

⁸¹ibid.

⁸²Cyc. of Tas. II, 296-7.

and Mining and Agricultural Gazette and was first published on October 1, 1890 as a "modest bi-weekly sheet."⁸³ In 1892 publication was extended to three days a week and in 1894 Harris and Company was established to manage the newspaper.⁸⁴ The newspaper has undergone a number of name changes over time. In 1897 the paper changed its name to the Emu Bay Times and North-West and West Coast Advocate.⁸⁵ The success of this newspaper led the company to found Devonport's North-Western Advocate in 1898, "... at the invitation of a number of well-known Mersey residents."⁸⁶ In 1904 the two newspapers were amalgamated under the title of the North-Western Advocate and on December 2, 1918 the title was shortened further to its present the Advocate.⁸⁷

⁸³Advocate, 50th Anniversary edition, October 1, 1940, 2. Hereafter 50th Anniv.

⁸⁴Advocate, corporate video. However both the Advocate 50th Anniv. feature, 6-7 and Advocate 75th Anniv. feature, 4, suggest that it became a tri-weekly in 1895.

⁸⁵Advocate, corporate video.

⁸⁶50th Anniv., 2.

⁸⁷ibid., 6-8. There seems to be some debate on this point. Morris Miller says that the newspaper did not become known as the Advocate until Jan. 3, 1919. However the Advocate in its 75th Anniv. feature, 4, claims that it happened on Dec. 2, 1918.

With the publication of the Wellington Times on Wednesday, October 1, 1890, the North-West Coast had three newspapers. However by the 1920s, the Advocate was the only survivor. The others - the Coastal News (Ulverstone) and the North-West Post (Devonport) - had ceased to operate.⁸⁸ The company has continued to expand. In 1948 the Advocate changed from a broadsheet to tabloid format and in March 1968 launched the Weekender, a Saturday evening newspaper to compete with the Examiner-owned Saturday Evening Express.⁸⁹ The company has gained a reputation for being one of Australia's most progressive newspapers. For example, it claims to have had the, "... only wholly electrified plant in the Commonwealth," (1930),⁹⁰ to have been the first Tasmanian newspaper to introduce colour (1957),⁹¹ and the first Australian newspaper to use Web off-set printing (1968).⁹²

The Advocate is also regarded as a very

⁸⁸Advocate. 75th Anniv., 4.

⁸⁹Lockwood, 22.

⁹⁰50th Anniv., 6.

⁹¹Interview, Jim Harris.

⁹²Advocate, unpublished paper, May 31, 1984.

successful newspaper. In fact Business Review Weekly in a recent assessment of Australia's 200 richest families and individuals estimated the Harris family's minimum net worth at \$35 million.⁹³ It said that while the company's principal interests were newspaper publishing, it had also expanded its commercial printing operations and property development interests in recent years.⁹⁴ In 1988 Harris and Company acquired a controlling interest in Tasmania's only free weekly newspaper, the Hobart-based Southern Star.⁹⁵ With a circulation of 62,000, the Southern Star has captured a significant share of grocery advertising from the Mercury and is becoming a profitable concern after taking a number of years to establish itself in the market place.

Thus Tasmania's smallest daily seems to be keeping each of its larger counterparts on their toes - the Mercury through its involvement with the Southern Star and the Examiner through a strategic 3.57 percent

⁹³Business Review Weekly, May 12, 1989, 152.

⁹⁴ibid.

⁹⁵Interview, Henry Catchpole, Editor, Advocate, July 7, 1989.

shareholding in ENT Ltd. While it is not as large as the other two newspapers, either in circulation or market capitalisation terms, the Advocate is proud of its role as the voice of the North-West and West Coasts. Mr Lloyd Harris, a former general manager of Harris and Co., described it thus:

A regional newspaper has a special and privileged position in the community it serves and in return usually enjoys a kind of loyalty and support which I guess would be unknown to their metropolitan counterparts. I think the regional paper gains that loyalty and support by, in a totally committed way, seeking to champion the area it serves. It has to identify whatever causes the community sees as important to its welfare and stand up and be counted against those who would seek to disadvantage its region. A 'local' paper like the Advocate will enter a controversy in the interests of its region with all guns blazing.⁹⁶

Recognition of this responsibility has seen members of the Harris family, both personally and through their involvement with the Advocate, become actively involved in community and regional affairs. For example, Mr Charles Harris was actively involved in the establishment of the Table Cape Butter Factory Company, the first co-operative butter factory in the colony, and the Emu Bay Butter company.⁹⁷ He was also

⁹⁶Kerry Pink, "A lifetime of service," Advocate, December 27, 1986, 14.

⁹⁷Cyc. of Tas., II, 297.

an active Freemason and a Justice of the Peace.⁹⁸ His father was a shareholder in the Launceston and Western Railway, an important project for the North-West Coast and during his years in Melbourne, was made a life governor of the Alfred Hospital.⁹⁹ More recently, Mr Lloyd Harris was foundation chairman of the Association of North Western Chambers of Commerce, chairman of the North Western Committee on Post Secondary Education, foundation chairman of the North-West Council for Community Education and a member of the TEND Committee of Inquiry into Education in Tasmania.¹⁰⁰ Both Lloyd Harris and Edmund Rouse have served as chairman of the Regional Dailies Association.¹⁰¹

From this historical overview it can be seen that the three newspapers have, in some respects, similar backgrounds. All have been successful; the Examiner for 147 years, the Mercury for 135 years and the Advocate for 99 years. They continue to operate profitably and, until News Ltd's takeover of Davies

⁹⁸ibid.,

⁹⁹ibid., 296.

¹⁰⁰Kerry Pink, "A lifetime of service," Advocate, December 27, 1986, 14.

¹⁰¹ibid; Lockwood, 3.

Bros. Ltd, all had successfully warded off any competition, both from within and from outside their prime circulation areas. The early proprietors of the Examiner and the Advocate were not as colourful as John Davies, founder of the Mercury. But they all showed a strong interest in community affairs, both at a state and local level. The active involvement of the newspapers, their proprietors and editors in community affairs may well have contributed substantially to their on-going success over many years. While the Examiner and the Advocate are both regional dailies and the Mercury a metropolitan newspaper, in terms of growth it is easier to draw comparisons between the Northern and Southern papers. Admittedly they had more than 40 years start on the Advocate. But over the years they have shown a preparedness to venture into other, non-media areas - a step the Advocate has only recently begun to take. While its interests are still Tasmanian based, the Examiner's are becoming increasingly focussed off-shore, even though it is still predominantly owned by local interests. The Mercury, on the other hand, has no financial ties to the State. Today, decisions affecting the Mercury are made in boardrooms outside of Tasmania. Whether these

factors influence the three newspapers' treatment of regional disputes is yet to be seen.

NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION

To date, this paper has provided an overview of Tasmania's regional development. It has traced the development of three distinct regions and the emergence of three daily newspapers. Part two of this chapter looks at circulation and readership loyalty data to see if any links can be drawn between the three regions and the newspapers' areas of influence. It seeks to establish whether the regions as defined by newspaper circulation data correspond with the popularly recognised regions as they have developed over time.

Newspaper circulation has been described as one of the key tests of regional homogeneity.¹⁰² According to Robert Park, newspaper circulation data serves to:

... delimit with exceptional accuracy the limits of the local trade area, and to measure at the same time the extent and degree of dependence of the suburbs upon the metropolis and of the metropolis upon the larger region which it dominates.¹⁰³

¹⁰²R. E. Dickinson, City and Region: A Geographical Interpretation (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1964), 6.

¹⁰³Robert E. Park, "Urbanization as Measured by Newspaper Circulation," American Journal of Sociology 35, no. 1 (July 1929): 62.

Other researchers have concurred with Park's findings. John Kinneman even suggested that circulation zones were coterminous not only with trade areas, but also with the areas from which people were drawn for hospital care.¹⁰⁴ Certainly newspaper circulation provides one criterion by which the influence of an urban centre can be determined.¹⁰⁵ In Tasmania's case the three newspapers have clearly defined areas of influence which have changed little over time, despite attempts from one or another to increase their share of the market. In fact, even as early as the 1930s and 1940s, newspaper circulation data had been used to help delineate the regions.¹⁰⁶

The regional breakdown of Tasmanian newspaper circulation is confirmed by research conducted by independent analysts and the newspapers themselves between 1985 and 1989. A 1986 study conducted by the

¹⁰⁴John A. Kinneman, "Newspaper circulation from small metropolitan centres," American Sociological Review 11, no. 2 (April 1946): 151.

¹⁰⁵K. J. Gregory and R. F. Williams, "Physical Geography from the Newspaper," Geography 66 (1981): 42.

¹⁰⁶Lloyd L. Robson, A Short History of Tasmania (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 144.

Roy Morgan Research Centre shows that the three newspapers had achieved virtual market saturation in their respective circulation areas. It also found that they sold very few newspapers outside of these regions.¹⁰⁷ The survey was undertaken between April 1986 and March 1987 and involved 1438 people aged 14 and above.¹⁰⁸ This included 638 people in the South, 466 in the North and 334 in the North-West.¹⁰⁹ According to the survey, on average, 75.3 percent of people aged 14 and above within the Hobart and Southern Statistical Divisions read the Mercury newspaper between Monday and Friday and 85.2 percent on Saturday.¹¹⁰ However only 3.7 percent in the Northern Statistical Division and 5.6 percent in the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division read the Mercury from Monday to Friday and 4.5 percent and 4.7 percent respectively on a Saturday.¹¹¹ The study found that 89.2 percent of people in the Northern Statistical Division read the

¹⁰⁷Roy Morgan Research Centre. Australia-wide Survey of Readership of Daily and Sunday Newspapers, Tasmania, April 1986 - March 1987, XV.

¹⁰⁸ibid.

¹⁰⁹ibid., 1.

¹¹⁰ibid.

¹¹¹ibid., 2.

Examiner and 80.1 percent of people in the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division read the Advocate.¹¹² It found further that 92.8 percent of people in the Northern Statistical Division read the Saturday edition of the Examiner and 82.8 percent of people in the Mersey-Lyell region read the Saturday Advocate.¹¹³

According to the survey results, the Launceston-based Examiner newspaper was the only Tasmanian daily which successfully increased its circulation out of area. This was along the North-West Coast where it was read by 17.4 percent of respondents, although mainly as a second newspaper.¹¹⁴ This success was not repeated within the South where the Examiner's market penetration was 2.3 percent, less than such interstate newspapers as the Australian (5.8 percent) and the Melbourne Sun (3 percent).¹¹⁵ The report also suggested that the Advocate had very little influence or support outside of the Mersey-Lyell Region. Its readership was only 1 percent in the Northern Statistical Division and 0.2 percent in the South.¹¹⁶

¹¹²ibid., 1.

¹¹³ibid., 2.

¹¹⁴ibid., 1.

¹¹⁵ibid.

¹¹⁶ibid.

These results are confirmed by private polling undertaken by the newspapers. A 1987 telephone market research poll commissioned by the Mercury in the Hobart Statistical Division (not the Greater Southern Region) of 600 people aged 18 and above showed that on average 74 percent read a weekday issue of the Mercury and 85 percent on a Saturday.¹¹⁷ The research showed that 71 percent read between four and six issues of the Mercury each week and 60 percent read every issue (Monday to Saturday).¹¹⁸ It also found that 29 percent of people in Hobart read three or fewer issues of the Mercury in the week of the survey, showing a large potential market within the region.¹¹⁹

A survey conducted by the Examiner within the Launceston Statistical Subdivision and surrounding towns also confirmed the argument that, based on circulation data, the newspapers are regional in influence.¹²⁰ The survey was based on the results of 350 face to face interviews conducted on

¹¹⁷Newspoll, Mercury Readership Study, June 1987, 1, 4.

¹¹⁸ibid., 12.

¹¹⁹ibid.

¹²⁰Media Management Services Pty Ltd, Examiner Readership Report, November to December 1986, 4.

consecutive weekends between November 8 and November 23, 1986.¹²¹ It found that 74 percent of Launceston residents read the Examiner each day from Monday to Saturday and that 98 percent read at least one issue per week.¹²² The average readership (Monday to Saturday) was 84 percent.¹²³ Average readership figures were derived by combining the number of every day readers with infrequent readers.¹²⁴ The survey found that the Examiner reached 78 percent of males and 70 percent of females aged 17 and above.¹²⁵

In May 1989 the Examiner commissioned a further readership study, this time undertaken by Quadrant Research Services Pty Ltd, of New South Wales. The survey covered the newspaper's "primary coverage area", defined in the introduction as the Northern Statistical Division.¹²⁶ The survey was based on randomly selected telephone numbers, with respondents in each household selected according to the "most recent birthday" method for people aged 14 and over.¹²⁷ In total, 314 people

¹²¹ibid., 2.

¹²²ibid., 4.

¹²³ibid.

¹²⁴ibid.

¹²⁵ibid.

¹²⁶Quadrant Research Services Pty Ltd, Newspaper Readership Study, Northern Tasmania (May 1989). Hereafter known as Quadrant (Northern) study.

¹²⁷ibid.

were interviewed.¹²⁸

The study found that an estimated 89,100 people (91 percent of people aged 14 and over in the Examiner's primary coverage area at June 30, 1987) read one or more week day issues of the Examiner.¹²⁹ It also found that an average weekday issue of the Examiner is read by an estimated 79,900 people (82 percent) and that one or more of the six issues Monday to Saturday are read by an estimated 92,500 people (95 percent).¹³⁰

The Quadrant (Northern) study confirms earlier data showing that the Examiner faces very little competition from the other newspapers, local or interstate, in its primary coverage area. For example, whereas an average weekday issue of the Examiner is read by an estimated 79,900 people (82 percent of the potential audience), only 5,500 (6 percent) would read the Mercury, and 1400 (1 percent) the Advocate.¹³¹ The ratio between the newspapers is even greater on a Saturday, when the Mercury's readership in the Northern

¹²⁸ibid.

¹²⁹ibid., 2.

¹³⁰ibid., 1, 3.

¹³¹ibid., 11.

Statistical Division falls to 4,800 (5 percent).¹³² The Advocate, however, improves its readership to 3,800 (4 percent).¹³³ The Mercury and the Advocate have in fact made less of an impression in the Examiner's primary coverage area than the mainland newspapers - the Melbourne Sun, the Melbourne Age, the Melbourne Herald, the Australian and the Australian Financial Review. Collectively, on the basis of average Monday to Friday figures, the interstate newspapers are read by 10,800 people (12 percent), compared with the Mercury and the Advocate which combined only reach 6,900 people (7 percent).¹³⁴ On Saturdays the Mercury and the Advocate are read by 8,600 people (9 percent), whereas the interstate newspapers - the Melbourne Sun, Melbourne Age, and Weekend Australia are read by 13,100 people (14 percent).¹³⁵ In fact the Weekend Australian, which is read by 9,200 people (9 percent) reaches more Saturday readers in the Northern Statistical Division than do the Mercury and the Advocate together.¹³⁶

¹³²ibid., 30.

¹³³ibid.

¹³⁴ibid., 11.

¹³⁵ibid., 30.

¹³⁶ibid

The Examiner's ascendancy in the Northern Statistical Division is also evident in Sunday newspaper readership data. The Quadrant (Northern) survey shows that the Sunday Examiner is read by 63,800 people (65 percent), whereas the Sunday Tasmanian, the State's only other Sunday newspaper, is read by only 6,300 (6 percent).¹³⁷ In fact the Sunday Tasmanian is read by only 300 people more than the interstate Sunday newspapers - the Sunday Press (2,700), the Sunday Observer (1,300), the Sunday Telegraph (1,000), and the Sun-Herald (1,000).¹³⁸

Research commissioned by the Advocate shows that it is read by 83 percent of readers aged 14 and above in the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division.¹³⁹ It found that the Advocate reached 72.7 percent of homes along the North-West and West Coasts and was read by 110,660 people on circulation of 26,136.¹⁴⁰ Advocate research has identified "prime circulation" and "total market" areas. The prime circulation area embraces the municipalities of Kentish, Latrobe, Devonport, Ulverstone, Penguin, Burnie, Wynyard and Circular Head

¹³⁷ibid., 30-31.

¹³⁸ibid., 31.

¹³⁹McNair Anderson Survey, Advocate, 1985.

¹⁴⁰ibid.

in the North-West and Waratah, Zeehan (including Rosebery), Queenstown and Strahan in the West - an area which closely equates with that of the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division.¹⁴¹

Like the Examiner, the Advocate commissioned a readership study from Quadrant Research Services in May 1989. The study involved interviews with 324 people aged 14 and over in the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division, identified in the report as being the Advocate's primary coverage area.¹⁴² The survey found that an average weekday issue of the Advocate was read by 68,700 people (81 percent of people aged 14 and over in the Mersey-Lyell Region on June 30, 1987).¹⁴³ The survey found that one or more of the six issues Monday to Saturday are read by an estimated 80,200 people (95 percent) and that one or more weekday issues of the Advocate are read by 77,500 (92 percent) people.¹⁴⁴

The survey confirmed earlier research, particularly that undertaken by the Examiner, which

¹⁴¹ibid.

¹⁴²Quadrant Research Services Pty Ltd, Newspaper Readership Survey, North-West Tasmania, May, 1989. Hereafter the Quadrant (North-West) survey.

¹⁴³ibid., 1.

¹⁴⁴ibid., 2.

showed that the Advocate was entrenched in the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Region. Not even the Examiner, which was read by an average 12,900 people (15 percent) Monday to Friday and 16,600 people (20 percent) on Saturday, posed any real threat to the Advocate's strong market position.¹⁴⁵ The interstate newspapers - the Melbourne Sun (4,900), the Melbourne Age (600), the Australian (3,000) and the Australian Financial Review (900) made little impression from Monday to Friday, reaching only 12 percent of readers.¹⁴⁶ However they made a greater impact on Saturday, when they were read by 15,300 people (18 percent).¹⁴⁷ The greatest impression was by the Weekend Australian, which was read by 9,500 people (11 percent), 7,100 less than the Examiner, but substantially more than the Mercury which, with readership of 5,100 on Saturday and 4,500 on average from Monday to Friday, does not appear to be considered an alternative to the Advocate in the minds of the Mersey-Lyell readers.¹⁴⁸

The only day on which the Mercury seems to be making any impression along the North-West Coast is on

¹⁴⁵ibid., 2, 5, 30.

¹⁴⁶ibid., 14.

¹⁴⁷ibid., 30.

¹⁴⁸ibid., 14, 30.

Sunday with its separate publication the Sunday Tasmanian, but this does not appear to be at the expense of the Advocate which does not publish a Sunday newspaper. The most popular Sunday newspaper in the Mersey-Lyell region is the Sunday Examiner, which is read by 34,400 people (41 percent) in the Advocate's primary coverage area.¹⁴⁹ The Sunday Tasmanian is read by 11,700 people (14 percent) and the interstate newspapers - the Sunday Press (2,400), the Sunday Telegraph (1,800) and the Sun-Herald (1,600) - by 5,800 people (7 percent).¹⁵⁰ Despite not having a Sunday newspaper, the Advocate still reaches 37,000 people (44 percent) with its Saturday evening newspaper, the Weekender.¹⁵¹

While each of the newspapers has its prime circulation areas, there are areas in which they overlap and vie for circulation ascendancy. For example, while the Advocate claims to represent the North-West and West Coasts, the Mercury has established a strong presence in southern areas of the West Coast, particularly around Queenstown and Strahan. The Mercury maintains an office at Queenstown and in

¹⁴⁹ibid., 30.

¹⁵⁰ibid., 31.

¹⁵¹ibid.

the past has also had an office at Zeehan and been represented in other West Coast mining centres.¹⁵² Its Queenstown-based journalist provides West Coast copy for the Mercury and also produces the Westerner, a small paper for local consumption. At times the Mercury has maintained a large staff in Launceston. In line with its aspirations of being a "statewide" newspaper, the Mercury has recently appointed a journalist in both Burnie and Devonport and additional journalists to its Launceston bureau. Possibly the greatest competition is between the Examiner and the Advocate. The aggressor has been the Examiner which established a substantial bureau at Devonport and has maintained a smaller office at Burnie since 1889.¹⁵³ The Advocate, in return, has one journalist and a number of non-editorial staff in Launceston.

The Examiner's push into so-called Advocate home territory is illustrated by the fact that each day it produces a special North-West edition. The North-West edition differs from the Launceston edition in that the front and back pages are replated with coastal news. Each Tuesday an additional page is replated with

¹⁵²Cyc. of Tas. I, 293.

¹⁵³Examiner, Jubilee edition, 24.

North-West Coast news and every Thursday a four or eight page North-West Extra is published.

The Advocate has responded to the perceived Examiner threat along the North-West Coast in a number of ways. In the late 1960s, when the Examiner made a concerted bid for a share of the North-West market, the Advocate produced a cartoon character which it named 'Billy Coaster' to rally community support in the face of a feared Examiner takeover.¹⁵⁴ It was a successful ploy: one which shored up the Advocate's pre-eminent position along the North-West Coast. Today, the Advocate maintains a large bureau at Devonport, in part to ward off the Examiner, but also to appease local interests. This concession dates back to the 1890s when the company produced the two separate newspapers - the Wellington Times at Burnie and the North-Western Advocate at Devonport.

Thus the Advocate has to contend with parochial rivalries between the cities of Devonport and Burnie, as well as warding off challenges from the Examiner along the North-West Coast and the Mercury in the southern reaches of the West Coast. To retain its

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Jim Harris, July 7, 1989.

strong base in Devonport, and to keep the Examiner at bay, the Advocate produces an eight to twelve page Devonport section which it calls Devonport City News, every Thursday, the same day the Examiner produces its North-West Extra. The Devonport City News is read by 22,400 people (27 percent of people throughout the primary coverage area).¹⁵⁵

This situation is not, however, unique to the Advocate. Both the Mercury and the Examiner produce inserts to cater for specific areas within their regions. For example, the Examiner produces the Launceston Week and a number of other inserts which appear on a rotational basis, including the Tamar Valley, Northern Midlands, Fingal Valley and Deloraine sections. Three of these inserts - Northern Midlands, Fingal Valley and Deloraine - cater for readers in the outer reaches of the Examiner's prime circulation area. The Deloraine section is produced for people in the area where the Examiner and the Advocate vie for readers and the Northern Midlands and the Fingal Valley sections for people in the southern reaches of Examiner territory. The Mercury produces not only the Westerner, but also the Community Express, an insert

¹⁵⁵Quadrant (North-West) survey.

which appears every Tuesday. The Mercury introduced the concept of a newspaper within a newspaper in 1966 when it published Northside News to cater for readers and advertisers specifically in the City of Glenorchy. This service was expanded to include Southside News and Eastside News. The three inserts were eventually combined to form a single regional weekly, the Suburban, which appeared every Thursday. In October 1985 the Suburban section was expanded and renamed the Community Express.¹⁵⁰ At one time it even produced a small green insert for the Mercury called the Northern Scene, which was aimed specifically at Launceston readers.

READER LOYALTY

One of the reasons newspapers produce these inserts is to maintain reader loyalty. A great deal of the market research undertaken by the three newspapers in recent years has concentrated on reader preferences. All studies have asked readers and non-readers alike to indicate what topics interest them, to state whether particular newspapers cover those subjects adequately and, finally, whether they can relate to the newspaper

¹⁵⁰DBL, 91st Report, 1.

in question. According to the research, all seem to be catering for their readers.

All studies conclude that the over-riding reason for newspaper readership is to stay abreast of the news - local, national and international. This is as opposed to other sections within the newspaper, including sport, crosswords, births, deaths and marriages, comics, cartoons, the television guide and advertisements. The Quadrant (Northern) study found that 94 percent of readers were either very or somewhat interested in national news, 92 percent in local district news, 88 percent in overseas news and 71 percent in local council news.¹⁵⁷ The Quadrant (North-West) study produced similar results. It found that 95 percent of readers were either very interested or somewhat interested in Australian news, 92 percent in news about the local district, 86 percent in overseas news and 74 percent in local council news.¹⁵⁸ In both surveys readers rated news as being their major interest.

These conclusions confirm the findings of the

¹⁵⁷ Quadrant (Northern) survey, table 3, 5-6

¹⁵⁸ Quadrant (North-West) survey, table 3, 4-6.

earlier Newspoll (Mercury) and Media Management Services (Examiner) surveys on why people read newspapers. Almost nine out of ten (88 percent) of Examiner readers did so for the news.¹⁵⁹ This varied between 86 percent (on Wednesday) and 89 percent (on Monday and Tuesday).¹⁶⁰ Other reasons given for reading the newspaper were births (59 percent), sport (48 percent) and habit (37 percent).¹⁶¹ The Newspoll survey found that 90 percent of Mercury readers read the paper to keep up-to-date with Tasmanian news.¹⁶² Nearly seven out of ten (67 percent) said that this was a major influence on their decision to read the newspaper and 23 percent said it was a minor influence.¹⁶³ Nine out of ten Mercury readers said that their decision was also influenced by a wish to keep up-to-date with national news [65 percent a major influence and 25 percent minor] and 83 percent [50 percent a major influence and 33 percent a minor influence] for international news.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹Media Management Services Report, 8-13.

¹⁶⁰ibid. ¹⁶¹ibid., 9

¹⁶²Newspoll Survey, 8.

¹⁶³ibid. ¹⁶⁴ibid.

While citing a desire to keep up with the news as a major reason for newspaper readership, many respondents were less than laudatory when asked whether the newspaper was doing a good job or not. For example, the Newspan survey asked readers whether they thought the Mercury had improved or not over the preceding 12 months. Only 39 percent of regular readers (4-6 issues per week) and 32 percent of casual readers (0-3 issues per week) said that it had improved and 15 percent of regular and 14 percent of casual readers said that it had deteriorated.¹⁶⁵ Yet generally it was well accepted by readers. They agreed that it serves the local community (87 percent), covers all local Tasmanian news (75 percent), appeals to all kinds of people (74 percent) and "is my kind of paper" (60 percent).¹⁶⁶ These findings prompted the report to comment: "the Mercury has a very strong and positive image amongst people in Hobart. Of particular relevance is its strong local association."¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, only 54 percent thought it authoritative, 52 percent accurate and 42 percent bright and lively, with 34 percent labelling it staid and boring and 31

¹⁶⁵ibid., 21.

¹⁶⁶ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁷ibid., 6.

percent as too sensationalist.¹⁶⁸

The Examiner's research produced similar findings. Almost nine out of ten readers (87 percent) said that the Examiner provided good coverage of local news (18 percent strongly agreed and 69 percent agreed).¹⁶⁹ However only 63 percent [8 percent strongly agreed and 55 percent agreed] that it provided good coverage of national news and 50 percent [5 percent, 45 percent] that it provided good coverage of world news.¹⁷⁰ Like the Mercury, the Examiner had its detractors, with 20 percent claiming it was too sensational, 34 percent that it lacked depth and 38 percent that it was boring.¹⁷¹ On the other hand, the Examiner was perceived as being a good balanced newspaper (79 percent), bright (52 percent) and "my newspaper" (74 percent).¹⁷² The Quadrant (Northern) survey asked respondents to state whether they believed the Examiner did an excellent, good, fair or poor job in covering different topics, irrespective of how often

¹⁶⁸ibid., 32.

¹⁶⁹Media Management Survey, 53.

¹⁷⁰ibid., 53-55.

¹⁷¹ibid., 56-57, 61.

¹⁷²ibid., 58-59, 62.

or whether they read the newspaper or not. Only 7 percent said that its coverage of local district news was excellent, good (45 percent) or fair (29 percent).¹⁷³ Forty seven percent rated its coverage of overseas news as excellent or good [3 percent excellent, 44 percent good], with an additional 36 percent saying it was fair.¹⁷⁴ The Examiner's Australian news coverage was rated excellent or good by 63 percent [8 percent excellent, 55 percent good] and fair by a further 30 percent.¹⁷⁵ The Examiner's news coverage was thought to be timely and up-to-date by 74 percent of respondents, mostly bright and interesting (60 percent), a bit boring (38 percent), stale, with out-of-date news (23 percent) and "your newspaper" irrespective of whether you read it regularly or not (88 percent).¹⁷⁶

According to the Quadrant (North-West) report, 65 percent of people thought that the Advocate did either an excellent or good job in reporting local

¹⁷³Quadrant (Northern) Study, table 88, 105.

¹⁷⁴ibid., table 83, 100.

¹⁷⁵ibid., table 84, 101.

¹⁷⁶ibid., table 6, 12; table 7, 13.

district news, [16 percent excellent, and 49 percent good], with a further 24 percent saying its coverage was fair.¹⁷⁷ Sixty percent said that its coverage of Australian news was excellent or good, with 32 percent describing it as fair and 45 percent saying that it did an excellent or good job covering international news, with 39 percent describing it as fair.¹⁷⁸

The Advocate was strongly supported within the Mersey-Lyell region, with 76 percent of people describing its news coverage as timely and up-to-date, 65 percent as being bright and interesting and 86 percent as "your" newspaper.¹⁷⁹ It was considered stale and out-of-date by 23 percent, and a bit boring by 34 percent.¹⁸⁰

This comparison shows that there is a strong association between the newspapers and readers in their respective primary circulation areas. This is despite the fact that there is some criticism of the newspapers and their coverage of issues. Reader loyalty has only

¹⁷⁷Quadrant (North-West) survey, table 88, 107.

¹⁷⁸ibid., tables 83-83, 103-104.

¹⁷⁹ibid., table 6, p. 11; table 7, 12; table 9, 14.

¹⁸⁰ibid.

been seriously tested on three occasions - by the Examiner in the late 1960s and again in the early 1980s and by the Mercury in mid 1989.

Both Examiner forays were aimed at increasing circulation along the North-West Coast; it has never engaged in a head-on confrontation with the Mercury for circulation ascendancy in the South. The first North-West push involved the Saturday Evening Express, the forerunner to the Sunday Examiner. Advocate executives concede that the success of the Saturday Evening Express forced them to produce the Weekender and resulted in the 'Billy Coaster' campaign.¹⁸¹ The latter was designed to encourage people to support the Advocate and through the newspaper the on-going prosperity of the North-West region. 'Billy Coaster' and his sister 'Betty' appeared throughout the newspaper; they were produced as water release transfers and were the subject of colouring competitions sponsored by the Advocate. The 'Billy Coaster' logo was accompanied by the caption "Keep the North-West prosperous; Grow with the North-West; Go! with the Advocate." While this campaign was successful, the Saturday Evening Express promotion only

¹⁸¹ Interview, Jim Harris.

served to whet the Examiner's appetite. In the early 1980s the Examiner again tested Advocate reader loyalty, but on this occasion through market research. However the study showed that North-West Coast readers still regarded the Advocate as their 'local' newspaper.¹⁸² It found that the Advocate commanded 85 percent of the market, including 97 percent of first buys.¹⁸³ Furthermore, that the Examiner had only 13 percent of the market, with just 3 percent of first newspaper purchases.¹⁸⁴ The loyalty of Advocate readers was confirmed by the fact that 81 percent of respondents (255) had taken it for over five years.¹⁸⁵ However the fact that many people purchased the Examiner primarily to gain "an alternative point of view on local news" may suggest some dissatisfaction with the Advocate's coverage of this important issue.¹⁸⁶

During 1989 the Murdoch-owned Mercury sought to establish itself as a truly statewide newspaper and in so doing once again tested the traditional regional

¹⁸² Examiner, 1985 survey, author unknown, 5.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 6.

readers - this time within both the Examiner's and Advocate's prime circulation areas. Using its relatively new Sunday Tasmanian as the vehicle, the Mercury advertised heavily - on radio, on television, via the Sunday Tasmanian and by letter dropping homes in the North and along the North-West Coast. It also gave away thousands of copies of the Sunday Tasmanian in an attempt to persuade people to change their readership loyalties.

While it is too early to assess the success or failure of the Mercury's ploy, it has provoked differing responses from the Examiner and the Advocate. The Examiner and its parent company, ENT Ltd, saw it as a direct threat to its own Sunday Examiner and reacted through a concerted advertising campaign which promoted both the newspaper and also ENT's largesse within the community. Both the Examiner and the Mercury conducted their campaigns on a statewide basis. The Examiner even printed a leaflet which was inserted within the Sunday Examiner, the text of which said:

Be aware. A Sunday newspaper subscription offer currently being promoted door to door is not for the Sunday Examiner. There should be no confusion. The Sunday Examiner is your convenient-sized local Sunday newspaper. The subscription offer is for a

Southern newspaper published in Hobart for a multi-national company."¹⁸⁷

The Examiner's message was clear and in some respects reminiscent of the Advocate's 'Billy Coaster' response to its own designs along the North-West Coast. It was seeking to evoke the regional loyalties upon which it and the other newspapers had relied for survival in what is recognised as a very small newspaper market in national terms. It had also played upon the fact that the Mercury was no longer locally-owned and that the Sunday Tasmanian as a broadsheet was a more cumbersome newspaper than the tabloid Sunday Examiner. The fact that the Mercury and the Sunday Tasmanian were owned by a multi-national became a recurring theme in subsequent Examiner advertising. It produced a number of double page, full page and part page advertisements proclaiming "Why we're on top of Tasmania".¹⁸⁸ The advertisements featured a map of Tasmania from the 42nd parallel north, shaded with photographs of Examiner employees and accompanied with the following text:

Meet just some of our staff who live and work in Northern and North-Western Tasmania to bring you

¹⁸⁷Examiner, pamphlet, April 15, 1989.

¹⁸⁸Examiner, May 7, 1989, 36-37.

... the Examiner and Sunday Examiner. The Examiner has been an important part of Northern and North-West Tasmania for 147 years. No newspaper has fought for so long or as strenuously to ensure that the regions outside the capital city are given a fair go: that goes back to its successful campaign to end the transportation of convicts to Van Diemen's Land. The Examiner of 1989 employs a dedicated professional staff of some 250 people with offices in Launceston, Devonport and Burnie. They include journalists and photographers, office typists and advertising salespeople, plus young people in every city, town and hamlet who deliver your copies of the Examiner and Sunday Examiner. It is their knowledge and respect for this region that ensures that Northern and North-West Tasmanian issues are always put first. Owned, operated and controlled by Tasmanians the Sunday Examiner, the Tasmanian newspaper."¹⁸⁹

It is significant that the Examiner omitted to mention its Hobart office when outlining where it was represented throughout the State. The advertisement gives the distinct impression - from the map and photographs down to the wording of the text - that the newspaper is clearly regional in outlook. But in this case it is seeking to portray the division as being north-south, rather than the traditional three way split in which the North and North-West retain their separate identities. This decision was obviously to reflect the Sunday Examiner's circulation ascendancy along the North-West Coast, as well as throughout traditional Examiner territory. Speaking on ABC's 7.30

¹⁸⁹ ibid.

Report, Michael Courtney, editor of the Examiner, said history had shown that the Mercury had no interest in the Northern region and he described Rupert Murdoch and News Ltd as: "...the interlopers from Hobart via New York and Sydney".¹⁹⁰

The Advocate, which does not have a Sunday newspaper, did not feel threatened. The then general manager, Mr Jim Harris, said that the Mercury's push would more likely affect Sunday Examiner circulation along the North-West Coast, without really hurting or competing with the Advocate's Saturday evening newspaper, the Weekender.¹⁹¹

The relationships between the newspapers in many respects mirror the relationships between the regions they serve. There are very strong feelings of competition between them and yet at times they have been known to work together, even to provide assistance in times of need. For example, the Advocate was actually printed by the Examiner for three weeks in 1920 after fire destroyed the interior of the Advocate building, badly damaging all linotype, plant and

¹⁹⁰ Transcript, ABC 7.30 Report, April 21, 1989.

¹⁹¹ Interview, Jim Harris.

printing equipment.¹⁹² They have also engaged in copy-swapping arrangements - the Advocate and the Mercury in an exchange of Southern and North-Western news and the Examiner and the Mercury in a swap of some Northern and Southern news. It is interesting to note that the existing copy-swapping arrangement between the Examiner and the Mercury has not been affected by the Sunday newspaper circulation war. The Examiner and the Advocate also exchanged copy, but that ceased in the late 1960s when the latter began to make in-roads along the North-West Coast. A similar arrangement between the Advocate and the Mercury was summarily terminated by the latter in the early 1980s when Davies Bros. Ltd purchased an interest in the Tasmanian Mail, a free statewide weekly newspaper established and operated by the Examiner.¹⁹³ The Examiner and the Mercury continued to operate the Tasmanian Mail jointly until a down-turn in advertising revenue prompted them to cease publication in 1986.

¹⁹² 50th Anniv., 6-7.

¹⁹³ Interview, Jim Harris.

THE NEWSPAPERS AND PAROCHIALISM

Despite their willingness to swap copy and to enter into other commercial agreements, relations between the newspapers are generally reserved. This is due to a number of factors, including the fear of a take-over or a major push by one into another's prime circulation area. Another very important reason is the relationship which has developed over a long period of time between the newspapers and their respective regions. The newspapers work hard to preserve these relationships. In fact they see themselves as an integral part, in many instances the mouthpiece for the region. They are not shy in proclaiming these allegiances. For example the Advocate (as the Wellington Times), proclaimed in its first editorial:

No large section of people can long afford to be without a newspaper. It is one thing above all others by which to make known the various needs of the community, and without its aid no district has much chance of securing its various claims ... Unless the natural resources and fertile nature of the soil, the healthfulness of the climate and its wonderful mineral deposits are properly set forth and advocated, the portion of the North-West Coast we have decided to represent would be at a disadvantage as compared with others possessing the much need advocate and, beyond comparison, inferior in all other respects.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴Wellington Times, October 1, 1890.

The editorial was written well before the Advocate had chosen to represent the broader region encompassing the North-West and West Coasts. However it showed from the outset that it believed newspapers had a responsibility to the community they served.

The Examiner has been equally forthright in its editorial columns. Its parochialism, expressed through its willingness to stand up for the Northern Region, is clearly documented in two articles by the current editor, Mr Michael Courtney. The first was in the form of "A letter from the Editor" to mark the Examiner's 136th birthday and the second on its 140th birthday. In the letter, Courtney said in part:

... because it is not headquartered in the capital city it has continued to be the champion of those Tasmanians (more than 50 percent of the population) who live outside Hobart. This has always given the Examiner a special and crucial role in Tasmania where the even dispersal of the population is so different to the mainland states dominated by their capital cities. The Examiner has remained sensitive to the special needs of the regions it serves. In recent years it has provided regular special editions for the North-West Coast, Launceston, the Tamar Valley, the Northern Midlands, Fingal Valley and Deloraine. There are some critics of newspapers who see this level of response to community needs as too parochial. It isn't of course; it is no more than supplying a comprehensive service. Because it is a Northern Tasmanian newspaper largely employing and serving Northern Tasmania. its emphasis in arguments and debates with governments (federal, state and local)

and statutory bodies has been Northern Tasmanian. Because the southern half of the State is so heavily weighted with bureaucratic power the northern half has always needed to be alert and vocal to ensure its rights are recognised. The Examiner believes it has been able to speak from strength because of the support given it by a caring and lively readership.¹⁹⁵

This theme was pursued in the 140th birthday article in which Courtney said:

From the day of its birth 140 years ago, the Examiner has been a Tasmanian paper, but always it has played a special role - the Voice and Watchdog of the northern half of the State. It has never apologised for playing the role with vigor and passion. its concern over this issue is one of the reasons for its vigor, its rigorous questioning of officials and bureaucrats at local, state and federal level and politicians of all parties. The Examiner was a vigorous newspaper, willing to champion its region and causes from its inception.¹⁹⁶

Unlike the Examiner and the Advocate, the Mercury has sought to play down parochial differences between the regions. In recent editorials it has called for an end to parochialism. In an editorial headlined "Damn our divisions: together we stand", the Sunday Tasmanian said:

Parochialism as too often practised in Tasmania is not fun: it is more in the nature of black farce. It is destructive, expensive and irrelevant. It has

¹⁹⁵Examiner, March 11, 1978, 6.

¹⁹⁶Examiner, March 12, 1982, 6.

has been ruthlessly used to create divisions in the community. It has led to the manifestly wasteful duplication of services such as hospitals, education institutes and airports. It has led to the worst form of political pork barrelling. It has been used by the unscrupulous to feather their own nests. It is now time for it to be laid to rest. Tasmanians are Tasmanians. They should try to tell those who try to manipulate them in the name of regional superiority that they are sick of being treated as though they are idiots. Tasmanians must stand together; only then will they fully develop the potential of this great State.¹⁹⁷

One could be excused for viewing this editorial with more than a modicum of cynicism, given the fact that it appeared in the newspaper at a time when the Mercury was trying to establish the Sunday Tasmanian statewide. However it does appear to pick up on a theme pursued by the Mercury over time. Not only has the Mercury spoken out against parochialism in its editorials, and its editors used public forums to denounce parochialism, it has also given other critics considerable coverage. For example, in its 70th anniversary supplement, the Mercury ran a message from the then Mayor of Launceston, headed "An appeal for unity," which ran:

There is one direction in which I think the press of both Hobart and Launceston may do good work for Tasmania, and that is by endeavouring, as far as

¹⁹⁷Sunday Tasmanian, July 23, 1989, 8.

possible, to discourage the absurd North versus South feeling which, unfortunately, is too much in evidence. If the State is to progress, as we wish it to, the residents of all parts of the island must pull together, remembering the old adage that in unity is strength.¹⁹⁸

REGIONALISM AND MASTHEADS

The Advocate's regional affiliations are evident in the wording of its masthead and stationery. Below the title on the masthead is the phrase "serving North Western and Western Tasmania". This region is highlighted on a map of Tasmania featured on the masthead. Advocate executives claim the newspaper is unashamedly parochial. The former general manager, Mr Jim Harris, said that he quite often cited as the Advocate's motto, the saying: "Parochial and proud of it".¹⁹⁹ The editor, Mr Henry Catchpole, said:

It is a voice of the North-West and West Coasts. It is parochial and I make no apology for that because I believe that's what a regional newspaper has to be. It is a community newspaper. Its aim is to be as involved in the community as is humanly possible. That's the reason for our influence, if you like, in trying to get the North-West Coast to act as a region rather than as a collection of small communities. That has been our policy and will continue to be our policy.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸Mercury, 70th Anniversary feature.

¹⁹⁹Interview, Jim Harris.

²⁰⁰Interview, Henry Catchpole.

Neither the Examiner nor the Mercury give any indication of their regional affiliations, if any, in the wording of their respective mastheads. To the contrary, in fact, for both feature a monotone map of Tasmania which does not identify the State's three regions. Furthermore, they strive to give the impression of being statewide newspapers, the Mercury claiming to be "Tasmania's Newspaper", and the Examiner promoting itself as "First in Tasmania".

This has not always been the case. When the newspapers were established they identified closely with particular areas and often included this association in the name. For example, the Mercury was first published in 1854 as the Hobarton Mercury. It was not until after Davies' successful series of takeovers in the late 1850s and early 1860s that the name was changed to the Mercury and any reference to Hobart dropped from the masthead and title. Likewise with the Examiner and the Advocate. From its first edition on March 12, 1842 until the end of December 1899, the Examiner was known as the Launceston Examiner. It was not until January 1, 1900 that 'Launceston' was dropped from the title.²⁰¹ The

²⁰¹Morris Miller, "Hist. Summary", pt 2, 37.

Advocate has progressively reinforced its regional attachment through a number of name changes. While its first title, the Wellington Times and Mining and Agricultural Gazette highlighted the region's principal industries, use of the word 'Wellington' did not evoke the same feelings of attachment as did 'Launceston' for the Examiner or 'Hobarton' for the Mercury. A change of name to the Emu Bay Times and North-Western Advocate, reinforced its regional association. In fact the change of name was explained in the paper of the day:

To outsiders unacquainted with our provincial and political divisions it was mystifying and even misleading. It [the title] either failed to convey any sense of locality whatever, or it was associated with Wellington, the capital of New Zealand.²⁰²

By the time the name was further shortened in 1919 to the Advocate, the association between the newspaper and the region was evident.

CONCLUSION

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this assessment of the three newspapers. The Examiner and the Advocate are still controlled by families and

²⁰² Emu Bay Times, November 2, 1897. Cited in the Advocate 90th Anniv. supplement, 3.

both identify with clearly defined geographical regions. For the Advocate, its prime circulation area equates closely with the region known as the Mersey-Lyell statistical division. Both circulation data and readership loyalty studies support this assessment. The Examiner, on the other hand, seems to lay claim to two regions - a region corresponding with the Northern Statistical Division for its Monday to Saturday readership and a wider region encompassing both the Northern Statistical Division and the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division for its Sunday readership. The Mercury, however, is seeking to overcome the traditional regional divisions by promoting itself as a statewide newspaper. It has taken such a stance since coming under the umbrella of first the Herald and Weekly Times Group and more recently News Ltd. While it is too early to assess whether the Mercury will be able to win over traditional Examiner and Advocate readers through its promotion with the Sunday Tasmanian, at this stage the circulation and reader loyalty studies do not support that claim. All studies show that the newspapers' primary coverage areas correspond with the three major statistical divisions. Thus the coverage of the three Tasmanian dailies lends further support to

the view that Tasmania is functionally regionalised.

Interestingly, each of the newspapers has adopted a strong editorial stance either proclaiming or condemning parochialism. An assessment of specific issues in subsequent chapters highlights whether their stated positions on parochialism can be interpreted as sincere or just mere posturing. Certainly the Mercury in seeking to establish a statewide identity has done all it can to warn against the perils of parochialism. The Examiner and the Advocate, on the other hand, have shown themselves to be unashamedly parochial and have no compunction in using their editorial columns to stand-up for their regions.

CHAPTER 3

THE STATE BANK DISPUTE

At various times since the early 1900s, Tasmanian governments have wrestled with proposals to amalgamate the State's two trustee banks - the Savings Bank of Tasmania and the Launceston Bank for Savings - to form a State bank. However on each occasion talks between the boards of the two banks have broken down, usually over fears that, rather than being a merger, the result would be the take-over of one by the other. In the mid 1980s fresh discussions began after the boards of the Hobart-based Savings Bank of Tasmania (SBT) and the Launceston-based LBS Statewide (LBS) each wrote to the then Premier, Robin Gray, supporting such a proposal.

This chapter explores the events between January 1986 and September 1987 when the Tasmania Bank - the State bank - opened its doors for business. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first outlines in detail the history of this dispute, including negotiations between the banks and the State Government. Part two explores the role of the three

daily newspapers in this dispute. It compares their coverage of this issue and seeks to determine whether they were impartial observers or consciously used their editorial columns to influence the decision and the community's perception of it.

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The State bank dispute is widely recognised as having developed into one of the most bitter parochial brawls in contemporary Tasmanian history. The State Government's goal was to amalgamate the nation's two surviving trustee banks to create a bank which could compete in Australia's deregulated banking environment. At the outset it seemed a fairly straight-forward task, despite the failure of earlier attempts to achieve such a result. On this occasion the two banks - the 151 year-old LBS and the 141 year-old SBT - had already held informal talks and reached agreement in principle that amalgamation was not only desirable but essential if they were to survive in the long term. However, within months of the amalgamation being mooted, the issue had deteriorated into a major confrontation which not only resulted in the two banks going their separate ways, but also fanned traditional North-South rivalries

and in the process threatened the Government's two seat majority in the House of Assembly. As one of Australia's major financial dailies commented in an editorial, the result was: "a bank born of parochialism."¹

The two banks disagreed on the mechanics of the proposed amalgamation virtually from the outset. Initially, the then chairman of the SBT, Bob Mather, said that the merger should be on the basis of equality, with the proposed State bank having an equal presence in both cities.² His comments recognised the risk of the merger foundering over parochial arguments. However his LBS counterpart, Jack Edwards, was not quite so conciliatory, making it clear that he believed the LBS should form the nucleus of any proposed State bank.³ Jack Edwards cited a number of reasons to justify the LBS's claims to being the major partner. He said that Launceston was central to the State's major population centres - in the North and along the North-West Coast - and that the LBS had been the more

¹Financial Review, August 11, 1987, 12.

²Mercury, May 3, 1986, 10.

³ibid.

successful of the two banks.⁴ The LBS's general manager, Marc Atherton, said that the LBS's claims were commercially-based and had not been influenced by traditional North-South rivalries.⁵ The LBS's statement provoked a number of responses from the SBT. Alan Parker, the SBT's general manager, warned that the formation of the State bank had to be divorced from parochial considerations.⁶ Mather said that while he envisaged a top managerial presence in both cities, Hobart was the obvious choice for the bank's headquarters as it was the capital city, the seat of government, and home to most State Government departments, the Reserve Bank and the cheque clearing centre.⁷

It was disagreement over this question - the siting of the new bank's headquarters, along with a later dispute over which city the bank's chief executive would be domiciled - which led to first one bank and then the other pulling out of negotiations.

⁴Examiner, May 3, 1986, 1-2.

⁵Examiner, May 6, 1986, 13.

⁶Mercury, May 7, 1986, 1, 4.

⁷Examiner, May 6, 1986, 13.

Despite the tension created by early statements from spokesmen for both banks, plans for the amalgamation proceeded. An eight man formation committee was established, chaired by Bob Mather, with Marc Atherton seconded from the LBS to perform the duties of executive officer. The LBS and the SBT were equally represented on the committee. However the committee and initial talks were short-lived. The LBS pulled out of negotiations when the SBT refused to accept three preconditions. They were: (1) that head office functions be shared between the two cities, with the chief executive to be based in Launceston; (2) that the formation committee's terms of reference be extended to enable it to prepare for amalgamation and; (3) that details of the two banks' respective balance sheets be provided to enable proper financial planning to proceed.⁸

According to Mather, the SBT had agreed to the proposal that there be a joint headquarters for the new bank. "It is not so much the pre-condition that the chief executive live in Launceston that we [the SBT Board] disagree with, it is the underlying principle of

⁸Examiner, September 5, 1986, 1-2.

the two banks not being equal," he said.⁹ Mather said that the SBT still favoured amalgamation and that it was in Tasmania's best interests if both trustee banks were partners in the proposed State bank. He also warned, however, that the SBT would consider establishing a State bank without the LBS.¹⁰

With the LBS' decision to withdraw from negotiations, relations between the two banks soured. There were claims and counter claims about which was the more successful bank, and over the upgrading and suitability of electronic data processing systems for a new, enlarged bank.¹¹ There were arguments over variations in the two banks' accounting procedures and their effect on results.¹² Despite their differences, both continued to acknowledge the need for a State bank and accepted that parochial arguments had prevented the amalgamation from taking place. But neither bank was prepared to vary its position; with each seeing the

⁹Examiner, October 26, 1986, 6.

¹⁰Advocate, September 6, 1986, 3.

¹¹Mercury, September 26, 1988, 10; Examiner, September 27, 1986, 11.

¹²*ibid.*

other as the villain in what was quickly becoming a battle in which the commercial reasons for the siting of the bank's headquarters and its chief executive and the division of functions were being subsumed by questions of regional pride and ascendancy. By November 1986 they had reached agreement on one point - that any further initiatives towards the establishment of the State bank had to be forthcoming from the State Government. The new Chairman of the SBT, John Harris, said: "... the impetus has to come from the State Government because there appears to be an impenetrable barrier somewhere around Oatlands."¹³ He was referring to the 42nd parallel - the historical, if artificial, dividing line between North and South.

To that stage the State Government had only played a facilitating role. The Tasmanian Premier, Robin Gray, had established the formation committee to encourage the two banks to work together without the need for government involvement. He had indicated both publicly and in discussions with the banks that while he wanted them to be a part of the proposed State bank, he would not "... drag anyone in kicking and

¹³Mercury, November 11, 1986, 3.

screaming."¹⁴ He said: "we'd rather see a happy marriage than a shot gun wedding."¹⁵

In late 1986 and early 1987 there were suggestions that talks between the two banks would resume. However, by that time, the dispute had widened; the arguments were becoming increasingly parochial, with groups not directly involved speaking out in support of one bank or the other. The Government too was coming under increasing pressure from many quarters, including the Australian Bank Employees Union (ABEU) and the Labor Opposition, both of which had supported the State bank proposal from the outset. The Opposition's Finance Spokesman and one time Opposition Leader, Ken Wriedt, argued that influential people both within and outside the Liberal Party were seeking to sabotage the Government's State bank plans.¹⁶ Both Wriedt and his successor as Labor Leader, Neil Batt, criticized the Premier, arguing that he was allowing parochial considerations to over-ride commercial

¹⁴Examiner, November 15, 1986, 3.

¹⁵Advocate, November 18, 1986, 5.

¹⁶Examiner, January 20, 1987, 5.

judgments.¹⁷ In March the Government announced that it would introduce legislation forcing the two banks to merge if they could not agree on the terms of amalgamation. The Government's plans were welcomed by both banks, although John Harris did criticize it for not having taken the initiative earlier.¹⁸

Any prospect of an acceptable compromise disappeared in June when the Government ran full-page advertisements in all the daily papers confirming that head office functions would be shared between Hobart and Launceston for an interim period. It said that after the expiration of that period the Board would be free to make any decisions on commercial grounds. The advertisement provoked angry responses from the SBT and the Hobart business community. The ABEU accused the Premier of "pandering to parochial interests,"¹⁹ and the SBT announced that it would withdraw from negotiations. John Harris explained the bank's decision with the comment:

Tasmanians can only lose further credibility if,

¹⁷ibid.

¹⁸Mercury, March 6, 1987, 10.

¹⁹Examiner, June 8, 1987, 5.

for merely political purposes, the new State bank commences its life in a highly competitive and deregulated financial market, by being consigned to a provincial city in the north of the State.²⁰

While the Premier argued that there was still time for the SBT to become a member of the new bank, its decision to withdraw was supported by the Hobart Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber argued that if the bank was to operate for the benefit of all Tasmanians, the chief executive and all major banking functions should be located in Hobart.²¹

The decision sparked a groundswell of community feeling throughout the State. The Association of North-West Chambers of Commerce welcomed the Government's decision, saying that the bank's headquarters should be in the North.²² The Launceston Chamber of Commerce welcomed the SBT's decision to withdraw from negotiations, saying:

Its [the SBT's] demands created a political scenario embarrassing to the Government. In this the Government showed commendable electoral balance by proposing a State bank with split functions and an 'outside' Chief Executive based in Launceston,

²⁰Mercury, June 12, 1987, 1.

²¹Mercury, June 13, 1987, 3.

²²Advocate, June 11, 1987, 11.

with later review.²³

But the strongest feelings were in the South, where business and community groups continued to lobby the Premier and the Government to locate the bank's headquarters in Hobart.

The Government was criticized by a number of Legislative Councillors, the Lord Mayor of Hobart, Doone Kennedy, the Director of the Hobart Chamber of Commerce, Vin Barron, a specially convened lobby "The Keep Southern Tasmania Alive Group," and a number of Federal Liberal politicians and candidates. In a one month period the Government faced censure motions from the Liberal Party's Denison and Franklin electorate committees and the Hobart City Council.^{23*} The Council passed a resolution condemning the Premier and accusing him of "patronisation".²⁴ Alderman Andrew Hurburgh, a member of the Liberal Party and an endorsed Liberal candidate in the 1986 State Election, described the State Government as the "Gray Northernist Government".²⁵ He highlighted the emotionalism that had

²³ Examiner, June 13, 1987, 2.

^{23*} Although interesting, the impact of this issue on the federal election was not pursued in any detail because it was not central to the thesis.

²⁴ Mercury, June 24, 1987, 3.

²⁵ Mercury, June 10, 1987, 3.

entered the debate and was affecting relations, not only between the two banks but also between the two cities, when he said: "it is absolute nonsense to suggest that a city half the size of Hobart should be considered to be Hobart's corporate equal."²⁶ The Denison electorate committee's motion that the bank be headquartered in Hobart was supported by the sitting Liberal Member, Michael Hodgman, and Hobart-based Liberal Senator Shirley Walters.²⁷

Hobart's business community had traditionally been supportive of the Government. But it showed its displeasure over this issue at a function called to establish a Business and Community Leaders Group. In the invitation sent out to 300 Hobart businessmen and community leaders, the Premier had indicated his willingness to be patron of this group.²⁸ However organisers withdrew the motion from the agenda following rumours that the then Attorney General and Liberal Member for Denison, John Bennett, would be nominated from the floor as patron in recognition of

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ Mercury, June 25, 1987, 12.

²⁸ Mercury, July 7, 1987, 3.

his supposed support of Hobart's case when the State bank issue had been discussed in Cabinet.²⁰ Reports of the meeting say that the Government was further embarrassed when one invitee asked the Premier to take a vote from the floor on support for the decision to divide the bank's head office functions.³⁰

This, and the Keep Southern Tasmania Alive Group's decision to campaign against sitting Southern Liberals in the July 1987 Federal election, highlighted the depth of feeling in Hobart. The Group took out a paid advertisement in the Mercury calling on electors to vote against the Liberal Party in retaliation over the State bank decision. The advertisement said:

Residents of Southern Tasmania. By decision of the Liberals, the headquarters of the new State bank are to be located in Launceston. This contradicts the Government's original intention, before the Savings Bank of Tasmania pulled out, of splitting head office functions between Launceston and Hobart for two years. On Saturday, register your opposition to this sell-out of Southern Tasmania. On Saturday, put the Liberals last.³¹

The ill-feeling within the Hobart business community and the divisive side of parochialism was further revealed on July 8, 1987 when Geoff Davis, a

²⁰ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Mercury, July 10, 1987, 4.

Liberal backbencher and former cabinet minister, resigned from the Government and sat on the crossbenches as a protest against its handling of the dispute. His resignation reduced the Government's majority in the 35 seat House of Assembly to just one - making the composition of the House 18 Liberals, 14 Labor and three Independents. There was also considerable speculation that a second Liberal, John Beattie, the Deputy Chairman of Committees and Franklin backbencher, was also being pressured to resign in protest. It had even been suggested that Beattie was offered the Speakership to ensure that he continued to vote with the Government. This does not appear to have been the case, however, for when the speakership became vacant the following year, he was not elected. Beattie did support the Government when the State bank legislation was debated in the House of Assembly, later justifying his decision in a Letter to the Editor published in the Mercury. He said that while he had been urged to vote against the State bank legislation, his first priority was to the electors who had voted for him because he represented Liberal

principles.³² There were other rumours too - that a senior Southern minister was prepared to challenge Robin Gray for the leadership; and that Cabinet, which was renowned for its solidarity, was split over the issue, with Hobart ministers pushing for the capital city to become the proposed bank's headquarters.

Divisions within the Liberal Party widened when Michael Hodgman lost the Federal seat of Denison in July, soon after the State Bank legislation had been introduced into Parliament. A number of Liberals, including the sitting Member for Franklin, Bruce Goodluck, blamed the Party's loss in Denison on the State Bank issue.³³ However it was later suggested that an emerging concern over conservation and a redistribution of boundaries had been the major factors in the election result.³⁴

The anti-Government feeling was also evident in Letters to the Editor published in the Mercury. Forty nine State bank letters appear to have been published in the Mercury during the study period. The

³² Mercury, July 28, 1987, 9.

³³ Sunday Tasmanian, July 12, 1987, 8.

³⁴ Mercury, July 13, 1987, 5.

overwhelming majority of these were critical of the decision not to base the proposed bank's headquarters in Hobart and condemnatory of the Government and Premier. Many contained warnings to the Premier and Southern-based members of the Government that the decision could produce repercussions at the next State election. Of the 49 letters, only six supported the decision to share head office responsibilities and to base the chief executive in Launceston for the interim period. There appeared to be only 16 Letters to the Editor in the Examiner on this issue and just four in the Advocate. None contained the veiled threats so evident in Mercury letters, in fact some even tried to make a joke of the whole dispute. A number, however, were antagonistic and were obviously intended to goad Southern readers. For example, one reader listed a number of United States cities which were the capitals of their respective states but not the financial centres.³⁵ Another documented a series of statistics which supported Launceston's claims to being the commercial capital and finished with the comment: "I have heard prominent Launceston citizens say that there

³⁵Examiner, July 2, 1987. 6.

is only one good thing that came out of Hobart - that's the road to Launceston."³⁶

Following the SBT's decision to withdraw from negotiations, both it and the Government embarked on strong and emotive advertising campaigns to justify their positions. The Government argued that the SBT had agreed at a meeting of both banks on December 14, 1985 that head office responsibilities would be shared between Launceston and Hobart.³⁷ Furthermore, it had accepted a proposal that the chief executive would be based in Launceston for an interim period of two years and that the first chairman would be from the SBT.³⁸ In a full page advertisement titled "The Tasmania Bank - the real facts", the Government cited a resolution passed by the the SBT's General Council on August 14, 1986 which said:

Within practical limits the amalgamation shall be based on equality between the two existing banks. In particular, such equality shall be maintained by the location for an appropriate period of departments exercising head office functions in both Launceston and Hobart on a basis of equality between the two present banks and taking account of

³⁶Examiner, July 16, 1987, 6.

³⁷Mercury, July 13, 1987, 13.

³⁸ibid.

the practical needs of the new bank.³⁹

In an earlier advertisement, published in the form of a letter to depositors and customers, the SBT had said that it would not participate in discussions unless the legislation guaranteed that: (1) the bank would be conducted on free enterprise lines; (2) it would be free from political control and interference and, (3) all decisions concerning the operations of the State bank would be made on commercial grounds by the Board of Directors.⁴⁰

The SBT responded to the July 13 advertisement, accusing the Government of selectively quoting from private minutes. The response, which was signed by SBT Chairman John Harris, denied that an agreement to merge had ever been finalised.⁴¹ It said that the SBT had withdrawn from negotiations because of Government preconditions which saw all core banking functions and management in Launceston for the first two years. "The object of that Government direction is to ensure that at the end of the two years, regardless of how

³⁹ibid.

⁴⁰Mercury, June 30, 1987, 7.

⁴¹Mercury, July 15, 1987, 5.

independent the Board is, that it will be unable to justify the expense of reversing the decision to headquarter the bank at Launceston," the advertisement claimed.⁴²

The dispute widened even further on July 16, when a group of Hobart businessmen authorised a full-page advertisement in the Mercury opposing the decision to site the chief executive in Launceston. It said in part: "The State Bank issue. Mr Robin Gray you are wrong. The headquarters and Chief Executive of the proposed State Bank must for economic, commercial and logistical reasons be in Hobart."⁴³ The advertisement cited a number of reasons supporting this argument, including the oft quoted "Hobart is the capital" argument.⁴⁴

The State Government's advertisements continued to push the argument that the SBT had agreed to merge with the LBS to become a part of the Tasmania Bank and that both the North and the South were entitled to "share equally in the operations and benefits of the

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Mercury, July 16, 1987, 15.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

bank."⁴⁵ It also urged the SBT to reconsider its decision and to resume negotiations.⁴⁶ The SBT argued that during negotiations the LBS would not indicate for how long after the merger, "the chief executive would be compulsorily headquartered in Launceston."⁴⁷ It continued to argue that these decisions should be left to the Board of the proposed bank to be decided on commercial grounds.⁴⁸

While the SBT was engaged in a war of words with the Government, it also produced a number of subtle advertisements which were designed to elicit customer support for the decision to withdraw from the State bank. The first such advertisement featured a single line of music accompanied by the words, "a-loan again naturally".⁴⁹ Not only did the advertisement encourage people to bank with the SBT, but the message also highlighted its decision to stand alone despite the pressure for it to become involved in the

⁴⁵Examiner, July 18, 1987, 15.

⁴⁶Mercury, July 27, 1987, 18.

⁴⁷Mercury, July 20, 1987, 13.

⁴⁸ibid.

⁴⁹Sunday Tasmanian, July 12, 1987, 8.

formation of the State bank. It also ran a very effective advertisement featuring a hang glider soaring in front of the Organ Pipes [mountain peaks], accompanied by the text:

Forming the Tasmania Bank is like hang gliding off the Organ Pipes. You've got to get it right first time. Establishing a new bank is a serious business. And when the bank is Tasmania's own, there's a lot at stake. SBT could play an important role in the Tasmania Bank. But first we have to be confident that the proposals make economic sense. The new bank must be strong and secure. It must be dynamic and competitive. It must be able to prosper in today's aggressive financial scene. For Tasmania's sake it has to be right. First time.⁵⁰

In the days leading up to September 1, 1987 when the Tasmania Bank officially commenced business, it introduced another very clever advertisement. This one featured a photograph showing part of the solar system with the caption, "On September 1 that other bank is going to offer you the Sun, the Moon and the Stars. Meanwhile, back on Earth ..." ⁵¹ The SBT used a number of other soft sell advertisements too - one headed, "Now's a good time to change banks; join Tasmania's free enterprise bank," ⁵² and the other bearing a very clever message: "What'll it be? A

⁵⁰ Advocate, July 1, 1987, 5.

⁵¹ Mercury, August 29, 1987, 5.

⁵² Mercury, August 7, 1987, 7.

Claytons - or a drop of Southern Comfort?",⁵³ with Clayton's, in this case the proposed State bank, being a substitute for the bank and the services people had come to know and accept.

The LBS, later the Tasmania Bank, responded with an advertising campaign of its own. Like the SBT's advertisements, they contained subtle messages, as well as an appeal to existing and potential customers. One series of advertisements featured a jig saw puzzle in the shape of Tasmania. The first advertisement, which was published in late July after the SBT had withdrawn from negotiations but while there was hope that it would participate in the proposed bank, showed the puzzle to be almost complete. The accompanying caption said:

The new State Bank: It's all coming together. Putting together the new State Bank is a bit of a puzzle for everybody. All the pieces need to be looked at carefully and we can't leave anything out.⁵⁴

The advertisement compared LBS and SBT deposits, home loans and profit and reserve figures before concluding: "The new State Bank will be

⁵³Mercury, September 1, 1987, 1.

⁵⁴Sunday Examiner, July 19, 1987, 8.

important to Tasmania. and however we put it together, it's obvious LBS Statewide will be a major part of our bank."⁵⁵ The follow-up advertisement, which appeared after the legislation had passed through both Houses of Parliament, showed a completed puzzle with the caption: "The new State Bank. It wasn't easy. (Good things rarely are)."⁵⁶ The advertisement produced to mark the Bank's launch on September 1 featured a master craftsman putting the finishing touches to a violin. The accompanying caption read: "The better things should take a little longer."⁵⁷ This appears to be an attempt to justify the delay in the bank's formation caused by the breakdown in talks between the LBS and the SBT. Certainly it provoked a response from the SBT for within 24 hours it had produced an advertisement also showing a violin, but on this occasion the caption read: "While they're fiddling around, we're making sweet music."⁵⁸

Despite the fact that relations between the SBT

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Examiner, August 7, 1987, 18.

⁵⁷ Advocate, September 1, 1987, 9.

⁵⁸ Mercury, September 2, 1987, 6.

and the State Government had deteriorated, there were still moves throughout July for the SBT to be included in the State Bank. First the Tasmanian Permanent Building Society (TPBS), which had decided to participate in the merger earlier in the year, acted as an intermediary between the two banks. Then, while the State Bank legislation was being debated in the Upper House, a number of Legislative Councillors put together a compromise package. While John Harris conceded that agreement was close, the SBT voted unanimously not to participate. Harris said that by participating the SBT would become "... the lackeys of the set-up in Launceston."⁵⁹

Thus it can be seen that parochial considerations played a major role in negotiations over the establishment of the Tasmania Bank. Throughout negotiations - firstly between the two banks, and later between the State Government and the SBT - there were countless claims that one party or the other had allowed parochialism to influence the decision-making process. There also appeared to be a perceptible change in the attitudes of both the SBT and the LBS. For

⁵⁹Examiner, July 31, 1987, 1-2.

example the change in SBT thinking after Bob Mather had been replaced as SBT chairman by John Harris. Whereas Mather had supported the principle of equality and had accepted the sharing of head office functions, Harris argued that no such agreement had been reached. Furthermore, he argued that all decisions should be based on commercial considerations, free of political interference. Having previously accused the Government of not acting quickly enough to resolve the impasse between the SBT and the LBS, he then began to criticize it for taking too prominent a role.

The LBS, on the other hand, appeared to soften its stance. Whereas initially it had pushed to be the major partner in the proposed bank, as negotiations progressed, so it adopted the equality argument first proposed by Bob Mather. It even agreed to a 60/40 split of head office functions between Launceston and Hobart, with the greater proportion of the services being southern-based, despite the fact that it was contributing 60 percent of the equity for the new bank.

While the two trustee banks and the State Government were the major players in this dispute, it

has often been suggested that the newspapers also contributed, that they helped to fan the parochial rivalries that, in the end, resulted in the State bank being formed without one of the intended partners. Part two of this chapter investigates the role of the newspapers in this dispute to see whether they had incited the parochial arguments or, rather, gave both sides of the debate equal coverage.

NEWSPAPERS AND THE STATE BANK ISSUE

The data for this analysis is based on 288 articles, 28 editorials and 14 cartoons in the Mercury, the Examiner and the Advocate (including their respective weekend newspapers - the Sunday Tasmanian, the Sunday Examiner and the Weekender) between January 1, 1986 and September 30, 1987. Over the period covered in this study 135 relevant articles, 14 editorials and 9 cartoons appeared in the Examiner, 85 articles, 9 editorials and 7 cartoons in the Mercury and 68 articles and five editorials in the Advocate.

Not including Letters to the Editor and advertisements, the three newspapers devoted 13,250 cms of newspaper space at 11 ems to coverage of the State bank dispute. This included 12,022 cms for articles and

cartoons and 1,228 cms for editorials. On a newspaper by newspaper breakdown, the Examiner devoted 6,178 cms to articles and 643 cms to editorials, the Mercury 3,810 cms and 422 cms and the Advocate 2,034 cms and 163 cms respectively. This represents 30.30 page equivalents in the Examiner, 12.08 in the Mercury and 9.76 in the Advocate. The differential between the Examiner and the Mercury with respect to page equivalents devoted to the issue can be attributed in part to the larger Mercury page size - the fact that it contains 350 cms of text at 11 ems as opposed to 225 cms in the Examiner and the Advocate.

One interesting comparison that can be drawn at this stage is the variation in coverage between the newspapers as determined by (a) the number of articles and (b) column centimetres. The Examiner's 135 articles represented 46.87 percent of total articles and its 6,178 cms of State bank text represented 51.38 percent of total column centimetres. The Mercury's 85 articles and the Advocate's 68 comprised 29.51 percent and 23.61 percent respectively. However when converted to column centimetres, their 3,810 centimetres (Mercury) and 2,034 centimetres (Advocate) represented

31.69 percent and 16.92 percent respectively.

These comparisons show substantial variations in each newspaper's coverage of the State bank controversy. By converting from the number of articles to column centimetres, the Examiner's contribution increased from 46.87 per cent to 51.38 and the Mercury's from 29.51 to 31.69. Yet the Advocate's coverage, as a percentage of the total, decreased quite substantially - from 23.61 to 16.92 per cent. The variation in the Advocate's percentage share of coverage between number of articles and column centimetres may be attributed to the fact that as the dispute was essentially between Launceston and Hobart and as the greater share of its readers were North-West based it may not have felt obliged to cover the dispute in quite the same detail as its two rivals. This may also be reflected by the fact that the average length of Advocate State bank articles was 29.91 cms, compared with 45.76 cms in the Examiner and 44.82 cms in the Mercury.

All articles, editorials and cartoons used in this study either dealt specifically with the State bank dispute or referred directly to it. The research

was undertaken according to the parameters outlined in the introduction. In so doing it sought answers to three propositions asked, for ease of interpretation, as questions:

(1) How did the article (and thus the newspaper) report on the decision to seek a merger between Tasmania's two trustee banks with the view to forming a State Bank?;

(2) How did it represent the decision to split head office functions between Hobart and Launceston, to base the chief executive in Launceston for an interim period of two years and for the inaugural chairman of the Tasmania Bank to be based in Hobart?; and

(3) through their coverage of one and two above, did any of the newspapers exhibit a bias towards or against either the North or the South and as such were they guilty of being parochial?

These questions were framed because they addressed the two core elements of the debate. The first was whether the merger should proceed or not and the second related to the terms of the proposed amalgamation. The first proposition was particularly

relevant in the first months of the study, when the two banks were jockeying to be the dominant partner. It was, however, also relevant in the dying stages when negotiations between the SBT and the State Government had foundered. The second proposition assumed significance from the time the LBS announced its intention not to be a party to the merger. Each article was assessed with these propositions in mind and the results were tabulated according to whether they agreed with, were opposed to, or were neutral in their outlook. During the period covered in this study, the three newspapers ran 128 articles supporting proposition one - 68 in the Examiner, 31 in the Mercury and 29 in the Advocate. There were only eight articles against the proposition, including three in each of the Examiner and the Mercury and two in the Advocate. A further 152 articles could be categorised as neutral, with 64 appearing in the Examiner, 51 in the Mercury and 37 in the Advocate.

The study showed that 44.44 percent of the 288 articles supported proposition one and just 2.77 percent opposed it. A further 52.77 percent could be

termed neutral. On a newspaper by newspaper breakdown, the greatest support for the merger of the two banks and the formation of a State bank was in the Examiner. The Examiner contained 53.12 percent of articles supporting proposition one, compared with 24.21 percent in the Mercury and 22.65 percent in the Advocate.

The second proposition produced vastly different results. Only 60 of the 288 articles (20.83 percent of the total) supported the proposition to split the head office functions between Launceston and Hobart, to domicile the chief executive in Launceston for an interim two year period and for the first chairman to be based in Hobart. Eighty one articles (28.47 percent) were opposed to the proposition and 147 (51.03 percent) were neutral.

The Examiner contained 44 articles (73.33 percent of the total) supporting proposition two, and 21 (25.92 percent) of those opposing it. It also published 70 neutral articles (47.61 percent). The Mercury, on the other hand, contained just seven articles (11.66 percent) supporting proposition two, 43 articles (53.08 percent) opposing it and 35 neutral articles (23.80 percent). The Advocate published nine

articles (15.00 percent) supporting proposition two, 17 (20.98 percent) against it and 42 (28.57 percent) which were neutral.

A comparison was also drawn using the same criteria, but in this instance as a percentage of the total number of relevant articles within each newspaper. Of the 135 relevant articles in the Examiner, 50.37 percent (68) supported proposition one and 32.59 percent (44) proposition two. Only 2.22 percent (3) were opposed to proposition one, whereas 15.55 percent (21) were opposed to proposition two. A further 47.40 percent (64) were neutral in their coverage of proposition one and 51.84 percent (70) with respect to number two.

Again, fairly substantial differences can be drawn between the Examiner and the Mercury. Whereas 36.47 percent (31) of the 85 Mercury articles favoured proposition one, only 8.23 percent (7) supported the second. Only 3.52 percent (3) of Mercury articles were opposed to proposition one, however a massive 50.58 percent (43) indicated opposition to the second. A further 59.99 percent (51) were neutral in their coverage of the first proposition and 41.17 percent

(35) with respect to number two.

The Advocate is positioned between the Examiner and the Mercury in its coverage of this issue. Of the 68 Advocate articles analysed, 42.64 percent (29) supported proposition one and 13.23 percent (9) proposition two. Another 2.94 percent (2) opposed proposition one and 25 percent (17) were opposed to the second. Furthermore, 54.40 percent (37) of articles were neutral in their coverage of proposition one and 61.76 percent (42) in their coverage of two.

From this analysis it can be seen that general news and feature articles in the Examiner were more supportive of both propositions one and two - the establishment of a State bank and the decision to divide responsibilities between Launceston and Hobart - than those in either the Mercury or the Advocate. This applies irrespective of whether comparisons are drawn using articles as a percentage of the total number studied or as a percentage of the number in each individual newspaper. The analysis also shows that while a fair percentage of Mercury and Advocate articles supported proposition one, very few supported proposition two - the division of head office functions and responsibilities.

To take this analysis a step further, the articles in each newspaper were compared on a month by month basis, again differentiating between the two propositions. This was undertaken to see if it was possible to determine when the newspapers supported or opposed one or other proposition and, if so, whether this was related to changes in relations between the parties. Of the 128 articles supporting proposition one, 49 (38.28 percent) were published in the two month period June to July 1987. Five (62.5 percent) of the eight articles opposed to the proposition appeared in the same period. Thirty three (55 percent) of the 60 articles supporting the second proposition and 75 (92.59 percent of those opposed to it were also published in that period. This is not surprising, given the fact that in the time frame studied the State bank legislation was debated in Parliament, the SBT had withdrawn from negotiations, there had been attempts using both the Legislative Council and the Tasmanian Permanent Building Society to entice the SBT back to the negotiating table and there were splits within the Government, with one defection and talk of another.

On a newspaper by newspaper breakdown of the

two propositions over time, a number of interesting similarities can be seen. For example, 36.76 percent of Examiner articles, 38.70 percent of Mercury and 41.37 percent of Advocate articles supporting the establishment of a State bank appeared in the period from January to December 1986. The remaining supportive articles were published between January and August 1987, in particular from June to August 1987. That three month period saw 50 percent (34) of the supportive Examiner articles, 32.25 percent of Mercury articles favouring the proposition and 41.37 percent of Advocate articles. It should be noted that in the Mercury's case this amounted to just 10 articles and for the Advocate 12.

The greatest proportion of articles relating to proposition two appeared in the period from June to July 1987. Within the space of two months there were 108 articles either for or against the division of head office functions, including 75 opposing it and 33 supporting it. The Examiner was the most even-handed during that period, with 24 articles supporting the proposition and 19 against. The Mercury, on the other hand, published just three articles supporting the

proposition and 41 opposing it. Six articles supporting proposition two were printed in the Advocate between June and July 1987 and 15 opposing it.

The concentration of articles in this period tends to support the argument that newspaper coverage of the issue was in part event-driven. Much the same can be said of the fact that the Examiner printed 18 articles supporting proposition one in the period from August to October 1986. The publication of these articles coincided with the LBS' decision to withdraw from State bank talks; talk about an impasse between the two banks and the need for the Government to step in to mediate; and the SBT's announcement that it would consider establishing a State bank in its own right. The Examiner had been very supportive of the merger and the LBS's decision to withdraw from negotiations, along with the SBT's announcement that it was still keen to form a State bank, would have undermined the major role it envisaged the North playing.

POSITIONING - A SIGN OF PAROCHIALISM?

The importance accorded this dispute by the newspapers is evidenced by two major factors: (1) the concentration of articles on the major news pages

(those before and including the editorial page) and;
(2) the positioning of the articles within each page as determined by an adaptation of Arnold's Gutenberg Theory.

The 288 articles were divided between 26 pages. Almost 59 percent (169 articles) were printed on odd pages and 41 percent (119 articles) were published on even pages. Fifty nine articles (20.48 percent) appeared on page one, 42 (14.58 percent) on page three, 34 (11.80 percent) on page two and 33 (11.45 percent) on page four. The only other pages of any real significance were page five, with 26 articles and 9.02 percent of the total and page 10 with 22 articles (7.63 percent). This data applies only to page starts, it does not include spill articles, for example page one Examiner and Advocate articles which continued on page two or the Mercury articles spilled to pages four or 12. Almost 26 percent of Mercury State bank stories began on page one, compared with 20 percent of Examiner stories and 15 percent of those which appeared in the Advocate. However, 84 percent of Advocate articles, not including editorials, were printed on pages one to six, compared with 68 percent of Mercury stories and 65

percent of those in the Examiner. The Advocate showed a slight preference for even numbered pages, with 28 articles (41.17 percent) appearing on either page two or page four. The Examiner and the Mercury, on the other hand, appeared to favour the odd numbered pages. For example 47.05 percent of Mercury stories began on either page one or three, compared with just 14 percent on pages two or four. Thirty percent of Examiner articles began on pages one and three, with an additional 11 percent (15 articles) beginning on page five. Only 20 percent (27 articles) began on pages two or four of the Examiner. In total, 63 percent (86 of the 135 Examiner articles) were printed on odd numbered pages, and 37 percent (49 articles) on the even numbered pages. This compared with 62 percent and 38 percent of Mercury articles and 44 percent and 56 percent of Advocate articles. Therefore it can be seen that both the Examiner and the Mercury showed a preference for positioning State bank stories on right hand pages and the Advocate on the left. All used the majority of State bank stories up front in the newspaper.

The tendency to place State bank articles in

early pages applied equally to those articles for and against the two propositions. For example, 66.40 percent of articles supporting proposition one were printed on pages one, three, four, five and ten and 61.66 percent of those favouring proposition two were on pages one, two, three and ten. The Examiner ran 44.11 percent of the 68 articles supporting proposition one on pages one, three and five. It ran 52.27 percent of the 44 articles supporting proposition two on pages one, two and three. The Mercury ran 24 of the 31 articles (77.41 percent) supporting proposition one on pages one, three and ten and five of the seven articles (71.42 percent) supporting proposition two on pages one and four. The Advocate ran 18 of 29 stories (62.06 percent) supportive of proposition one on pages one, two, four and five and three of nine articles (33.33 percent) supportive of the second proposition on pages one and two.

Much the same can be said of the articles opposing the two propositions. Of the articles in the three newspapers, 50 percent of those opposed to proposition one (4068) and 62 percent of those opposed to opposition two (50 of 81) were printed on pages one

to three. The Examiner ran 62 percent (13 of the 21 articles opposed to proposition two) on pages one, two, three and five, the Mercury 79.06 percent (34 of 43) on pages one to five and the Advocate 94.11 percent (16 of 17 articles) on pages one, two or three.

Having established that all three newspapers considered the dispute between the LBS and the SBT sufficiently important to warrant placing most articles on pages one to ten, the study then sought to establish whether there was any tie-in between articles for and against the proposition and their position on the page as determined by the adaptation of Arnold's Gutenberg Diagram. The study found that 168 of the 288 articles (58.33 percent) began in quadrant one, 53 (18.40 percent) in two, 51 (17.70 percent) in three and 16 (5.55 percent) in four.

The data showed that 58.51 percent (79) of Examiner articles, 71.76 percent (61) of Mercury articles and 41.17 percent (28) of Advocate articles began in the top left hand segment. It found that an additional 20.74 percent (28) of Examiner articles, 18.82 percent (16) of Mercury articles and 13.23 percent (9) of Advocate articles began in segment two.

Thus 79.25 percent of Examiner articles, 90.58 percent of Mercury articles and 54.40 percent of Advocate articles began in the top half of the page. Twenty six Advocate articles (38.23 percent) began in the third segment, whereas only 16.29 percent and 3.52 percent of Examiner and Mercury articles respectively did so. Only a small percentage of articles in all three newspapers - 7.35 percent in the Advocate, 5.88 percent in the Mercury and 4.44 percent in the Examiner - began in the fourth segment, the bottom right hand corner.

The research also showed that the articles tended to spread across and down the page; that very few started and ended in the same quadrant. In fact only 75 of the 288 articles did so. Forty two percent were confined to the top half of the page, 23.26 percent to the bottom half and 34.72 covered both.

Sixty eight (53.12 percent) of the 128 articles supporting the establishment of a State bank began in the top left hand segment. Forty eight of those articles (37.5 percent) were confined to the top two segments only, and 32 (25 percent) were in the bottom half page only. Of the eight articles opposed to proposition one, five were in the top half only and three in the bottom half of the page.

A slightly different picture emerged in relation to the second proposition - the division of head office responsibilities. Almost 63 percent of articles against the proposition (51 of the 81 articles) began in the first segment and 53.08 percent (43 articles) were confined to the top half only. Thirteen articles against proposition two (representing 16.04 percent) had been positioned in the bottom half of the page only. Of the articles supporting proposition two, 68.33 percent (41 of 60) began in the top left hand segment, 33.33 percent (20) were confined to the top half only and 20 percent (12) in the bottom half of the page.

On a newspaper by newspaper comparison, it was found that 37 of the 68 Examiner articles supporting proposition one (54.41 percent) began in the top left hand segment and that 21 of those articles were contained in the top half of the page only. Two of the three Examiner articles opposing the proposition were in the top half of the page. The Mercury placed a larger proportion of its articles supporting proposition one in the top half of the page than did the Examiner. Twenty one of the 31 Mercury articles

supporting the bank (67.74 percent) began in the top left hand segment, with the same number being confined to segments one and two only. Two Mercury articles opposing the proposition began in one, the other in the bottom half of the page. The Advocate, on the other hand, placed almost 60 percent of articles supporting proposition one in the bottom half of its page. Only 10 of 29 supportive Advocate articles (34.48 percent) began in the first segment and just six (20.68 percent) were confined to the top half of the page, whereas 17 of the 29 pro merger articles were placed in the third and fourth segments.

The results relating to the more contentious second proposition were quite different. Seventy percent of Examiner articles (31 of 44) supporting the proposition began in the top left hand corner, although only 13 (29.54 percent) were confined to the top half of the page only. Twelve of the 21 Examiner articles opposed to proposition two (57.14 percent) began in segment one. The Mercury, which ran 43 articles opposing proposition two and just seven supporting it, began 72.09 percent of those against it (31 articles) in segment one. Twenty eight Mercury articles opposed

to the proposition were in the top half of the page only, while just three were restricted to the bottom half of the page. The Advocate, which ran nine articles supporting proposition two and 17 opposing it, spread the articles throughout the page. Eight of those opposing the division of head office functions (47.05 percent) began in one, while five began in the bottom half of the page. Eight were confined to segments one and two only.

These results would seem to suggest that the three newspapers have been fairly equitable in their treatment of the State bank dispute. Obviously some disparities are evident. For example, the fact that the Examiner has given greater space and prominence to articles supporting both propositions. Also, the fact that the Mercury had a preponderance of articles opposed to the second proposition when compared with either the Examiner or the Advocate. This is despite the fact that the Examiner published almost as many State bank stories as the Mercury and the Advocate combined. The ratio between the Examiner and the Mercury was 1.6:1 and between the Examiner and the Advocate 3.03:1.

The real differences between the newspapers, however, cannot be gleaned solely from news articles. The true test of a newspaper's stance on a particular issue can only be gained through an assessment of its editorials. Another important insight can be provided by its cartoons, not only their content, but also their use and positioning.

EDITORIALS

During the period covered in this study there were 28 State bank editorials in the three newspapers. There were 14 in the Examiner, nine in the Mercury and five in the Advocate. The greater number of editorials in the Examiner and the Mercury reflects the direct involvement of both Launceston and Hobart in the dispute and possibly the perception that the decision and events leading to it would create greater interest among readers. The editorials provide an important insight into the newspapers' stance on a particular issue. All three newspapers adopt a distinctive regional outlook in their editorials - the Mercury supporting Hobart's claims as the logical choice to headquarter the proposed State bank, the Examiner and the Advocate supporting Launceston.

From the outset, the Examiner made its position very clear. It devoted a great deal of space in its editorials lauding the LBS Statewide for its contributions to Northern development and its relationship with both the North and the North-West. It claimed that from a Northern point of view there could be no compromise between the two banks, that the merged bank must be headquartered in Launceston. The Examiner justified this stance with arguments that the LBS was, "more efficient, more profitable, better run".⁸⁰ It claimed - as the LBS had done - that the SBT used outdated technology; that it even filled in its passbooks by hand and that it had failed in an earlier attempt to establish a statewide presence when it was forced to close and rationalise its branches in the north of the State.⁸¹

The Examiner did change its "no compromise" stance. It accepted, even welcomed the decision to divide head office functions between Launceston and Hobart, to appoint a chairman from the South and to domicile the chief executive in the North for the first

⁸⁰Examiner, May 8, 1986, 6.

⁸¹ibid.

two years. It said that it was a "courageous" decision; one which would, "... more accurately reflect the economic realities of the State."⁶² This decision, it claimed, had been reached for two reasons - to assuage fears of a takeover of the LBS by the SBT and to dissolve any potential North-South stalemate.⁶³

Certainly it achieved the first; the second it seemed only to exacerbate. The prospect of the SBT taking over the LBS appeared to be one of the Examiner's greatest fears. It cautioned and counselled against such an outcome, arguing that for a bank to properly serve a community it needed to be part of that community. It was wary of the SBT and of the motives driving the Southern push to have the new bank headquartered in Hobart and it said so. It warned in one editorial: The North, which has lived for too long with the indifference of a Southern-based government bureaucracy, appreciates only too well the likely perils of losing control of its major financial institutions.⁶⁴ It followed up in a later editorial with the warning that the merger of the two banks

⁶²Examiner, June 8, 1987, 6.

⁶³ibid.

⁶⁴Examiner, May 8, 1986, 6.

could lead to. "... the consolidation of all important decision-making in Hobart."⁸⁵

This had become a popular theme in Examiner editorials, not just those relating to the State bank issue. It had become critical of what it termed: "... an imbalance in Government treatment of the northern and southern regions."⁸⁶ In this case it argued that it would be surprised if, within a year or two, the State bank:

... does not take on all the appurtenances of most institutions headquartered in a capital city, including ready access for local people to the decision-makers and a growing ignorance of, and superficial attention to, the concerns and needs of those removed from the sphere of influence and interest.⁸⁷

The Examiner accepted that in taking such a stance it was being parochial, but it countered with the argument that such parochialism was healthy.⁸⁸ It also argued that, "the non-capital regions are scarred by decades of dismissive treatment; they know that out of sight is too often out of mind and react

⁸⁵Examiner, August 7, 1986, 6.

⁸⁶ibid.

⁸⁷ibid

⁸⁸ibid

accordingly."⁶⁹ The Examiner accused the SBT of causing un-necessary divisions that the State could not afford. It said that because of the stance being adopted by the SBT and other interests, "... a reasonable compromise was being painted as a conspiracy."⁷⁰ Furthermore, it attacked arguments substantiating Hobart's claims to being the headquarters as being based on the tenet that: "... Hobart deserved to be the headquarters in every way because it is the capital city."⁷¹ This it argued against, claiming that the decision to split head office responsibilities recognised the contribution that the LBS and the TPBS would make to the merged bank, that is, the fact that the LBS alone would contribute 60 percent of the merged bank's initial funds.⁷² Also, that the decision recognised the fact that Tasmania was decentralised, with more than 50 percent of people living outside of the capital city.⁷³

⁶⁹Examiner, June 25, 1987, 6.

⁷⁰Examiner, July 14, 1987, 6.

⁷¹Examiner, July 21, 1987, 6.

⁷²Examiner, July 21, 1987, 6.

⁷³Examiner, July 16, 1987, 6.

Launceston found another ally in the Advocate. Like the Examiner, it too supported the decision to divide the head office functions, to base the inaugural chairman in Hobart and the chief executive in Launceston for two years. The Advocate's State bank editorials were free of the vitriol and the emotionalism which, at times, crept into those in the Examiner and the Mercury. But, like the Examiner, it was critical of Southern attitudes towards the State's other regions and, like both other newspapers, tended to put the welfare of its own region first. Initially it said that the bank's survival was of greater importance than where it was to be headquartered.⁷⁴ Then it argued that both Launceston and Hobart had reasonable claims to that honour - the former because of its geographical location, the latter because it was the State capital.⁷⁵ However, in the end, it supported Launceston and the division of responsibilities. It appears to have done so for two reasons- the first a concern that a bank headquartered solely in the South would appear to be a direct takeover of one bank by the

⁷⁴Advocate, May 8, 1986, 6.

⁷⁵ibid; Advocate, June 9, 1987, 6.

other, not a merger as originally intended and the second, a distrust of Southern interests. It said that Hobart's claims would have been easier to accept:

...if it wasn't for the fact that some Southern thinking has confused peck order with holy writ, regards all roads as leading to Hobart, remains indifferent to all people who live in Tasmania's other regions and considers the extra burdens which the tyranny of distance thrusts upon them as something they must live with. That is not bitchy parochialism. It is fact.⁷⁶

While the two Northern newspapers supported the decision to split the bank's functions between the two cities and to base the chief executive in Launceston, the Mercury opposed such a decision. It argued that on the basis of commercial judgements alone, the bank and its chief executive should be based in Hobart.⁷⁷ It said that Hobart's claims rested with the fact that it was the capital, the seat of government, and home to most State Government departments, Federal Government departments based in Tasmania, the Reserve Bank and major companies with head offices in the State.⁷⁸ The

⁷⁶Advocate, June 30, 1987, 6.

⁷⁷Mercury, May 7, 1986, 8.

⁷⁸ibid.

Mercury's arguments in favour of Hobart as the site of the proposed bank's headquarters were almost identical to those expressed by the SBT and other southern-based business and community interests.

However there was a perceptible change in the Mercury's attitude throughout the dispute. While it continued to support the concept of a merger in its editorials, the justification for its stance seemed to alter. For example, in early editorials it said that it would have, "enormous potential to assist with the development of Tasmania."⁷⁹ In later editorials the emphasis was on the justification of Hobart's claims, with little attention being paid to the broader questions. In one editorial it even called on Southern-based Members of Parliament to revolt against the Government's decision to share the bank's functions between Launceston and Hobart.⁸⁰ In another it warned that if Hobart businesspeople did not push the capital city's case strongly enough the Government could interpret their lack of response as being tantamount to

⁷⁹ibid.

⁸⁰Sunday Tasmanian, June 28, 1987, 2.

tacit support for a Northern-based bank.^{8 1}

Throughout the dispute, the Mercury argued that parochial considerations should be ignored. It said that the decisions should be based on commercial considerations alone. However it appears to have been just as guilty of pushing the parochial barrow as the other two newspapers. It argued that the bank should be headquartered in Hobart because it was the State's commercial heart; the Examiner made the same claim about Launceston. Whereas the Advocate claimed that the decision to share the bank's functions made the merged bank "... more relevant to the Coast,"^{8 2} the Mercury appeared preoccupied only with its relevance to Hobart. While urging Southern MPs to revolt against the Government on the one hand, it claimed that the decision allowed "Northern members of the Government to keep some sort of misplaced faith with the electors", on the other.^{8 3} As if that was not what it was urging Southern members to do! While decrying the parochialism which the dispute had engendered, and

^{8 1}Mercury, April 10, 1987, 8.

^{8 2}Advocate, June 30, 1987, 6.

^{8 3}Mercury, June 9, 1987, 8.

running editorial headlines saying that "Tasmania doesn't need two-headed bank jokes",⁸⁴ it proceeded to publish a front page cartoon which perpetuated such an idea.⁸⁵

Not only did the Mercury criticise the decision to share head office functions and base the chief executive in Launceston for two years, but when it appeared unlikely that the SBT would be a part of the proposed State bank, it also condemned the State Government for its handling of the dispute. Initially it accused the Government of being tardy in becoming involved in the dispute. Some months later it adopted a more conciliatory approach when it said that the banks' request that the Government break the impasse between them had placed it in a no-win situation. Between November 1986 and April 1987 it had gone from accusing the Government of procrastination to acknowledging its patience. At that time the Mercury commented:

His [the Premier's] reluctance to become embroiled at this early stage in the heated politics of parochialism is understandable, but it would not surprise if the final decision on a base for the bank is forced on the Government.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ibid.

⁸⁵Mercury, June 6, 1987, 1.

⁸⁶Mercury, April 10, 1987, 8.

When the Government did make its interim decision, the Mercury, along with the SBT and many southern-based interest groups, denounced it. The Mercury accused the Government of:

... chipping away at Hobart's capital city status and carting the pieces to Launceston. The pieces in many instances have been small and barely noticeable, but they are slowly and surreptitiously adding up into a sizeable chunk which, if the trend continues, will result in the shift of power becoming institutionalized.⁸⁷

Thus it can be seen that while the Mercury looked on the State Bank dispute as having the potential to erode Hobart's traditional role as the capital, the Examiner and the Advocate saw it as another example of the capital city seeking to draw all functions towards it. These sentiments were also evident in cartoons published in both the Examiner and the Mercury.

CARTOONS

Both the Mercury and the Examiner freely used cartoons to present their views on this issue. The Advocate did not use cartoons as such, however it did

⁸⁷Sunday Tasmanian, June 28, 1987, 2.

illustrate one feature article with a map of Tasmania divided by barbed wire at the 42nd parallel to indicate the battle lines between the North and South caused by this dispute.⁸⁸ On another occasion it showed both bank logos in the form: LBS + SBT = ?⁸⁹ This accompanied an article in which the writer questioned the outcome of the proposed merger.

The Mercury ran 9 cartoons on this issue. As relations between the banks and then between the SBT and the Government and later between the Government and the Mercury soured, so the cartoons became more vitriolic. The first two Mercury cartoons concentrated exclusively on the impact parochialism was having on plans to establish the proposed State bank. The first showed a southward push by soldiers wearing LBS helmets being thwarted by a brick wall at Oatlands.⁹⁰ On the southern side of the wall SBT soldiers were prepared to retaliate should those wearing LBS colors manage to

⁸⁸ Advocate, June 17, 1987, 6.

⁸⁹ Advocate, May 8, 1986, 6.

⁹⁰ Mercury, May 7, 1986, 2.

breach or scale the wall. This cartoon highlights the historical significance of the 42nd parallel of latitude as the dividing line between North and South; how over the years it had become a psychological barrier - one which has defied attempts to unify the State.

The second cartoon showed a ship sinking after having struck an iceberg.⁹¹ The iceberg was labelled 'parochialism' and the ship the S.S. State Bank. In the stern of the ship were two men, one representing the SBT, the other the LBS. The representative of the SBT was sitting in a chair marked 'Head Office'. While everyone else was abandoning the sinking ship, these two gentlemen were quarrelling over who should be sitting in the seat. There were two themes in this cartoon. The first was the ability of parochialism to scuttle the plans to form a State bank; and the second the intransigence of both major parties to the discussions.

Another of the early Mercury cartoons showed a truck labelled 'State Bank' being driven towards

⁹¹Mercury, September 6, 1986, 2.

Launceston on the Midland Highway.⁹² One of the truck's wheels, this one labelled 'SBT', had fallen off and was rolling back down the highway towards Hobart. The comment from within the cabin as the disabled truck continued on its way was, "let it go". The apparent message is that, within the North they believed the bank could proceed without the SBT, even if it was to be in a less healthy state.

The Mercury highlighted its feelings towards the announcement that head office functions would be divided between Launceston and Hobart for two years with a cartoon showing a two headed bank teller.⁹³ Above the teller's head was the new bank's logo: "LBSBT, Tasmania's two headed bank."⁹⁴ One head questioned whether you wanted to make a deposit, the other if you intended to make a withdrawal. The Mercury gave its feelings further weight by running the cartoon on page one, in conjunction with its lead story.

During June 1987, when the Government was endeavouring to keep all parties talking, the Mercury

⁹²Sunday Tasmanian, August 2, 1987, 2.

⁹³Mercury, June 6, 1987, 1.

⁹⁴ibid.

ran a cartoon showing the door to the Premier's office.⁹⁵ Converging on the office were two groups of businessmen, identified by their respective placards, one saying Northern bank, the other Southern bank. There were signs of fighting after they had entered the Premier's office. The final sketch showed an embattled Premier emerge from his office calling for the "Blood bank". Under the door had oozed a pool of blood and behind him, jammed in the door, were various human limbs.

The Mercury's preoccupation with the Premier's role in this issue continued in a July 1, 1987 cartoon.⁹⁶ It showed the Premier, Robin Gray, dressed in a uniform out of the American Civil War and astride a horse. In his hand was a lighted torch. Before him was a Southern Bank burning furiously and at his side was a man identified as a Southerner. He was holding a Liberal voting card in his hand and asking the Premier for a match. The symbolism in this cartoon was particularly strong. There was a big N for North on the Premier's hat and there was the suggestion that he

⁹⁵Mercury, June 30, 1987, 2.

⁹⁶Mercury, July 1, 1987, 2.

was out to destroy the SBT. There was also the suggestion in the lead-up to the Federal election on July 11, that the Government's handling of the State bank issue would cost it votes. It continued this theme the day after the election with another cartoon featuring Robin Gray.⁹⁷ On this occasion he looked as if he had been in a fight; he was carrying a pig (the State bank) under his arm. At his feet was a body, with a 'Denison' tag attached to it. The finishing touch was a sheepish Premier saying, "don't look at me," as if the State bank issue was not the cause of the Liberal Party's loss in Denison.⁹⁸

While parochialism was an underlying theme in all Mercury State bank cartoons, it was central to the final two. One showed a State Bank which had been constructed on a huge low-loader so that it could be transported around.⁹⁹ There were a number of signs on the bank. One read: "North or South we'll close your mouth", a second: "Deals on wheels", and a third: "Dial

⁹⁷Sunday Tasmanian, July 12, 1987, 3.

⁹⁸ibid.

⁹⁹Mercury, July 15, 1987, 2.

a dollar".¹⁰⁰ Among the bystanders were Robin Gray and another man who was apparently responsible for the concept. The latter said: "Well, I thought if they can do it with pizza - why not!"¹⁰¹ The Premier thinking to himself: "I like it", as if a mobile bank was the answer to his parochial problems.¹⁰² The final cartoon, which appeared in the Mercury after the SBT had decided to withdraw from negotiations, showed two counterfeiters, looking at a newspaper which had as its front page lead: "State Bank in North".¹⁰³ One counterfeiter retorted to the other: "We're ruined, Inky. Gray's come up with a bank note that self destructs south of Oatlands."¹⁰⁴

It can be seen, therefore, that the Mercury's State bank cartoons contained two basic themes. The first was parochialism and the impact it had on negotiations. The second was the Premier's role in the dispute. Inextricably linked with this was the underlying theme that the Premier in fact supported the North against the South and, as such, was partially

¹⁰⁰ibid

¹⁰¹ibid.

¹⁰²ibid.

¹⁰³Mercury, August 1, 1987, 2.

¹⁰⁴ibid.

responsible for the parochial clashes between Hobart and Launceston and their various representatives and organisations.

The Examiner, on the other hand, adopted a different approach with its cartoons. Its first cartoon appeared on the day State Government officials confirmed that legislation would be introduced to break the impasse between the LBS and the SBT. The cartoon showed a person holding an LBS briefcase disappearing through a trapdoor at the State bank.¹⁰⁵ Leaning over the counter was the Premier, saying: "We do try to discourage withdrawals."¹⁰⁶ Its reaction to the announcement that the SBT had pulled out of negotiations was appreciably stronger. The cartoon featured an SBT armoured van rushing away from a State bank.¹⁰⁷ The van had pulled the handy teller out of the wall. Whether the Examiner considered the SBT's contribution to the new bank could be measured in terms of money contained in a handy teller is open to debate. The fact that customers were left standing, looking at

¹⁰⁵Examiner, October 1, 1986, 2.

¹⁰⁶ibid.

¹⁰⁷Examiner, June 12, 1987, 1.

a hole in the wall where the handy teller had been, may be indicative of the message it was seeking to convey, that the SBT was leaving people in the lurch.

Certainly that was the theme of a later cartoon, which portrayed the Premier, Robin Gray, dressed as a minister of religion, standing at the altar with the bride (the LBS) and the bridesmaid (the TPBS).¹⁰⁸ The reader is left with the distinct impression that the SBT (in the role of the groom) had a last minute change of mind and left the other partners waiting. This cartoon, by portraying the SBT as the groom, also picks up on another theme the Examiner had pursued, particularly in its editorials - that the SBT was the suitor. It often maintained that the SBT had more to gain from the proposed merger than did the LBS.

The Examiner continued to support the concept of a State bank throughout the dispute. One cartoon showed the State bank as a large sow being suckled by two piglets - one identified as the LBS, the other as the TPBS.¹⁰⁹ A third piglet (the SBT) was flying

¹⁰⁸Sunday Examiner, July 5, 1987, 11.

¹⁰⁹Examiner, July 2, 1987, 4.

through the air, having just been rejected by the sow. This cartoon, which was published the week after the SBT's decision to officially withdraw from merger talks, portrays the State bank as bigger and stronger than the individual banks and the TPBS. Its penultimate cartoon on the State bank in the period studied, continued to suggest that a bank with the SBT as a partner would be stronger than one comprising just the LBS and the TPBS. It showed a man identified as the SBT jumping out of a window at the Tasmania Bank.¹¹⁰ As he fell past each floor, people could be seen with their arms outstretched, trying to catch him. All were calling out "no!"¹¹¹

While it continued to support the concept of a merger between the two banks and the TPBS, the Examiner could not resist one slap at the parochial fervour which the dispute had evoked in and around Hobart. It responded to the SBT's announcement that it would begin a major advertising campaign to attract new business with a cartoon showing a man using an SBT Easy Bank.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Examiner, July 31, 1987, 2.

¹¹¹ibid.

¹¹²Examiner, August 2, 1987, 10.

As he was about to key in his request, a gun barrel popped out of the automatic teller and a voice asked him to produce his, "pin number AND oath of allegiance."¹¹³ However, it displayed its own parochial colours as well. In the Letters to the Editor column one day it ran a cartoon entitled "Sunrise in Lonny" to accompany a letter which hailed Launceston as the State's commercial capital.¹¹⁴

CONCLUSION

The State bank dispute provides an interesting study in conflict reporting and regionalism. It confirms the general proposition that Tasmanian newspapers consider conflicts of a regional nature to be newsworthy. Furthermore, that by their coverage of this issue the newspapers have helped to promote and maintain parochial attitudes within the State.

In their coverage of this dispute the three newspapers adopted stances which can only be described as regional. The Mercury's stance was no different to that expounded by the SBT, the Hobart Chamber of

¹¹³ibid.

¹¹⁴Examiner, July 16, 1987, 6.

Commerce, the Keep Southern Tasmania Alive Committee and any number of other Southern interest groups. Likewise with the Examiner and the obvious similarities between the arguments expressed in its editorials with those propounded by the LBS, the TPBS, the Launceston Chamber of Commerce and even the Association of North Western Chambers of Commerce. The fact that such distinctly regional groupings as the chambers of commerce had become involved in the dispute was a clear indicator of the emotions which had been aroused. There were other important indicators too of the emotions at play and of the clear link between regionalism and this issue. These included Geoff Davis' decision to resign from the Government and the divisions this dispute caused within the Liberal Party. Southern antipathy towards the Government and the problems this caused within the Liberal Party were highlighted by the Keep Southern Tasmania Alive Committee's campaign against Liberal candidates in the 1987 Federal election. It did not matter that Southern Liberal candidates, including sitting members, supported Hobart's claims to the proposed bank's head office functions.

The newspapers' stances on this issue were most evident in their editorials and cartoons. All three were reasonably balanced in their presentation of

general news State bank stories. It is obvious that while the Advocate adopted the role of observer and commentator, both the Mercury and the Examiner sought more active roles - the former through its on-going and much publicized stoush with the Premier, the latter through its preparedness to take the SBT to task, even to the extent of responding to Letters to the Editor.

Returning to the two dichotomies advanced in the introduction, this issue helps to illustrate two aspects of the relationship between the media and parochialism in Tasmania. It shows the support for parochialism in addressing political issues and illustrates the leadership role the media can play in promoting parochialism. With regard to the first dichotomy, it is possible to draw a direct connection between the newspapers' coverage of this issue and the perceived impact that a favourable decision would have on their region. In relation to the second dichotomy, newspaper coverage of the State bank dispute appears to support the proposition that a connection can be drawn between conflict reporting and the importance attached to the issue by the media. A number of factors point to the existence of such a relationship. They include newspaper coverage of the issue as determined by criteria of measurement and placement. The criteria of

measurement were: (1) the number of articles devoted to the issue, and (2) the coverage as determined by column centimetres. Prominence was measured by the positioning of articles within the newspaper according to two criteria: (1) the page number and (2) its placement on the page under an interpretation of the Gutenberg diagram.

While the newsworthiness of this issue in a general sense is confirmed by the large number of articles published in all three newspapers, its significance from a regional perspective is highlighted by the greater coverage of the more specific questions in the Examiner and the Mercury. These were the questions that: (1) dealt with the decision to split head office functions between Launceston and Hobart for two years, and (2) sought to determine whether the newspapers' stances could be interpreted as regionally biased or not? It is significant from a regional viewpoint that the Examiner published the highest percentage of articles supporting the division of head office functions, the location of the chief executive in Launceston for two years and the appointment of a Hobart-based chairman. While less than 21 percent of all articles (60 of 288) supported this proposition, 73 percent of those (44 of 60) appeared in the Examiner.

Equally significant from a regional perspective is the fact that the Mercury published 53.08 percent of articles opposing the division of head office responsibilities between the two cities, thereby highlighting its commitment to the South.

While the State bank dispute was essentially North-South in orientation, its general appeal was confirmed by the fact that all three newspapers gave it prominence. It is significant that more than 65 percent of State bank articles were published on pages one to six inclusive. The newsworthiness of this issue was confirmed by the fact that the Advocate published 84 percent of its State bank articles on these pages - well above the Mercury (68 percent) and the Examiner (65 percent). A further indicator of its newsworthiness is the fact that both the Examiner and the Mercury published more than 60 percent of articles opposing their respective regional positions on these major news pages. For example, the Mercury published 71.4 percent of articles supporting the division of head office functions (five of seven) on pages one and four. The Examiner, on the other hand, published 62 percent of articles opposed to the division of head office

functions (13 of 21) on pages one to five. Thus it can be seen that stories of high regional interest receive prominence, irrespective of whether or not the papers supported the regional slant of the story.

The newspapers also enhanced the articles prospects of being read by placing them prominently within the page. The fact that more than 58 percent of all articles began in the first quadrant - the top left hand corner of the page - tends to give weight to Arnold's Gutenberg Theory of readership. The higher percentage of Mercury and Examiner articles which began in this quadrant (71.76 and 58.51 percent respectively), compared with the Advocate (41.17 percent) is significant and reflects the greater involvement of the Northern and Southern regions in this dispute. Despite beginning a lower percentage of its articles in quadrant one, the Advocate did show a preference for the top left hand quadrant. Furthermore that this, when viewed in conjunction with the positioning of articles according to page numbering, is a fair test of newsworthiness.

Thus it is suggested that the State bank issue provided a good test of regional conflict reporting.

Furthermore, that the three newspapers, through their editorial opinions, the coverage they gave to this issue, and their positioning of general news State bank articles did seek an agenda-setting role. While it could be said that they were reasonably balanced in their reporting of general news State bank articles, the distinctly regional stance adopted in their respective editorial columns, added to the prominence accorded to the articles within the newspaper, would suggest that regional conflicts are considered highly newsworthy. Furthermore, by giving such disputes prominence, they could be said to be promoting them. By so doing they are playing an agenda-setting role.

CHAPTER 4

STATEWIDE FOOTBALL - PAROCHIALISM ANSWERED OR INFLAMED?

Historically, Tasmania has been served by three major football competitions, all regionally-based. They were the Tasmanian Australian National Football League (TANFL), based in the South, the Northern Tasmanian Football Association (NTFA), in the North and the North Western Football Union (NWFU, in the North-West. Over the years the competition between the three leagues has been intense, both on the field and off. At various times all enjoyed success in the intra-state clashes which had become a feature of the Tasmanian football calendar. All three have been fiercely independent and have been closely associated with their respective regions, with on-field success providing a fillip to regional pride.

In 1985 the TANFL sought to break down the regional affiliations when it proposed that a Statewide football competition be established, involving teams from each of the three major leagues. It argued that such a competition was necessary if the State hoped to arrest the decline in the standard and popularity of

Tasmanian football and intended fielding a team in the proposed National Football League. The proposal was not new. Plans for a combined league had been mooted at different times over the years, but with little action. In 1980 the NTFA and the NWFU had even combined forces for a Greater Northern Football League (GNFL). However that was short-lived, lasting only two seasons before the two leagues reverted back to their own autonomous competitions.

The TANFL's proposal received a mixed reaction from the three leagues, the communities affected and the media. This chapter seeks to show that the statewide football issue is further evidence of the rivalry that exists between Tasmania's three regions - that it provides further grist for the regional media mills.

In covering this issue, it is not possible to consider the State league proposal in isolation. Any analysis must also include the formation of the Northern Tasmanian Football League - a new competition resulting from the amalgamation of the NTFA and the NWFU. This competition differed from the old GNFL which allowed for separate regional finals and separate

regional administrations. The new league, which was forced on the Northern and North Western competitions by the formation of the State league, operated as a single entity. In many respects it too was an attempt to overcome entrenched regional attachments.

The TANFL's plan was to establish a league drawing teams from each of the three regions. It commissioned a former head of the Premier's Department, Nick Evers, to conduct a feasibility study. Evers recommended that a ten team competition be established, with five teams from the South, four from the North and one from the North-West.¹ He suggested that two of the six Southern teams - Hobart and North Hobart should merge to provide a strong fifth team; that Northern teams North Launceston and East Launceston should amalgamate and that the North-West Coast enter a representative team.²

The proposal produced an immediate outcry, with Hobart and North Hobart saying that they would not contemplate a merger.³ Reactions from the NTFA and the

¹Mercury, September 26, 1985, 42.

²ibid.

³ibid.

NWFU were mixed. The President of the NTFA, Bill Luck, welcomed the concept of a State league, however he warned that it faced, "many of the parochial problems which have plagued Statewide plans in the past", and that it had the potential to destroy the NTFA.⁴ He did concede though that, "the loss of the NTFA may be the price we have to pay."⁵ That is, the establishment of a State league may be at the cost of the NTFA.

Evers recommended that five of the NTFA's eight clubs be involved in the competition. However Luck suggested that an eight team competition, with four teams from the South and two each from the North and North-West would be more equitable and more accurately reflect the State's population distribution.⁶ While Luck favoured the establishment of a State league, the President of the NWFU, Rex Batt, was wary of the proposal. He doubted whether the Union could organise its own competition and participate in a State league as well.⁷ In fact he warned that the decision may have

⁴Examiner, September 27, 1985, 47.

⁵Advocate, September 26, 1985, 32.

⁶Mercury, October 7, 1985, 19.

⁷Examiner, October 24, 1985, 40.

been made 12 months too early.⁸ The general manager of the NWFU, Don Younger, also argued against the proposal, claiming that it should not be introduced at the expense of the existing leagues.⁹ He warned that the TANFL's plans would weaken the NWFU.¹⁰

The TANFL moved to appease the two Southern clubs when the Ever's Report was discussed at a board meeting in early October, 1985. Instead of adopting the 5/4/1 split suggested by Evers, it decided to include all six Southern teams and to reduce the number of Northern teams invited to participate.¹¹ The TFL opted for a ten team competition as recommended by Evers, but with just two teams from the NTFA and two from the NWFU. TFL President John Bennett dismissed criticism of the decision not to force a merger between the two Southern clubs. "Knowing the opposition of the clubs to it, we didn't even bother to put it to the vote," he said.¹²

⁸ibid.

⁹Examiner, October 25, 1985, 52.

¹⁰ibid

¹¹Mercury, October 6, 1985, 1.

¹²ibid.

The TFL's intransigence provoked condemnatory headlines in both the Examiner and the Advocate, with the former decrying the decision as, "State League TANFL style",¹³ and the latter with a more subdued, "South dominates State roster."¹⁴ Both newspapers ran articles questioning the TFL's motives. Sources within and outside of the NTFA and the NWFU also questioned whether the TFL was firmly committed to a truly statewide competition, or whether it was merely seeking to expand its own competition at the expense of the other two leagues. These fears were constantly aired throughout the debate, despite frequent denials by the TFL. John Bennett's response was to compare Tasmania with Victoria. He claimed that the State could not justify having 23 senior football teams when Victoria was struggling to support 12 in the VFL.¹⁵

Bennett argued that Tasmanian football was destined for "mediocrity" unless the number of senior football teams was reduced.¹⁶ He said that this was

¹³ Examiner, October 6, 1985, 1.

¹⁴ Advocate, October 7, 1985, 32.

¹⁵ Examiner, August 10, 1985, 56.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

the only way Tasmanian football could be improved.¹⁷ While the State's football administrators agreed that the standard needed to be upgraded, traditionally relations between the leagues had mirrored those between other regional organisations - there was a keen sense of competition and a strong wish to survive.

Despite its wish to have the competition up and running in time for the 1986 season, the TANFL delayed making an announcement on which NTFA and NWFU clubs would be invited to participate in the competition. There were a number of reasons for this. Neither the NTFA nor the NWFU had formally endorsed the TANFL's proposal. This brought an ultimatum from John Bennett. In mid November 1985 - four months after the TANFL's plans had been unveiled and just four months before the 1986 season was due to kick off - he warned that the NTFA and NWFU had three days to endorse the competition or the TANFL would begin proceedings to have them relegated to junior status.¹⁸ He said that if their support was not forthcoming, Northern teams could still be invited to participate in an expanded TANFL

¹⁷Advocate, November 1, 1985, 2.

¹⁸Advocate, November 18, 1985, 1.

competition.¹⁹ While the support was forthcoming, the TANFL's attitude had further undermined relations between the three football bodies.

The TANFL was also hindered by the inability of NWFU clubs Burnie and Cooebee to agree to the terms of a merger. The clubs had intended to combine to compete in the State league, but disagreement over Cooebee's financial position prevented an early agreement. In December, the TANFL announced that it would give the clubs more time to effect a merger, saying that the NWFU teams would not participate in the proposed State league until the 1987 season.²⁰

Once again, the TANFL was condemned, the critics arguing that the decision not to have a full Statewide competition in the first year confirmed earlier claims that it was only interested in propping up its own roster.²¹ The two NTFA teams invited to participate in the State league - North Launceston and East Launceston - and the Devonport Football Club from the NWFU, all confirmed allegiance to and support of

¹⁹Examiner, November 18, 1985, 36.

²⁰Mercury, December 4, 1985, 52.

²¹Advocate, December 4, 1985, 44.

their regional competitions. Both North Launceston and East Launceston agreed to field senior, reserves and Under 19 teams in the NTFA and Devonport announced that it would only participate in the State league on three conditions. They were: (1) that it could continue to field teams in the NWFU roster; (2) could retain its affiliation with the NWFU; and (3) a team from the Burnie area was included in the Statewide competition.²²

These promises produced tremendous difficulties for the North Launceston and East Launceston clubs and subsequently for the NTFA. Both clubs, but particularly East Launceston, which had not enjoyed much on-field success in recent years, had difficulty meeting their commitments to both competitions. They had difficulty adjusting to the higher standard of play in the State league and also in fielding teams in the local competitions. Other NTFA clubs were experiencing problems too, with the media reporting that the City South Club was not only having trouble fielding teams, but was in a parlous financial state as well.²³

²²Advocate. November 9, 1985. 48.

²³Examiner. March 19, 1986. 56.

The full implications of the State league proposal struck the NTFA mid season when the possibility of a merger between East Launceston and City South was raised. The NTFA opposed the merger, claiming that it would destabilise the competition, creating a bye and undermining attempts to restructure the Association after a troubled 1985 season. East Launceston condemned the NTFA executive, claiming that the club had "been under siege" from the Association since announcing its intention to join the State league.²⁴ It also accused the NTFA of being scared of a "super team" emerging through the amalgamation of East and City.²⁵ The NTFA could not win. Earlier in the year it had been accused of "contributing to the rape" of the NTFA by not supporting non-league clubs.²⁶ The TANFL added to its woes in April when it announced that the two Northern State league clubs would be withdrawn from the NTFA in 1987.²⁷

²⁴Examiner, May 16, 1986, 44.

²⁵Examiner, May 9, 1986, 44.

²⁶Examiner, February 11, 1986, 44.

²⁷Examiner, April 26, 1986, 72.

In May the NTFA rescinded an earlier decision not to allow the East Launceston/City South merger to proceed.²⁸ However this decision, coupled with the TANFL's announcement that North Launceston and East Launceston would not be competing in the NTFA in 1987, meant that it had to find alternatives for its own competition after 1986. With the survival of Northern football at stake, it approached the NWFU with a proposal to establish a combined Northern league.

The NWFU was receptive to the NTFA's overtures. While its immediate future was not in doubt, the Union too felt threatened by the prospect of a State league. In fact it had adopted a firmer approach than the NTFA in dealing with State league hopefuls. It argued that clubs would not be able to divide their loyalties between the Union and the State league. The Union saw the proposed combined league as an opportunity to strengthen Northern football. However, a number of NWFU clubs were not as supportive of the proposal as the Union executive. Smithton, which is based in the far North-West, and Wynyard cited travelling as one of the

²⁸Examiner, April 26, 1986, 72. On May 5 the NTFA had voted 8/2 not to allow the merger.

major obstacles to the new competition.²⁹ A spokesman for Smithton said that his club would have difficulty fielding a reserves team because of the low financial rewards for players and the cost and inconvenience of travel.³⁰

However there were deeper, parochial objections too. Within the NWFU it was believed that the Union should be the senior body in any negotiations, given that it was in a more secure position than the NTFA. Despite these concerns, the NTFA, the NWFU and the media believed that the new league would be formalised. The NTFA gained approval for the merger from its clubs and travelled to Devonport for an NWFU meeting which it expected to produce the same result.

However, in a major blunder, a number of delegates misunderstood the motion and voted against the merger.³¹ A surprised NTFA delegation stormed out of the meeting and returned to Launceston, believing that the NWFU had destroyed any prospect of a

²⁹Advocate, September 4, 1986. 1-2.

³⁰Advocate, February 28, 1987, 44.

³¹Examiner, September 4, 1986, 1.

combined league.³² The decision not only undermined relations between the NTFA and the NWFU, but also exposed tensions within the Union. Ulverstone President Wayne King said that as a result of the decision his club would make an application to join the State league. He said:

We didn't throw our hat into the ring for the Statewide competition a few months ago because we believed the Northern league would have been an equal ... I'm disgusted at the parochial attitudes of some clubs who seem only concerned at their future instead of looking at improving football.³³

His East Devonport counterpart, Ron Dell, agreed. He said that, "some clubs are too self interested instead of trying to provide an alternative and attractive competition for our players."³⁴ However a Wynyard delegate was firmly opposed to the competition, saying that he had voted against the new league after a survey of players and supporters found that they would not support it. "They are the backbone of the club and Wynyard prefers to stay in a regional North-West competition," he said.³⁵

³²Advocate, September 4, 1986, 1.

³³Examiner, September 4, 1986, 1.

³⁴ibid.

³⁵ibid.

Realising that the majority of clubs supported the proposed combined league, the NWFU scheduled another executive meeting, at which the earlier decision was overturned.^{3*} It re-commenced talks with the NTFA and a new competition - the Northern Tasmanian Football League (NTFL) was born. To appease all parochial interests, the new competition was headquartered at Devonport - the mid point between Scottsdale and Smithton - the two outlying clubs at either end of the expanded region. It also satisfied those people who were concerned that the new competition was simply a take-over of the NWFU by the NTFA.

Thus it can be seen that there were a number of similarities between the formation of the State league and the establishment of the NTFL. In both instances there was considerable disquiet about the motives of one or other party - the TANFL during the formation of the State league and the NTFA in the creation of a combined Northern league. Both were accused of promoting the new league to prop up their own ailing competitions.

^{3*}Advocate, September 4, 1986. 1.

There was also considerable opposition to the two competitions from clubs as well. For example, despite the fact that the majority of NTFA clubs had expressed interest in the State league when it was first mooted, a number had - like those NWFU clubs when asked to vote on the combined Northern competition - expressed their doubts about its viability. Longford President Bruce Exton warned of the disruption to the NTFA and its clubs if the Statewide competition failed after a few years.³⁷ Before the combined Northern league had even been mooted his club had indicated that it would consider joining the NWFU if the State league was adopted. In fact the Advocate reported that both Longford and Deloraine had written to the NWFU with such a proposal in mind.³⁸ They were not alone. Scottsdale had earlier indicated that it would not participate in the State league because most of its home games would have to be played in Launceston.³⁹ It also rejected the prospect of the club playing curtain-raisers to State league matches. Club delegate Geoff

³⁷Examiner, October 3, 1985, 56.

³⁸Advocate, October 4, 1985, 28.

³⁹Examiner, September 26, 1985, 2.

Lidgerwood said that the club would not entertain such a possibility. He said:

We will not play second fiddle to a Statewide roster ... we've won nine flags out of the past twenty and we've proven ourselves a top team. Scottsdale's senior team plays at 2pm on Saturday.⁴⁰

There were differences too. While the NTFA and the NWFU moved quickly to settle any disagreements so that the transition could be achieved with the minimum of fuss, the TANFL appeared oblivious to the impact of its decisions on the other competitions. Despite claims that players were being "poached" from non-league clubs, the TANFL refused to impose a moratorium on transfers.⁴¹ Instead, it introduced a system whereby footballers did not need a transfer from their local club to play State league football.⁴² However players wishing to transfer back to their local club from a State league club needed a clearance. Individual State league and NTFL clubs had arranged free trade agreements, but the TFL appeared to be doing little to prevent the Northern clubs from being stripped of

⁴⁰Examiner, October 30, 1985, 52.

⁴¹Examiner, May 27, 1986, 60.

⁴²ibid.

players. In fact David Smith made the TFL's intentions clear when he said that his objective was to:

... have the best 200 players in this State playing Statewide this year. If we don't, then we are really only kidding ourselves that we've improved our football standard at all.⁴³

This attitude was also reflected in a league decision not to roster the 1987 elimination final on the North-West Coast after the Burnie Hawks (the re-named Cooee team) had secured fifth spot on the ladder in its first year in the competition.⁴⁴ The TFL ignored pleas from two North-West politicians - one a minister, the other the Speaker of the House of Assembly - that the game be held on the Coast. It even turned down the offer of \$2,000 and advertising space from the Examiner.⁴⁵ Instead it argued that the decision was based on financial considerations - that it would cost \$12,500 to send five Southern teams to the North-West Coast as opposed to the \$2,700 to transport the Burnie Hawks to Hobart.⁴⁶

⁴³Mercury, March 5, 1987, 36.

⁴⁴Examiner, August 23, 1987, 10.

⁴⁵ibid.

⁴⁶Examiner, August 18, 1987, 32.

The reaction against the decision underlined the ill-feeling Northern football followers still harboured towards the TFL. The Editor of the Examiner, Michael Courtney, took up the regional cudgels and decried the decision, saying that it had, "exacerbated North-South tensions, as well as making a mockery of its 'statewide' title."⁴⁷ He said:

the outcome of the TFL's parochialism will be that its 1987 gains in the North and the North-West will be eroded to some extent and next season it will have to work harder (spend more?) to regain lost ground.⁴⁸

Certainly that is the impression to be gained from Letters to the Editor published in both the Examiner and the Advocate. The majority of letters were supportive of the State league; a small number were critical and quite a few said that the NTFA and/or the NWFU would suffer as a result. Many of the letters proposed alternative plans, the most popular being a 12 team statewide competition - four from each of the three regions. One even suggested that a statewide competition be conducted on alternate weekends, made up

⁴⁷Examiner, August 23, 1987, 10.

⁴⁸ibid.

of 12 so-called super teams.⁴⁹ The proposal was that the teams draw players from domestic clubs; that this would enable all outstanding footballers to participate in the new competition; that travelling would be reduced and that the regional leagues would be preserved. Another argued, however, that Tasmania's population was not large enough to support a State league and that the introduction of such a competition could, "drive people away from the game."⁵⁰

A deep regional commitment was evident in most letters. Many writers expressed concern that the regional competitions and their constituent clubs would lose their identities. One warned that the value of a Statewide competition would be doubtful, "... if it destroyed one country club or one local team."⁵¹ Another recognised the need for change, and also that the costs had to be weighed against the benefits:

There is no doubt that Union football would lose some of its identity and some compulsory changes would have to be made. However the Union stands to lose a lot more if the Statewide competition goes

⁴⁹Examiner, November 7, 1985, 6.

⁵⁰Examiner, October 17, 1985, 33.

⁵¹Advocate, October 30, 1985, 6.

ahead with the six TANFL clubs and four NTFA clubs," he warned.⁵²

A certain degree of bitterness had crept into the debate and this is illustrated by the comments of a former NTFA President, who accused the TFL of orchestrating a, "... campaign to destroy Northern and North-Western football."⁵³ His comments also highlight the traditional enmity between the different leagues. Outrage at the TFL's actions and the parochialism such a dispute can arouse are summed up in the following quotations:

(1) To prevent the blackmail of Tasmanian football, I would suggest that the NTFA and the NWFU get together and form their very own statewide league and thus retain their own identity, grounds and, above all, their loyal supporters."⁵⁴ and;

(2) Launceston, geographically and for administrative purposes, should be ideal for headquarters of the league, but this will never happen.⁵⁵

Very few of the major players in this debate escaped criticism from the letter writers. The TANFL was accused of only accepting clubs into the league

⁵² Advocate, November 4, 1985, 14.

⁵³ Advocate, February 21, 1987, 50.

⁵⁴ Examiner, October 25, 1985, 6.

⁵⁵ Examiner, November 1 1985, 51.

which it believed Southern teams could defeat.⁵⁶ John Bennett was labelled as "dictatorial and arrogant".⁵⁷ The NWFU was accused of ignoring the interests of its players and the NTFA of disregarding the well-being of its clubs.⁵⁸ Reaction to the proposed Northern league was just as critical. Not all writers, particularly those from the North-West Coast, believed it would be the panacea the NTFA and NWFU were seeking.⁵⁹

THE NEWSPAPERS - A PASSIVE ROLE?

While community response to the formation of the two leagues was relatively easy to judge, that of the three newspapers was more difficult to ascertain. The time span involved - in excess of two years from the announcement of the feasibility study to the end of the first genuinely Statewide season - and the number of articles written made the task appreciably more complex. In this case 563 articles and 26 editorials covering the period from June 1985 to September 1988

⁵⁶Advocate, November 5, 1985, 15.

⁵⁷Advocate, November 29, 1985, 13.

⁵⁸Advocate, August 29, 1987, 40.

⁵⁹ibid.

were analyzed. The study involved 229 articles from the Examiner, 144 from the Mercury and 190 from the Advocate. Of the editorials, 11 were from the Examiner, seven from the Mercury and eight from the Advocate. There were also a small number of cartoons, mainly in the Mercury.

Each article was assessed with three questions in mind:

(1) Did it support the concept of a State league; one which would be representative of the three regions?;

(2) Would the NWFU or the NTFA and their respective regions benefit from or suffer as a result of such a State league being formed?;

(3) Did it support the concept of a combined Northern/North-Western football league to prevent the loss of first grade regionalised football in the North and North-West?

The results were tabulated according to whether the article supported, disagreed with/opposed, or was neutral in its attitude.

All three newspapers devoted a great deal of editorial space to this issue. The Examiner's coverage

was the most extensive, with 12,330 column centimetres, not including editorials and cartoons, followed by the Advocate (8,262 cms) and the Mercury (6,145 cms). All articles were individually measured and converted to 11 ems for ease and fairness of comparison. As a percentage of the total, the Examiner's 12,330 cms represents 46.11 percent, the Mercury's 6,145 cms 22.98 percent and the Advocate's 8,262 cms 30.89 percent. The 26,738 column centimetres in the three newspapers represented 109.07 page equivalents - 54.80 in the Examiner, 17.55 in the Mercury and 36.72 in the Advocate.

The study produced some interesting results. It was found that responses to all questions varied between the newspapers. For example, support for question one did not mean that questions two or three would receive the same level of acceptance. To provide a clear picture, the results have been tabulated for the individual newspapers. They were then compared on both a question by question and newspaper by newspaper basis.

Less than 45 percent of the 563 articles analyzed supported question one, that is the formation

of a State football league drawing teams from each of the three regions. The data showed that 250 articles (44.40 percent) supported its formation, 23 (4.08 percent) were opposed to it and 290 (51.50 percent) were neutral. Support was greatest in the Mercury and equally guarded in both Examiner and Advocate articles. Whereas 59.02 percent of Mercury articles supported the establishment of a State football league, only 39.73 percent of Examiner articles and 38.94 percent of Advocate articles did so. There were very few articles in any of the newspapers which openly opposed the State league. In fact there were just 15 in the Examiner (6.55 percent of total Examiner articles), five in the Advocate (2.63 percent) and two in the Mercury (2.08 percent). However there was a high percentage of neutral articles in both the Examiner and the Advocate, in fact 123 (53.70 percent) in the Examiner and 111 (58.41 percent) in the Advocate. Only 56 (38.88 percent) of Mercury articles were neutral. A similarity between the Examiner and the Advocate is revealed through a comparison of supportive and neutral articles in all three newspapers. In the Mercury, supportive articles outnumbered neutral articles by more than 2:1

- 85 to 38 (59.02 percent to 26.38 percent). Yet in both the Advocate and the Examiner there were appreciably more neutral articles than supportive articles. In fact, more than 50 percent of articles in both newspapers were neutral.

A monthly comparison revealed that support for the formation of a State league was strongest during two periods - the first was between September and November 1985 and the second between May and August 1986. The first period was some months after the proposal was first mooted and coincided with the end of the 1985 football season. There was a high level of support in Examiner articles at this time and this may be attributed to an awareness of the need for a solution to the NTFA's problems in 1985. The second period was during the 1986 season and coincided with the period of uncertainty over which North-West Coast teams would be invited to participate in the league in 1987. The only real discrepancy between the newspapers is in the period from February to April 1986, when there was almost no support for the proposition in the Advocate, yet reasonable support in both the Examiner and the Mercury. However the period May to August 1986

showed a significant turn-around, with supportive Advocate articles outnumbering those in both the Examiner and the Mercury in all months except July.

The results for question two are quite different and tend to reflect the concerns, particularly within the Northern and North-West regions, that formation of a State league would detrimentally affect the NTFA and/or the NWFU. Only 113 (20.07 percent) of the 563 articles supported the proposition that there would be benefits to the NTFA and the NWFU and their respective regions from a State league. There were a greater number of articles, 150 in fact (26.64 percent) which argued that there would be costs to the two Northern leagues. Three hundred articles (53.27 percent) were neutral.

The greatest number of articles to answer the question in the affirmative were in the Mercury. There were 39 Mercury articles (27.08 percent of 144) which said that formation of the State league would benefit the NTFA and the NWFU and their respective regions. While there were 31 and 43 supportive articles in the Examiner and Advocate respectively, these represented just 13.53 and 22.63 percent of their respective

totals. Almost 39 percent of Examiner articles (89 of the 229) said that formation of a State league would involve costs to the NTFA and/or the NWFU. Only 21.05 percent of Advocate articles (40 of 190) and 14.58 percent of Mercury articles (21 of 144) expressed similar concerns. All newspapers, particularly the Mercury and the Advocate, contained a high percentage of neutral articles. Whereas 47.59 percent of Examiner articles (109 of 229) could be termed neutral, 58.32 percent of Mercury articles and 56.31 percent of Advocate articles (84 and 107 articles respectively) were neutral.

The large number of neutral articles in the Advocate and the Mercury may be attributed to two factors: (1) the feeling on the North-West Coast that the NWFU would survive with or without a State league and (2) the possibility that Southern people were not overly concerned about the impact of such a league on either Northern competition, given that the TANFL would be the beneficiary. The first confirms comments made by Evers in his report to the TANFL when he said that the NWFU was the least interested of the three football bodies in the formation of a State league. This

indifference may also explain the dilly-dallying which preceded the acceptance of Union teams into the TFL in 1987. The second suggests a certain degree of arrogance and may be indicative of the parochialism which has played such a major role in Tasmanian football, both on the field and off.

Coverage of these issues on a monthly basis showed the similarities in the three newspapers' support of question two. The peaks and troughs tended to correlate, with only a small number of exceptions. The most obvious exception was in August 1986 when the Advocate published eight articles which said that the State league would benefit the Northern leagues and the regions, whereas the Mercury ran just one supportive article and the Examiner none. This may be explained by the fact that the NWFU was still awaiting entry to the league, whereas Northern and Southern teams were participating in the inaugural season.

There were differences, however, between the Examiner on the one hand and the Mercury and the Advocate on the other in the publication of articles which highlighted the cost and disadvantage of a State league to either the NTFA or the NWFU. There

were greater fluctuations in the Examiner's coverage, with a high number of articles one month, and virtually none the next. For example, there were thirteen articles in September 1985 and ten in October 1985 warning against the cost of the proposed league to the North and yet there were just three in November and one in December. Examiner coverage increased to nine articles during both January and February 1987, seven in March and ten in April before falling to two in May. Thereafter, its coverage of articles addressing this question was comparable to that of the other newspapers. The greater coverage this question received in the Examiner further points to the stranger concerns which formation of a State league evoked in the North.

A COMBINED NORTHERN LEAGUE

The apparent concern about the formation of a State league and its impact on the domestic football competition evident in Examiner articles can be translated to support for a combined NTFA/NWFU roster. The shortage of such articles in the Mercury, and the fact that the greater percentage of those which did appear were from the Examiner under the copy swapping

arrangement, again highlight the Southern preoccupation with the State league to the apparent exclusion of other, even associated, matters.

The formation of a combined league involving both the NTFA and the NWFU did not receive the same level of coverage as the State league, even though the two were inextricably linked. Considerable space was devoted to the mix-up caused when NWFU club delegates, who had intended to support the formation of such a league, misunderstood the motion and voted against it. Overall, however, the coverage was light. In fact, just 146 of the 563 articles (25.93 percent of the total) addressed this topic. Of those, 91 supported the formation of a Greater Northern competition. Surprisingly, given the NWFU voting mix-up and the fact that a number of Union clubs openly opposed the GNFL, the greatest number of pro-league articles were in the Advocate. There were 46 supportive articles, representing 50.54 percent, in the Advocate, with 37 (40.65 percent) in the Examiner and eight (8.79 percent) in the Mercury.

Only 2.13 percent of articles (12 out of a possible 563) were openly opposed to the merger of the

NTFA and the NWFU to form a combined league. There were five articles in each of the Examiner and the Advocate and two in the Mercury.

POSITIONING - A SIGN OF PAROCHIALISM?

The study found that all three newspapers gave State league or Greater Northern League articles considerable prominence. Almost 56 percent of Examiner articles (128 of 229) were either on the back page or on page one. This included 11 page one articles and 117 back page articles. The Mercury ran 60.41 percent of relevant articles on either the front or back pages and the Advocate 58.42 percent. This included 83 back page and four front page in the Mercury and 90 back page and 21 front page in the Advocate.

While all three tended to agree that the majority of articles were of sufficient interest or importance to warrant front or back page coverage, there was a notable difference in emphasis on the positioning of articles within the page. All three favoured the top left hand quadrant as the starting point for articles. However the Examiner, with 143 articles (62.44 percent), and the Advocate, with 114 articles (60 percent), made more use of this quadrant

than did the Mercury which began 71 (49.30 percent) articles from that position. Other comparisons can be drawn too. For example, the Examiner began just 18.34 percent of articles and the Advocate 19.47 percent in the more remote bottom left hand corner, (the third quadrant), whereas the Mercury began 31.25 percent in three. There were also similarities between the Mercury and the Examiner and between the Advocate and the Mercury. The Mercury and the Advocate began a higher percentage of articles in the bottom right hand corner, the fourth quadrant, (6.94 and 5.25 percent respectively) than did the Examiner (2.18 percent).

The study found that there was a greater tendency to position articles containing a negative response to questions one and two in quadrant one, than was the case with positive responses. For example, 59.2 percent of articles supporting the formation of a Statewide football league and 55.75 percent of those which argued that there would be benefits to the Northern and North-Western regions from such a competition began in quadrant one. Of those opposed to the formation of such a league, 65.21 percent began in quadrant one and 71.14 percent of articles which warned

of costs to the NTFA and the NWFU as a result of a Statewide competition being established were likewise positioned. Only 24 percent of articles supporting the State league and 21.73 percent of those opposing it began in the bottom two quadrants.

The results for question two differed marginally, although they still showed a preference towards the quadrants in the top half of the page. Almost 73 percent of articles (82 of 113) which argued that the NTFA and NWFU or their respective regions would benefit from the State league and 85.23 percent (127 of 149) of those which warned of costs to the two Northern football bodies began in quadrants one or two. Only 27.42 percent of the former and 15.43 percent of the latter began in the bottom half of the page.

The results for question three are more difficult to correlate, given the small number of Mercury articles which addressed it. Mercury articles comprise just 10 of the 46 which discussed the formation of a combined Northern football league. Such a small number, representing as it does less than 7 percent of the total, may not give a fair impression. For example, six of the eight Mercury articles (75

percent) supporting the establishment of a combined Northern league began in Quadrant three, whereas just 10.81 percent of Examiner articles and 6.52 percent of Advocate articles began in the same segment. It may be, given the Mercury's apparent disinterest in this aspect of the debate, that such positioning was intentional. If so, it certainly accords with the Gutenberg Theory on newspaper readership and with the concept of fallow space.

Both the Examiner and the Advocate gave their combined Northern league articles considerable prominence. The Examiner began 70.27 percent of supportive articles in quadrant one and a further 16.21 percent in number two. The Advocate, on the other hand, began 69.56 percent of articles supporting the joint league in quadrant one and 6.52 percent in the second. The number of articles in the Examiner and the Advocate opposing the formation of such a league were so few as to be almost insignificant. There were just five in each, and a further two in the Mercury. This small number makes comparisons between the newspapers and between the results of questions one and two on the one hand and question three on the other difficult.

Research showed that the results tended to vary substantially between the newspapers, particularly from question to question. For example, the Mercury, which did not have the same reservations about the formation of a State league, began 69.41 percent (59 of 85) articles supporting question one in quadrant one and a further 18.68 percent in number two. The Examiner and the Advocate began 59.34 percent and 60.81 percent of articles respectively in quadrant one, with a further 14.11 percent and 17.56 percent in quadrant two.

The results for question two were more even, again with the Mercury showing a slight preference for quadrant one with articles showing a positive response. Almost 59 percent of supportive Mercury articles began in one, whereas 55.81 percent of Advocate articles and 51.61 percent of Examiner articles outlining the benefits of a State league were so positioned. There was a significant turnaround, however, in relation to articles which pointed to the costs of such a competition. The Advocate began 82.50 percent of such articles in quadrant one, the Examiner 67.41 percent and the Mercury 61.90 percent. While the Mercury figures suggest a balance between the positioning of

positive and negative articles. both the Examiner and the Advocate seem to show a slight preference towards articles favouring their respective regional interests.

As a content analysis, this study does tend to support the suggestion that the formation of a State League was viewed with some distrust both in the North of the State and along the North-West Coast, while it was fully supported in the South. It also points to the difficulties in trying to use general news stories as a true and accurate indicator of newspaper policy on particular issues. That can only be obtained through an assessment of editorials.

EDITORIALS AND PAROCHIALISM

The Statewide football editorials in all three newspapers highlighted the depth of parochialism within Tasmania and the inter-regional rivalry and distrust it has engendered. In particular they pointed to the fact that Tasmania's divisional break-down could be either two-way, that is North/South or three way - North/South/North-West, depending on the circumstances involved. This was evidenced by the similarity in the Examiner's and the Advocate's statewide editorials and their slightly different

responses to a Greater Northern competition.

All three newspapers supported the introduction of a statewide football competition, albeit to varying degrees. Both the Mercury and the Examiner welcomed the findings of the Evers' Report, the former commenting that it, "... shrewdly takes account of entrenched parochial forces ... [to provide] the blueprint for the rationalisation and ultimately a substantial improvement of football."⁰⁰ The Examiner described the plan as "bold", but warned that while Tasmanian football was in need of reform, there were other related issues that needed to be addressed.⁰¹ These included funding, the future of teams not included in the new competition and administration. The Advocate was more circumspect in its approach, saying: "There's a lot to be said for North-West participation, so long as the Union and the clubs can satisfy themselves it's for the best."⁰²

These opening editorials introduced themes which were developed throughout the Statewide football

⁰⁰Mercury, September 26, 1985, 8.

⁰¹Examiner, September 26, 1985, 6.

⁰²Advocate, September 27, 1985, 6.

saga. Support for the competition in Examiner and Advocate editorials became more guarded as the TANFL's intentions came under intense scrutiny, both within the media and in the wider community. The Advocate maintained the view that the NWFU competition was stronger than either the TFL or the NTFA - one which was "... definitely in less urgent need of revitalisation."⁸³ It was critical of the TANFL for not proceeding with the recommendation to merge Hobart and North Hobart and referred to the possibility of "Southern paternalism revisited".⁸⁴ That same editorial carried the headline, "Footy on the South's terms."⁸⁵ A similar headline, "Statewide means Hobart", heralded the Advocate's editorial response to the announcement that the TFL had decided not to award an elimination final to the North West Coast on financial grounds.⁸⁶ It did, however, conclude the editorial with the concession that the Statewide league

⁸³ Advocate, July 27, 1985, 6.

⁸⁴ Advocate, October 8, 1985, 6.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Advocate, August 19, 1987, 6.

did deserve to "thrive and consolidate".⁸⁷

This editorial also highlighted the common ground between the NWFU and the NTFA, the North-West and the North and between the Advocate and the Examiner. This was a concern that the North and North-West, their respective competitions and clubs were making all the sacrifices and concessions, with the TFL reaping all the rewards. The Advocate said that despite the "tyranny of distance", the NWFU and the NTFA had relinquished teams and replaced their individual competitions with a combined roster, "... to make the Statewide concept something more than an expanded TFL competition."⁸⁸

The Examiner made no concessions to the fact that the NTFA was in a desperate position, with internal divisions threatening its future on the one hand, and the State league doing likewise on the other. While it was critical of the NTFA, saying that it had, "... accepted the [State league] proposal with open arms and thereafter hibernated", it roundly condemned

⁸⁷ibid.

⁸⁸Advocate, August 19, 1987, 6.

the TANFL for its tactics.⁶⁹ It responded to John Bennett's ultimatum to the NTFA and NWFU with an editorial accusing it of unacceptable behaviour:

It is the action of a bully. It is not the action of a body which has at heart the good of football in all parts of the State. Whatever fear and mistrust there is of the TANFL will only be entrenched by this heavy-handed approach.⁷⁰

The Examiner said that for the Statewide competition to succeed there had to be strong back-up competitions in the North and the North-West. It claimed that many of the problems being experienced by the NTFA and the NWFU could be traced to the TFL's, "... blind pursuit of a Southern-controlled competition", and added, reiterating Advocate concerns, that it, "... has yet to make a sacrifice for the good of Tasmanian football as a whole."⁷¹ It also decried the decision not to stage a final out of Hobart in an editorial headed: "It's Statewide?".⁷² "The TFL has taken an un-necessary backward step and given its critics further ammunition to use in their claim that

⁶⁹Examiner, October 25, 1985, 6.

⁷⁰Examiner, November 19, 1985, 6.

⁷¹Examiner, April 28, 1986, 6.

⁷²Examiner, August 18, 1987, 6.

when the chips are down its first priority is what's good for the South," it said.⁷³ In a comment which effectively sums up the Examiner's reservations towards the State league, it said that the TFL had ignored a number of important considerations, including:

... the painful cost to the North of the NTFA's decision to become part of the Statewide competition. The facts are that the NTFA is dead and buried after 100 years of history, and those of its teams that sought a new life in the NTFL are only shadows of their former proud selves. Regrettably, the TFL has seriously mis-kicked at a crucial stage of its existence, giving the impression it does not value its Northern supporters very highly.⁷⁴

While the Examiner and the Advocate were concerned about the future of the regional competitions, the Mercury held no such fears. It responded to claims that the NTFA was being weakened by the introduction a State league with the retort: "... it is only continuing the erosion which has been underway for some time and is the price regional football must pay to ensure the advance of Tasmanian football."⁷⁵ It was equally critical of regional football administrators too, accusing them of not being

⁷³ibid.

⁷⁴ibid.

⁷⁵Mercury, March 21, 1986, 8.

able to see "... past purely local concerns."⁷⁸ This attitude, it said, had resulted in previous plans for a Statewide competition being shelved. Furthermore it warned that the latest proposal, "... will undoubtedly be the occasion for re-opening the festering sore of football parochialism."⁷⁷

Parochialism was mentioned in virtually all Mercury Statewide football editorials. It was labelled "that grand Tasmanian pastime", and credited with dividing the State, "... into North and South and North and North-West at lines going through Oatlands and near Deloraine."⁷⁸ The analogy was also drawn between Tasmania and Ireland, with parochialism the link:

The suggestion that Tasmanian football should try to make best use of a small population by having a Statewide football competition was to some people almost the same as suggesting to an Orangeman that Ireland should be united.⁷⁹

While appearing to adopt a hardline anti-parochialism stance, the Mercury sided with the TFL, defending its decision to issue the NTFA and the NWFU

⁷⁸Mercury, July 17, 1985, 8.

⁷⁷ibid.

⁷⁸Mercury, November 20, 1985, 8.

⁷⁹ibid.

with ultimatums, using the promise of almost \$1 million in possible corporate sponsorship as justification.⁸⁰ It also took the opportunity to criticise the Examiner for supporting the NTFA, and the NWFU in not blindly supporting the proposed State league. It may be a sign of the competition between the two newspapers that it referred to the Examiner as "a Northern newspaper", and not by name. The Advocate had adopted the same policy some years earlier.⁸¹

The Mercury did not confine its criticisms to the NTFA, the NWFU or the Examiner. It also criticized the TFL executive for not reducing the number of Southern teams in the competition. It said:

As a major step in proving a commitment to the concept of a Statewide competition, Southern clubs should seriously consider reducing their numbers to four. This also is a necessary ingredient to create the type of standard needed to make this competition the selection base for an eventual national league side.⁸²

It even commended Northern sides for their "far sightedness" in merging, and said that it would be

⁸⁰Mercury, November 25, 1985, 8.

⁸¹Mercury, November 20, 1985, 8.

⁸²Mercury, April 28, 1986, 8.

petty of Southern teams not to do the same.⁸³

The Mercury may have condemned parochialism in its editorials, but it appeared to place no such constraints on its cartoons. These smacked of parochialism and played on the traditional North-South rivalries. A cartoon published to coincide with the announcement that North Launceston and East Launceston had been the NTFA clubs selected to participate in the proposed State league showed an open sewer with a number of footballers struggling to keep their heads above water. They were carrying the flags of NTFA clubs Launceston, City South and Longford. A Launceston City Council engineer was pictured talking to a workman, the latter responding to a question: "... yair - there have been a few upheavals in the pipeline."⁸⁴ The significance of this cartoon is two-fold: it draws attention to the plight of the NTFA clubs not invited to participate in the State league, and also links this dispute with another which had caused relations between the cities of Launceston and Hobart to deteriorate - the Northern city's decaying

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Mercury, October 23, 1985, 2.

sewers and the State Government's decision to allocate \$10 million towards their rehabilitation. This decision had prompted demands from Southern Councils for money to be spent on their sewerage systems - requests which were not met.

Equally pointed was a cartoon published after the TFL's decision not to hold the 1987 elimination final between Hobart and the Burnie Hawks on the North-West Coast. The cartoon featured Hobart coach Peter Hudson standing outside his hotel, the Granada Tavern, leaning on a sign which said "Free beer for all Burnie Hawks players from 2pm till 5pm Sunday." The road in front of the tavern had been sprinkled with tacks - a trap designed to immobilise the bus carrying the Burnie players which could be seen in the distance. The cartoon employed considerable artistic licence, for the bus carrying the Burnie team would have to detour to pass Hudson's hotel; however it does portray the depth of intra-regional feelings. In fact Hudson himself is seen to comment, "North-South rivalry? ... What North-South rivalry?"⁸⁵

The rivalry which provided the inspiration for

⁸⁵Sunday Tasmanian, August 23, 1987, 2.

these cartoons was not only North-South orientated. The announcement that a report had been commissioned and the subsequent release of its recommendations drew a number of cartoons. One portrayed John Bennett, the then TANFL President, as a chef. He was preparing to make an omelette and on the table in front of him were six eggs, each bearing the name of a TFL club. Bennett's comment was: "Sorry boys, but this omelette only takes four eggs", - the intimation being that there would have to be a reduction in the number of Southern teams in the new competition.⁸⁶ This theme was pursued when the Evers' Report recommended that the Hobart and North Hobart clubs amalgamate. The cartoon featured a very angry Tiger, with a forked tail and brandishing a trident.⁸⁷ However the wittiest cartoon accompanied the TFL's announcement that the NWFU would not field teams until the 1987 season. It showed a burly footballer wearing a guernsey, emblazoned with a map of Tasmania, minus the North-West Region. The footballer commented: "Watch this space

⁸⁶Mercury, July 11, 1985, 32.

⁸⁷Mercury, September 26, 1985, 42.

next year."⁸⁸ When the North Western teams were finally admitted into the State league the Mercury ran a cartoon showing two footballers saying: "coming! ready or not!" The footballer representing the Burnie Hawks

was carrying a suitcase and a football, his Devonport counterpart a football and a bag of potatoes marked, "North-West Coast up-to-dates".⁸⁹

The Examiner's cartoons were somewhat more oblique than those in the Mercury. However it was not averse to loading its cartoons with parochial overtures and comments either. For example, when the TFL elected not to allocate the 1987 elimination final in the North it ran a cartoon showing a footy fan standing at the doorway to his house kicking his television out. On the screen was the stinging comment: "No footy final".⁹⁰

Other Examiner cartoons were not quite so blatant. For example, it responded to the NTFA's concerns about zoning difficulties and the apparent lack of communication from the TFL with a cartoon which

⁸⁸ Mercury, December 4, 1985, 52.

⁸⁹ Mercury, August 6, 1986, 46.

⁹⁰ Examiner, August 4, 1987, 32.

showed a footballer standing before the goal posts scratching his head, apparently in amazement and confusion. Extra posts had been added, with the space between each one designated a zone.⁹¹

While the Examiner's cartoons may not have provided a clear indication of its attitude to the formation of either a Statewide league or a combined Northern competition, one gesture certainly did. Apart from offering the TFL \$2000 and sponsorship space to encourage it to play the 1987 elimination final north of Oatlands, it sponsored the State league, the NTFA and the NWFU by offering weekly player encouragement awards.⁹² In the first year it offered \$100 each week for the best northern State league player and \$50 a week for the best player in the NTFA and the NWFU. When the NTFL was introduced, the Advocate sponsored that competition in conjunction with a North-West Coast jeweller.⁹³ So, despite their editorial warnings, both Northern newspapers provided some financial

⁹¹Examiner, January 22, 1986, 56.

⁹²Examiner, April 5, 1986, 64.

⁹³Advocate, March 24, 1987, 28.

support for the new leagues. It is also significant that Tasmanian Breweries, a major sponsor of Tasmanian regional football over many years, did not become involved in the politics of this dispute. It continued to support both the TFL and Northern football, even after the two new leagues had been formed, although its support of the State league was appreciably greater than its contribution to the NTFL. Thereby suggesting from a corporate and marketing perspective the two competitions were not equal: that the State league and its controlling body the TFL were the senior body in Tasmanian football - a suggestion that both the League and the Mercury were not averse to making.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the formation of a Statewide competition did spell the end of the three regional competitions as they had existed for upwards of 100 years. This in itself is significant because it suggests that the entrenched parochialism which had been a key feature of Tasmanian football for so long was being broken down. A number of factors pointed to this, including the general acceptance among clubs and administrators of the need for change. It was this

acceptance which saw clubs support not only the State league, but also the combined Northern league and in so doing helped to break down the regional barriers. It also achieved, although not to the extent expected, the TANFL's aim of rationalising the number of senior football clubs in Tasmania. Yet despite the TFL's claims that it is the senior football body in Tasmania, the fact remains that the two leagues continue to compete for crowds, gate receipts and, of course, footballers. The TANFL's motives in proposing a Statewide competition may have been entirely honourable and in the best interests of the game, but there are people who argue that it will not receive widespread support until the number of Southern teams is reduced to more accurately reflect the regional break-down of Tasmania's population. Furthermore, that the TANFL's approach to the negotiations may have exacerbated rather than helped to quell the regional differences and loyalties. Certainly the Mercury sought to distance itself from the parochial squabbles - its condemnation of the TFL for not reducing the number of Southern teams in the competition and its recognition of the sacrifices being

made by Northern clubs is testimony to that. At the same time, however, it closely followed the TFL's line of argument; one which in the long run forced the formation of the NTFL and left relations between the three regional football bodies and, to a lesser extent, the regions themselves, uncertain. By so doing, it had pursued a line of argument which in itself could be interpreted as parochial. Whether its criticism of the Examiner could be put down to parochial fervour is another matter.

The Examiner and the Advocate, on the other hand, had the well-being of their respective regions in mind at all times. While they agreed to the need for a grand plan for the future of Tasmanian football, they did not necessarily believe that it should be at the expense of the regional competitions - hence their support for the NTFL.

As a study in regional conflict reporting, this dispute provides a number of interesting insights. It confirms the proposition that regionalism in Tasmania is not confined simply to a North-South axis. The strong involvement of the North-West in both aspects of this dispute - the formation of a State

league and the establishment of the NTFL - is testimony to that.

The considerable coverage accorded this issue in each of the State's three daily newspapers suggests that all agreed on its newsworthiness. As a Southern-inspired issue, it is important that 59 percent of Mercury articles supported the formation of a State league and just 2.08 percent of those opposed it. Equally significant is the appreciably lower support the proposal received in both the Examiner (37.73 percent) and the Advocate (38.94 percent). While both published few articles opposing the formation of a State league (6.55 percent and 2.63 percent respectively), they ran a large number of articles which questioned the cost of the proposed competition to the North, the North-West, and their respective local competitions, the NTFA and the NWFU. These concerns were highlighted by the fact that a greater percentage of articles warned of the costs (26.64 percent) than heralded the benefits (20.07 percent).

From a regional perspective, the greatest number of articles which warned of the costs inherent in the proposal were published in the Examiner (59.33

percent of the total), followed by the Advocate (26.66 percent). It is significant that the Mercury published just 14 percent of articles which warned of costs to the North and North-West or the other competitions. The fact that the Advocate ran a similar number of articles warning of the costs associated with the proposal (43) as those highlighting the benefits (40) may be indicative of the belief within the region that the local competition would survive with or without the State league. It does not necessarily suggest that the Advocate sought to be balanced in its coverage of this issue: its editorials attest to that. There was, however, a clear link between the Mercury's general news coverage, in which there was a greater number of articles supporting the proposed State league (39) than those warning of costs (21), and the attitudes evident in its editorials and cartoons.

The Mercury's interest in and support of the State league, however, was not extended to the NTFL. The fact that 83 of the 91 articles supporting the formation of a combined Northern league appeared in the Advocate (50.54 percent) and the Examiner (40.65 percent) further confirms the argument that the

newspapers are regional in outlook and tend to publish articles supporting their respective community viewpoints. It is somewhat surprising, however, that the Advocate published more pro NTFL articles than the Examiner, given the fact that there was some resistance to the combined league along the North-West Coast and that the NTFA appeared to be the real beneficiary. This may just be an example of the Advocate's tendency to devote itself to issues in which it believes. This suggests that the Advocate was trying to keep regional football alive, even to the extent of encouraging other regions.

The positioning of articles gave further weight to the argument that this dispute was considered newsworthy by each of the newspapers. It is significant that almost 60 percent of State league articles (326 of 563) were positioned on either the front or back pages. This applied across all of the newspapers, with the Examiner placing 128 of 229 articles (56 percent) on those pages, the Advocate 111 (58.42 percent), and the Mercury 87 (60.41 percent).

The decision by each of the newspapers to begin the largest proportion of State league articles within

the prominent top left hand quadrant of the page adds to the newsworthiness argument. This is illustrated by the fact that the Mercury began 49.30 percent of articles in this quadrant, the Advocate (60 percent) and the Examiner (62.44 percent) - in all cases well above the other quadrants. The fact that articles addressing all three questions were prominently placed according to these two criteria, irrespective of whether they supported or opposed the stance adopted by one or all of the newspapers, is significant. It highlights the link between regionally-based conflict and newsworthiness.

Thus it is suggested that the State's three daily newspapers played a major agenda-setting role throughout the State league football dispute. Furthermore, that they did this through their coverage of the dispute. Through this coverage they contributed to the likelihood of the State league dispute becoming a major community issue. Furthermore, it is argued that by adopting a distinctly regional stance in their editorials and cartoons, the newspapers sought to influence the formation of public opinion. By adopting such a stance, it is suggested that they each sought to promote the maintenance of regional loyalties.

CHAPTER 5

BRIDGING THE STRAIT

As an island state, Tasmania is heavily dependent on shipping and air services to move passengers and goods interstate and overseas. This, and the fact that all major Tasmanian population centres are adjacent to the sea, has led to intense competition and rivalry between the State's four principal ports. In recent years the rivalry has intensified as Bass Strait shipping has been rationalised and successive Tasmanian governments have considered a reduction in the number of port authorities. In many respects the rivalry among the ports has been as strong as that between the regions in which they operate. To survive, they have sought a greater share of the Bass Strait freight trade and been on the look out for new opportunities.

In mid 1987 one such opportunity presented itself. It was the possibility of providing home port services for a proposed fast catamaran ferry service between Tasmania and Victoria. The ferry, which was to be built by a Hobart company, International Catamarans

Pty Ltd, was based on a revolutionary new wave piercing design. It would be capable of travelling at 40 knots in seas of up to four metres, and cross Bass Strait in under four hours while carrying 350 passengers and 80 vehicles.¹ The company established to undertake the feasibility study and later to run the new service, Tasmanian Ferry Services Pty Ltd, believed that it could increase passenger arrivals in Tasmania by 9.6 percent per annum and appeal to the 80 percent of Australian holiday-makers who travelled to their destination by motor vehicle.²

Tasmanian Ferry Services was confident that the new service would be a great success. It envisaged a pricing structure which would enable people to cross Bass Strait at half the cost of a domestic air fare and at 80 percent of the cost on the other Bass Strait ferry service, the overnight Abel Tasman.³ To achieve this, it proposed using a skeleton crew - 13 compared with 100 plus on the Abel Tasman - and also by following the shortest route between Tasmania and

¹Sunday Examiner, September 13, 1987. 1-2.

²Mercury, May 11, 1988. 25

³Sunday Examiner, September 13, 1987. 1-2.

Victoria.⁴ At the same time it argued that it did not wish to compete with the immensely successful Abel Tasman - a former Norwegian ferry which sailed between Devonport and Melbourne.⁵ The Abel Tasman had been in service since 1985 when the State Government had decided to take over the service previously operated by Australian National Line (ANL). Within two years the TT Line, which was set up to operate the Abel Tasman service, had turned a substantial loss into a \$2.76 million profit.⁶ In its second year the Abel Tasman carried 181,000 passengers and 56,000 vehicles and was unable to meet demand in peak periods.⁷

While the State Government considered a number of options to meet the increased demand on the Bass Strait run, including the introduction of a second ferry, the construction of a larger ferry which would be brought into service to replace the Abel Tasman earlier than previously intended, and the possibility of smaller, faster catamaran ferries, the company

⁴ibid.

⁵Examiner, December 14, 1987, 5.

⁶Examiner, September 4, 1987, 5.

⁷ibid.

proceeded with its plans. Tasmanian Ferry Services believed that its proposed ferry would cater for a different market, including people who were not interested in a leisurely overnight crossing.

The decision to set up the new service provided the necessary ingredients for inter-regional confrontation. There was little likelihood of it developing into a North-South stoush. Hobart's geographic position precluded it from being a serious contender. Besides, Hobart already had a major interest in the new service. The ferry was to be constructed in Hobart and the first chairman of Tasmanian Ferry Services was from Hobart. The only possibility was a contest between ports on the North and North-West Coasts or, alternatively, one between ports along one of those two coasts, thereby giving the issue an intra-regional complexion as well. The ports in contention were George Town and Kelso on the Tamar and Burnie and Stanley on the North-West Coast. The decision not to compete with the Abel Tasman service effectively precluded Devonport from being a serious option.

This chapter looks at efforts to establish the Bass Strait ferry service. The emphasis is not so much

on the company which was established to oversee the operation, but rather on the competing interests of the Tasmanian ports which fought to become the home base for the new service. Of particular interest is the role of the Examiner which has sought to cultivate readers along the North-West Coast by offering itself as an alternative to the Advocate.

A FAST CATAMARAN SERVICE

The proposal for a fast catamaran ferry service had been mooted a number of times during the early 1980s by Bob Clifford, at that time the co-managing director of International Catamarans. Clifford had been a commercial fisherman and had operated a trans-Derwent ferry service after Hobart's Tasman Bridge had been disabled by the Lake Illawarra. Despite his experience, Clifford was not the main spokesman for the committee set up to investigate the proposal. That was left to another Hobart businessman, Geoff Fader.

From the outset, Fader clearly identified the company's prerequisites and priorities. He said that George Town was the favoured site as a Tasmanian base

for the \$17 million operation.⁸ However he said that the company would not make a final decision until it had considered the financial aspects, inspected the various ports and conducted market research in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania.⁹ He said that ultimately the decision on a Tasmanian port would be based on two considerations: (1) economics and, (2) the selection of a Victorian port.¹⁰ Possible Victorian ports included Hastings, San Remo and Port Welshpool.¹¹

Early media reports suggested that Stanley and George Town were the two main contenders.¹² This was because they offered the two shortest and most direct routes between Tasmania and Victoria. However, as time progressed, a number of other possibilities were mentioned. At one time the choice appeared to be between the two North-West Coast ports of Stanley and Burnie.¹³ Then Devonport was mentioned,¹⁴ and later still Kelso.¹⁵ When it became clear that Burnie was the

⁸Examiner, December 14, 1987, 5; Advocate, December 15, 1987, 3.

⁹ibid. ¹⁰ibid. ¹¹ibid. ¹²ibid.

¹³Mercury, May 11, 1988, 25.

¹⁴Weekender, February 2, 1988, 1.

¹⁵Examiner, April 7, 1989, 1-2.

only serious North-West option, the contest developed into a North versus North-West contest.

Both Burnie and George Town argued that Tasmanian Ferry Services' emphasis on economic considerations enhanced their respective claims. Yet they also sought as much outside support as they could muster. Burnie enlisted the support of the Hastings Shire Council and the Westernport Development Council in Victoria. The Westernport Development Council and the Burnie Council even prepared a joint submission for presentation to Tasmanian Ferry Services, outlining the benefits of a Burnie-Hastings route. The Burnie Council and the Burnie Port Authority teamed together and inserted full page advertisements in the Mercury and the Sunday Tasmanian seeking to enlist the support of Hobartians for the North-West Coast option.¹⁶ Burnie Mayor Rex Collins even announced that a number of Southern councils had indicated their verbal support for the Burnie-Hastings route.¹⁷ And the Council used the announcement of a \$9 million hotel on the

¹⁶Sunday Tasmanian, July 31, 1988, 33.

¹⁷Advocate, August 5, 1988, 5.

waterfront as a lure for the ferry service.¹⁸

Whether Collins, the Burnie Council and the Burnie Port Authority were playing on traditional North-South rivalries to garner support for their own bid is difficult to ascertain. Certainly they sought to present George Town in the worst possible light, especially when discussing the relative merits of both proposals. For example, the full page advertisement in the Mercury and Sunday Tasmanian was quite inflammatory. The advertisement had argued that people travelling from Hobart to catch the ferry would have a 54 minute shorter trip if the Burnie-Hastings option was selected over the George Town-Port Welshpool route.¹⁹ It said that the Burnie-Hastings route was 376 kms by road and 163 nautical miles by sea and would involve total travelling time of 8 hours and 48 minutes. The George Town to Port Welshpool route, on the other hand, was 443 kms by road and 150 nautical miles by sea - a trip of 9 hours and 42 minutes. The advertisement also described Burnie as "the hub of the North-West Coast" while inferring that George Town was

¹⁸Mercury, July 22, 1988, 5.

¹⁹Sunday Tasmanian, July 31, 1988, 33.

of questionable appeal to tourists.²⁰ It said that people travelling on the Burnie-Hastings route could travel on national highways and freeways, while again intimating that the George Town-Port Welshpool option offered roads of doubtful standard.

The advertisement provoked reactions from both the George Town Council and the South Gippsland Council. The Warden of George Town, Cr Geoff Sweet, said that the advertisement had under-estimated the road distances between Melbourne and Hastings by 26 kilometres and between Burnie and Hastings by seven nautical miles.²¹ At the same time, it had over-estimated the George Town-Port Welshpool route by three nautical miles. Warden Sweet said that Victorian speed restrictions would add 45 minutes to the Burnie-Hastings route and he claimed that Burnie had not sought advice from Tasmanian Ferry Services on comparable times over the two routes. He also argued that the Burnie-Hastings option would be \$10 dearer each way to cover the additional \$1.5 million in annual fuel and crew costs incurred because of the additional

²⁰ibid.

²¹Examiner, August 4, 1988. 20.

distances and times involved.

South Gippsland officials retorted that Burnie's claims were based on the premise that all Tasmanians wanted to go to Melbourne.²² Rather, they said, there was evidence that many would take advantage of a Port Welshpool link to travel to Sydney, Canberra and the Snowy Mountains. They also took exception to the suggestion that roads between Hastings and Melbourne were of a higher standard than those between Port Welshpool and Melbourne.

While Burnie was doing all it could to enhance its claims, in the North, George Town's bid had produced a softening in the traditional enmity between itself and the Launceston City Council. In an almost unprecedented show of regional unity, the two councils agreed to overlook their past differences and work together to ensure that George Town's bid was successful. They announced plans to provide on-shore facilities at George Town for the ferry service, including a terminal, car parking and a floating passenger and vehicle loading wharf.²³

²² *ibid.*

²³ Examiner, July 22, 1988, 1-2.

The George Town Council also enlisted the support of the South Gippsland Council and the Latrobe Regional Commission in Victoria. The Commission announced that it would spend \$620,000 developing on-shore facilities in Victoria and up to \$80,000 in advertising support if the George Town to Port Welshpool route was selected.²⁴ This announcement came only weeks after the decision by the Launceston City Council and the George Town Council to build on-shore facilities at George Town.

Burnie tried a number of tactics to enhance its prospects, but in particular it sought to highlight differences between itself and George Town. Both the Warden, Rex Collins, and the Master Warden of the Burnie Port Authority, Hugh Loane, claimed that George Town did not have the same advantages as Burnie. Rex Collins said, "Burnie is a port where the ferry can land at all times, while often the ferry would be forced to wait off George Town for up to four hours because of fog and tides."²⁵ He said that Burnie already had an internationally recognised port, and all

²⁴ Examiner, August 9, 1988, 5.

²⁵ Advocate, July 22, 1988, 3.

the facilities of a city on the waterfront, whereas George Town would have to rely on Government assistance to provide the necessary infrastructure.²⁶ According to Hugh Loane:

The ferry could get out of Burnie much easier. The catamaran would be at full speed quickly as there is no estuary tide or fog problems. George Town has these problems. If you knew the number of ships that went aground in the Tamar you would be amazed. We're unable to find figures because it is all hush hush.²⁷

These themes were developed by other Burnie Councillors. For example, Cr Jim Altimira was reported as saying that tourists preferred to disembark "... at an established port rather than a country backwater."²⁸ This comment, while directed at George Town, drew an angry response from the Master Warden of the Circular Head Marine Board, Cr Merv House, who believed that it had reflected on Stanley's claims to the service.²⁹ He said that Stanley was still an option and had a great deal to offer tourists.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Mercury, August 1, 1988, 3.

²⁸ Advocate, July 27, 1988, 3.

²⁹ Advocate, July 28, 1988, 14.

The challenge was also taken up by George Town in an advertisement directed at people who were about to be surveyed by consultants for Tasmanian Ferry Services and asked which of the two routes they would prefer.³⁰ The advertisement claimed that the Burnie-Hastings route would mean, "leaving one industrial port and arriving at another - historic George Town and the picturesque fishing town of Port Welshpool have an appeal of their own."³¹ It described the George Town to Port Welshpool route as, "shorter, faster, more scenic and cheaper than the Burnie-Hastings alternative."³² It also said that the George Town-Port Welshpool option would save a family travelling with their car about \$100 on a round trip and that it would also create 80 extra jobs - jobs which would be lost to Victoria if the Burnie-Hastings proposal was nominated.³³ It concluded. "Please look at the benefits for all Tasmanians before making your choice."³⁴

The reports commissioned by Tasmanian Ferry Services produced conflicting results. Potential users

³⁰Insert in the Examiner, August 14, 1988.

³¹ibid.

³²ibid.

³³ibid.

³⁴ibid.

in Victoria favoured the Burnie-Hastings route, saying that they preferred the shorter 40 minute trip from Melbourne to Hastings than the two and a quarter hour trip to Port Welshpool.³⁵ Tasmanians, on the other hand, indicated a preference for the George Town-Port Welshpool route.³⁶ The Burnie Council and the Burnie Port Authority seized on the results of the Victorian survey, arguing that they confirmed Burnie's claim to the catamaran service. However, Tasmanian Ferry Services opted for the George Town route, claiming that while 9.2 percent more people had indicated a preference for the Burnie-Hastings option, that benefit would be more than offset by increased fuel and crew costs.³⁷

The Burnie Port Authority (BPA) questioned the decision. BPA chairman Hugh Loane said he believed that while George Town had been successful in winning the catamaran service, the survey results would encourage other groups to consider starting up a rival

³⁵Mercury, October 29, 1988, 6.

³⁶ibid.

³⁷Advocate, November 8, 1988, 2.

service between Burnie and Hastings.³⁸ He said that such a service would compete with and severely impact on the George Town-Port Welshpool service.

The contest for the fast catamaran service drew attention to two key features of Tasmanian regionalism, including:

- (1) the tendency of intra-regional rivalries to be subsumed by matters of an inter-regional nature; and
- (2) the willingness of political parties to exploit the inter-regional rivalries for their own purposes.

From a North-West Coast perspective, the first became apparent once Burnie had established itself as the main contender. A number of key organisations and personalities backed its campaign. These included the North West Municipal Region and the Devonport Chamber of Commerce, the latter having previously pushed for Devonport to be considered. Two prominent individuals who supported Burnie's case were the Mayor of Devonport, Ald. Geoff Squibb, and the inaugural chairman of the Association of North-West Chambers of

³⁸ Advocate, November 10, 1988, 2.

Commerce, Lloyd Harris. Squibb, a State Government liaison officer, said that while the decision should be a commercial one, the North-West Region could be economically disadvantaged if the George Town-Port Welshpool route was selected.³⁹ However he subsequently changed his mind. When that route was selected over the Burnie-Hastings option, he conceded that Devonport would have benefited either way.⁴⁰ He said that travellers would probably stay overnight at Devonport before travelling along the Frankford Highway and over the Batman Bridge to catch the ferry at George Town. Mr Harris, the Deputy Chairman of the Advocate's parent company, Harris and Co., was critical of the decision and said that, "... it completely ignores what I understood to be the purpose of the exercise, namely to attract a maximum number of Victorians to Tasmania and to make a profit doing so."⁴¹ He said that the decision could be attributed to, "... the pro George Town influence on the Tasmanian Ferry Services

³⁹Advocate, July 29, 1988, 3.

⁴⁰Examiner, November 12, 1988, 22.

⁴¹Advocate, November 9, 1988, 2.

Board."⁴² This comment appears to be directed at the appointment of ENT Chairman Edmund Rouse first to the board and later as chairman of Tasmanian Ferry Services Pty Ltd.

From a Northern perspective, George Town received considerable support. The Tamar Regional Master Planning Authority (TRMPA), the Northern Tasmanian Regional Organisation (NTRO), the Port of Launceston Authority (PLA) and the Launceston Chamber of Commerce all backed George Town in its bid for the ferry service. Warwick Smith, the local Federal member, circulated a petition seeking support for George Town's case. The petition, when presented to Tasmanian Ferry Services contained 6000 signatures.⁴³ A second petition supporting George Town was circulated by the State Opposition. Support continued to grow, even after Tasmanian Ferry Services had announced its decision to make George Town the home port. George Town Council received a number of applications for new hotel and motel developments and a public meeting called to rally

⁴²ibid.

⁴³Sunday Tasmanian, September 3, 1988, 6.

support for the proposal was well attended. Media reports varied in their estimations, with the Examiner suggesting 250 and the Advocate 450.⁴⁴

While there was strong community support for George Town's bid there were signs of inter-council rivalry too. The Beaconsfield Council, which stood to benefit if the Kelso site was selected, refused to formally back George Town.⁴⁵ A motion put by Cr Bill Morris, who like the Mayor of Devonport, Geoff Squibb, was a State Government Liaison officer, supporting George Town, lapsed for want of a seconder. The Council did, however, support plans to attract the service to the Tamar Valley, without naming a specific site. This was despite the fact that the NTRO, of which Beaconsfield Warden Trevor Roach was chairman, had already pledged its unanimous support for George Town.⁴⁶

The second characteristic - the tendency of political parties to exploit regional rivalries for

⁴⁴Advocate, August 31, 1989, 18; Examiner, August 30, 1989, 3.

⁴⁵Examiner, August 24, 1988, 3.

⁴⁶ibid.

personal gain - was highlighted by the then Labor Opposition. A Labor Party plan to force the Government into indicating a preference for one site over the other back-fired when one of its North-West members indicated a preference for the Burnie-Hastings route only hours after a Northern member had said the Party would support George Town-Port Welshpool.⁴⁷ The Government had deliberately not indicated a preference, saying that the decision was a commercial one which should be left to the company to make. It was also conscious of the political implications that would flow from a decision one way or the other. Neil Batt, the Opposition Leader, was forced to step in. He publicly chastised the North-West Coast Member concerned and reiterated that the Labor Party would support George Town.⁴⁸ Batt and his spokesman on Northern Development, Harry Holgate, made much of their announcement that they would provide the George Town Council with \$1 million "no strings attached" to build on-shore facilities should they win government at the

⁴⁷Examiner, July 20, 1988. 3.

⁴⁸Examiner, July 21, 1988. 2.

next State election.⁴⁹

Batt was seeking to undermine the Government's hold on Bass and Braddon. At that time there was still a likelihood that the \$1 billion pulp mill would be built at Wesley Vale on the North-West Coast and as a consequence an existing mill at Long Reach, near George Town, was expected to close with the loss of many jobs. Batt's strategy was electorally astute; he knew that the Government could not afford to lose any of the four seats it held in either Bass or Braddon. The Labor Party, on the other hand, needed to engineer a swing against the Government in Bass if it hoped to win the next State election.

Thus it can be seen that a relatively innocuous proposal to establish a fast catamaran service between Tasmania and Victoria developed into a major regional dispute in which parochial considerations and political manoeuvrings were at the forefront. As a postscript, it is interesting to note that the ALP's promise of \$1 million "no strings attached", made at a time when its prospects of winning government were considered remote, have since come home to haunt it. After winning

⁴⁹Examiner, October 2, 1988, 4.

government through a deal with the State's five Green Independents, it has re-negotiated the terms of the offer with the George Town Council, attaching a few conditions in the process.

NEWSPAPERS AND THE CATAMARAN DISPUTE

The data for this chapter are drawn from 212 articles and 10 editorials published in the Examiner, the Sunday Examiner, the Mercury, the Sunday Tasmanian, the Advocate and the Weekender between March 5, 1987 and October 7, 1989. This includes 87 articles and 2 editorials in the Examiner and Sunday Examiner, 83 articles and 5 editorials in the Advocate and Weekender and 42 articles and 3 editorials in the Mercury and Sunday Tasmanian.

The three newspapers devoted 9,379.26 cms at 11 ems to coverage of the ferry issue, including 9,016 cms to articles and 364.26 cms to editorials. Letters to the Editor and advertisements were not measured. The most comprehensive coverage was in the Examiner, which devoted 4,040 cms (articles) and 57.81 cms (editorials) to this issue. It was followed by the Advocate with 3,224 cms (3,088 cms, articles and 136 cms, editorials) and the Mercury with 2,057.45 cms (1,887 cms, articles

and 170.45 cms. editorials). This represented 18.21 page equivalents in the Examiner, 14.32 in the Advocate and 5.87 in the Mercury. The greater coverage in the Examiner and the Advocate, compared with the Mercury, can be attributed to the more immediate involvement of their respective regions in the actual dispute itself. While the ferry was being constructed in Hobart, the contest for its home port was between the North and the North-West. This competition is reflected in results produced later in the chapter.

Such a comparison produces some interesting results. While the Examiner published only four articles more than the Advocate, it devoted an additional 960 cms of newshole (editorial space within a newspaper) to coverage of this issue. That represents 11.3 cms per article. Examiner articles averaged 46.43 cms. and those in the Mercury 44.92, whereas Advocate articles were just 37.20 cms. This also produced some interesting comparisons on a page equivalent basis. In its coverage of articles alone (not including editorials), the Examiner allocated 4.23 page equivalents more than the Advocate to this issue (17.95 to 13.72). Comparisons with the Mercury are more

difficult, given the larger size of its pages, that is, the fact that it takes 350 cms of 11 em text to fill a Mercury page, compared with 225 cms in both the Examiner and the Advocate. Consequently, on a page equivalent basis, the Mercury's coverage of 5.39 appears minimal. Even if the pages were standardized to 225 cms at 11 ems, its contribution would be 8.38 pages, still appreciably less than the other two newspapers.

Another interesting comparison shows the variation in coverage between the newspapers as determined by: (1) the number of articles and (2) column centimetres. The Examiner's 87 articles represents 41.03 percent of the total, and its 4,040 cms 44.81 percent. The greatest change in percentage share between the two criteria is in the Advocate. From 39.15 percent of articles (83), its percentage share based on column centimetres slipped to just 34.25. The Mercury, on the other hand, boosted its share marginally - from 19.81 percent of articles (42) to 20.93 percent, based on column centimetres.

Each article was analyzed with three questions in mind:

(1) Did it support the introduction of a fast catamaran service between Tasmania and Victoria?;

(2) Did it support or oppose the claims of a Northern port to provide the Tasmanian base for such a service? and;

(3) Did it support or oppose the claims of a North-West Coast port to provide the Tasmanian base for the proposed service?

These questions address the two fundamental elements of this debate. That is: (1) whether the fast catamaran service should proceed and (2) the selection of a home port in Tasmania. As the following assessment will show, there was very little debate over the first aspect, but considerable disagreement over the second. The responses to questions two and three give a clear insight into the nature of Tasmanian regionalism. All answers were tabulated according to whether they agreed with, were opposed to, or were neutral in their outlook.

During the survey period, the three newspapers published 194 articles supporting the introduction of a fast catamaran ferry service between Tasmania and Victoria - 83 in the Examiner, 74 in the Advocate and

37 in the Mercury. This represented 91.50 percent of all ferry articles. In fact there were just two articles opposed to the introduction of such a service - one in the Examiner and one in the Mercury and 16 (7.54 percent) which could be termed neutral.

On a newspaper by newspaper basis, the greatest support for the introduction of a fast catamaran service was in the Examiner. Eighty three of the 87 Examiner articles (95.40 percent) supported question one. There was only one Examiner article (1.14 percent) which was opposed to it and three (3.44 percent) which could be termed neutral. Support was also high among Advocate and Mercury articles, with 89.15 percent (74 of 83 articles) and 88.09 percent (37 of 42) respectively supporting the introduction of such a service. Only one Mercury article (2.38 percent) opposed the service while none in the Advocate did so. The Advocate, however, did have the largest number of neutral articles, with nine (10.84 percent), followed by the Mercury with four (9.52 percent).

Predictably, question two produced vastly different results. Just 30.18 percent of articles (64 of 212) supported the claims of Northern Tasmanian

ports for the ferry service. Only 9.43 percent of articles (20) were opposed to the home port being in Northern Tasmania, however a very high percentage could be termed neutral. There were 128 neutral articles, representing 60.36 percent of the total.

Again, the highest level of support could be found in Examiner articles. Nearly 52 percent of Examiner articles (45 of 87) supported the claims of Northern ports to be the ferry's home base. Only five (5.74 percent) were opposed to it and 37 (42.52 percent) were neutral. Only nine Advocate articles (10.84 percent) and 10 Mercury articles (23.80 percent) supported question two. There were 13 Advocate articles (15.66 percent) opposed to the establishment of a home port for the ferry in Northern Tasmania and 61 (73.48 percent) which were neutral. There were only two Mercury articles opposed to question two, but there were a large number which were neutral. Thirty of the 42 Mercury articles (71.42 percent) were non-committal. This was only marginally less than Advocate articles.

Given the responses to question two, the results for question three were not entirely surprising. Fifty one of the 212 articles (24.05

percent) supported the establishment of a fast catamaran ferry service between a North-West Coast port and Victoria. Only nine articles (4.24 percent) were opposed to this option and 152 (71.69 percent) were non-committal.

The greatest support for a North-West Coast to Victoria catamaran link was in Advocate articles. Almost 50 percent of Advocate articles (41 of 83) supported the claims of North-West Coast ports for this service. Only one Advocate article (1.20 percent) opposed North-West Coast claims, while 41 (49.39 percent) were neutral. Of the 87 Examiner articles, only 6 (6.89 percent) supported the North-West Coast to Victoria route, while a further five (5.74 percent) were opposed to it. A massive 87.35 percent of Examiner articles (76 of 87) were non-committal. Mercury articles were a little more supportive of the North-West Coast link than the Examiner, but not much. Four Mercury articles (9.52 percent) supported the proposition and three (7.14 percent) were opposed to it. A further 35 (83.32 percent) were neutral.

The use of similar phrasing for questions two and three has enabled a number of important comparisons

to be drawn, particularly between the Examiner and the Advocate. The Examiner published 70.31 percent of articles (45 of 64) supporting the ferry route between a Northern port and Victoria, whereas the Advocate ran 80.39 percent of articles (41 of 51) supporting the North-West Coast option. Whereas the Advocate ran 65 percent of articles (13 of 20) opposed to the Northern route, the Examiner published 55.55 percent of articles (5 of 9) opposed to the North-West link. The Mercury, on the other hand, produced 15.62 percent of articles supporting the Northern option (10 of 64), but just 7.84 percent of those favouring the North-West alternative (4 of 51). It published 10 percent of articles opposed to question two (2 of 20), yet 33.33 percent of those opposed to question three.

To further develop this, the three newspapers were compared using a number of other criteria, but at all times using the articles as the basis of assessment. The articles were broken down on a month by month basis to see if there were any discernible or significant trends or variations between the newspapers. The study found that 116 of the 212 articles were published in the five month period

between July and November 1988. This is not entirely surprising, because it corresponds with the period leading up to the announcement of which port would be the home base for the ferry. It was also the period during which George Town and Burnie pushed their respective claims. Even so, the coverage which the dispute attracted in that period represents less than one article per day, and that is in the three newspapers combined. That in itself may be an indication of the importance they attached to the ultimate decision.

Even on a question by question basis, the results showed a build-up of interest and coverage in the period from July to November 1988. There were differences between the newspapers, as indicative of their varying responses to the questions, but generally they showed the same peaks and troughs in coverage. For example, there was a substantial increase in articles supporting question one in all three newspapers during the July to November period. The coverage peaked in August when the Advocate published 18 articles supporting question one and the Examiner 13. There was a second smaller peak in November when

they published eight and seven articles respectively. The Mercury, on the other hand, reached a plateau between August and September when it published four articles in each month.

The results for articles supporting questions two and three showed different trends and highlighted the tendency of Examiner articles to support question two - the Northern port - and Advocate articles to support question three - the North-West port. In fact there was only one month in which Advocate articles supporting question three were outnumbered by articles in one of the other newspapers. That was in May 1988 when neither the Advocate nor the Mercury ran an article supportive of question three, but the Examiner ran one. The Examiner, on the other hand, maintained a similar record in relation to positive responses to question two. It was out-published in just three of the 32 months covered in the survey - in December 1987 when the Mercury ran two articles to the Examiner's one, in January 1988 when the Advocate ran one positive article and again in August 1989 when the Advocate published three to the Examiner's two.

POSITIONING - A SIGN OF PAROCHIALISM?

The high news value attached to this issue is confirmed by a number of factors. These include: (1) the concentration of fast catamaran service articles on the major news pages; and (2) the positioning of each article within the page. The criterion for determining the latter is an adaptation of Arnold's Gutenberg Theory.

The 212 articles were divided between 29 pages - 23 in the Examiner, 18 in the Mercury and 16 in the Advocate. Almost 56 percent of articles (118 of 212) were printed on odd numbered pages and 44 percent (94 articles) on even numbered pages. Almost 62 percent of articles (131 of 212) were published on pages one to five. Twenty articles (9.43 percent) were published on page one, 32 (15.09 percent) on page three, 23 (10.84 percent) on page five, 27 (12.73 percent) on page two and 29 (13.67 percent) on page four. The only other pages of any real significance were pages 13 and 16 with nine articles (4.24 percent) and ten articles (4.71 percent) respectively. There were eight articles (3.77 percent) printed on pages seven and nine and seven (3.30 percent) on page ten. Other pages had

between one and five fast catamaran service articles over the survey period.

A comparison between the newspapers showed a difference in priority. All concentrated on the main news pages, with the Advocate printing 72.26 percent of articles (60 of 83) on pages one to five, the Examiner 59.74 percent (52 of 87) and the Mercury 45.22 percent (19 of 42). The Advocate, for example, printed 26.50 percent of its fast catamaran articles (22 of 83) on page two and a further 18.07 percent (15) on page three. There were eight articles (9.63 percent) on each of pages four and five. The Advocate published only seven fast ferry articles (8.43 percent) on page one. The Examiner, on the other hand, printed 19 articles (21.83 percent) on page four, 10 (11.49 percent) on page five and nine (10.34 percent) on each of pages one and three. It printed only five articles (5.74 percent) on page two, the Advocate's preferred page. The Mercury did not print any fast catamaran articles on page two, however it published eight (19.04 percent) on page three and five (11.90 percent) on page five. It printed just four articles (9.52 percent) on page one and two (4.76 percent) on page four. In fact the Mercury showed

a tendency to 'bury' some of its ferry articles. Nine of its 42 articles (21.42 percent) were shared between pages 13, 16 and 19. The Advocate, on the other hand, printed 86.7 percent of articles (72 of 83) on pages one to nine and the Examiner 67.81 percent (59 of 87) likewise.

These results suggest that the three newspapers did attach different priorities to the positioning of fast catamaran ferry articles within the newspaper. It is interesting to note that according to this criterion the Advocate attached greater importance to the dispute than did either the Examiner or the Mercury. However the fact that all newspapers kept ferry articles off the front page may be of significance.

The newspapers tended to place the fast ferry catamaran service articles on the major news pages irrespective of whether they supported or opposed the questions. For example, 61.34 percent of articles supporting the introduction of a fast catamaran service (119 of 194) were placed on pages one to five. Almost 63 percent of articles supporting question two - the Northern option - (40 of 64) were likewise positioned. Just over 82 percent of articles supporting question

three - the North-West option - (42 of 51) were placed on pages one to five.

There were some differences between the newspapers on a question to question basis. The Examiner ran just 59.03 percent of articles supporting the establishment of a fast catamaran service between Tasmania and Victoria (49 of 83) on pages one to five, and 68.88 percent of articles supporting the Northern port (31 of 45) on those same pages. It also ran 66.66 percent of articles supporting the North-West Coast's claims for the service (four of six) on pages one to five. There was a more obvious bias in the positioning of Advocate articles supporting the North-West Coast's claims to be the home port for this service. The Advocate positioned 85.36 percent of articles (35 of 41) supporting the North-West option on pages one to five and 72.97 percent of articles supporting question one (54 of 74). Yet it placed just 44.44 percent of those supporting the Northern option (four of nine) on pages one to five. Advocate figures show a clear discrepancy between the positioning of articles supporting a Northern port (44.44 percent) and a North West Coast port (85.36 percent). The Mercury, on the

other hand, placed only 43.24 percent of articles supporting question one (16 of 37) and 50 percent of those supporting question two (five of ten) on pages one to five. Seventy five per cent of Mercury articles supporting question three (three of four) were so positioned, however the small sample, like the small number of Examiner articles supporting the North-West Coast option, may be overstating the level of support for this option.

Overall, there was a high percentage of articles opposing questions two and three on the main news pages. The Advocate published 13 articles opposing the route between a Northern port and Victoria. All were positioned on pages two to five. The Examiner, on the other hand, published just five articles opposed to question two, with three positioned on pages one to five. The remaining two articles were published on page 22. Of the two Mercury articles opposed to the Northern option, one was printed on page three, the other on page 33.

Important comparisons can be drawn between these results and those for question three. Not surprisingly, the Advocate did not publish any articles

which openly opposed the establishment of a ferry route between a North-West Coast port and Victoria. However it did give page one coverage to the announcement that Tasmanian Ferry Services had chosen George Town as the home port. The Examiner published five articles opposing the North-West Coast's claims to the ferry service; four of those on pages one to five. The Mercury's three articles opposing question three were spread throughout the newspaper - on pages one, thirteen and twenty.

These results tend to support the contention that the newspapers give greater prominence to articles containing opinions they favour, than those which they oppose. One only has to look at the prominence the Advocate gave to articles supporting the North-West Coast option and those opposing the Northern route. The same can be said of the Examiner, although to a lesser extent, with articles supporting the Northern route and those opposing the North-West Coast option.

Having established that a link exists between the importance of news articles and their positioning within the newspaper, this relationship was further examined. Using the adaptation of the Gutenberg Theory,

the articles were assessed to see whether there was a link between the importance of news articles (as determined by the opinions they contain) and their positioning within the page.

The data showed that 50.47 percent of all fast catamaran articles (107 of 212) began in the top left hand quadrant. This included 58.62 percent of Examiner articles (51 of 87), 54.76 percent of Mercury articles (23 of 42) and 39.75 percent of Advocate articles (33 of 83). It found that an additional 25.47 percent of articles (54) began in the top right hand quadrant, including 29.88 percent of Examiner articles (26), 23.80 percent of Mercury articles (10), and 21.68 percent of Advocate articles (18). Only 15.56 percent of articles (33) began in the bottom left hand segment, identified as quadrant three. This included 6.89 percent of Examiner articles (6), 14.28 percent of Mercury articles (6), and 25.30 percent of Advocate articles (21). Quadrant four, the bottom right hand quadrant, provided a starting point for just 8.49 percent of articles (18), including four from the Examiner (4.59 percent), three from the Mercury (7.14 percent) and 11 from the Advocate (13.25 percent).

A newspaper by newspaper comparison highlights the preference for quadrant one. Sixty percent of Examiner articles favouring the establishment of a fast catamaran service (50 of 83), 60 percent of those in the Mercury (22 of 37) and 54 percent of supportive Advocate articles were published in quadrant one. Quadrant two was the next most favoured for Examiner and Mercury articles supporting question one, with 28.91 percent (24) and 21.62 percent (8) so placed. The Advocate, on the other hand, placed 24.32 percent (18) in quadrant three and 22.97 percent of articles supporting the service (17) in quadrant two. Few articles were published in quadrant four in any of the newspapers.

There was a marked increase in the number of Examiner and Mercury articles supporting a Northern home port in quadrant one. Whereas Advocate articles supporting this option remained fairly constant at 55.55 percent - an increase of just 1.5 percent from question one - 73.33 percent of Examiner articles supporting the Northern port and 70 percent of Mercury articles (33 and 7 articles respectively) began in quadrant one. Quadrant two was the next most favoured

among all three newspapers. The Examiner positioned 15.55 percent of articles (7 of 45), the Mercury 20 percent (2 of 10) and the Advocate 22.22 percent (2 of 9) in that quadrant.

There was a noticeable change between the Examiner's positioning of articles supporting questions one and two and those supporting the North-West port. While it continued to favour quadrants one and two, the greater share of supportive articles began in quadrant two (4 of 6), with the remaining two beginning in quadrant one. The Mercury continued to start the majority of articles in quadrant one (3 of 4), with the other article beginning in quadrant four. The Advocate, on the other hand, began just 46.34 percent of articles supporting the North-West port in quadrant one (19 of 41). This is rather surprising, given its total support of the North-West Coast's claims during this issue. In fact the percentage of Advocate articles beginning in quadrant one was appreciably lower than for either questions one or two. Advocate articles supporting the North-West option were spread across the page, with 21.95 percent beginning in quadrant two, 19.51 percent in three and 12.19 percent in four.

The results for articles opposing the questions may not be quite so sustainable, given the small number of articles involved. There were only two articles opposing the introduction of a fast catamaran service across Bass Strait, one in the Examiner, the other in the Mercury. Both began in the top two quadrants, the Examiner article in one, the Mercury article in two. The results for question two are more receptive to interpretation, there being 20 articles involved. Seven of the articles (35 percent) began in quadrant one and six (30 percent) began in two. A further six began in three (30 percent) and one (five percent) began in four. Of the nine articles opposed to the ferry's home port being established on the North-West Coast, seven (77.77 percent) began in quadrant one. The remaining two articles began in quadrant four.

On a newspaper by newspaper comparison of questions two and three, the results fluctuated dramatically, but again this can be attributed to the small number of articles involved. Forty percent of Examiner articles opposing the Northern route (2 of 5) began in one, with the other 60 percent (3 of 5) beginning in two. Again this shows the Examiner's

preference for the top two quadrants. Mercury articles opposing question two were divided equally between quadrants one and three (one article apiece). The Advocate's articles, however, were spread throughout the page, with four out of 13 articles (30.76 percent) beginning in one and three (23.07 percent) in the second quadrant. Five Advocate articles (38.46 percent) began in three and one (7.69 percent) began in four.

The articles opposing question three were shared between quadrants one and four. Four of the five Examiner articles opposing the North-West Coast's bid for the ferry service (80 percent) began in one, the other in four. Two of the three Mercury articles opposing this option (66.66 percent) began in one, the fourth in four.

The preceding discussion shows how the State's three major newspapers each adopted a different approach in their general news coverage of this issue. The Advocate and Examiner appeared quite involved, while the Mercury seemed a little more detached. An additional insight into their respective stances can be gained from a perusal of the small number of editorials written on this issue.

EDITORIALS AND PAROCHIALISM

Like the general news articles, the editorials in each of the three newspapers adopt a different approach to this issue. The editorials in all three were very supportive of the decision to establish a fast catamaran ferry service between Tasmania and Victoria. All recognised the substantial benefits that would flow on from such a project - the increase in visitor arrivals, the additional \$35 million a year injection into the economy, the creation of 700 jobs within the hospitality industry, and the boost for Tasmania's boat-building industry.

But from that point onwards their perspectives differed. The Mercury and the Examiner adopted more of a statewide view, whereas the Advocate's approach was distinctly regional. The Mercury said that while the decision to base the ferry out of George Town would cause some disappointment at Burnie, that city would still benefit.⁵⁰ It would, after all, share in the increased tourist cake the State could expect once the service begins operation. At the same time, it said that the decision to opt for George Town over Burnie

⁵⁰Mercury, November 9, 1988, 8.

was "unarguable", offering as it did the shortest and quickest route at the cheapest fare.⁵¹

The Examiner appeared more interested in the implications of the decision by the Launceston City Council and the George Town Council to present a united case for the service than a home base for the ferry. In this respect it was adopting a distinctly regional view, but not one of an antagonistic nature. It was not seeking to provoke or promote a dispute between Northern and North-Western interests. It said:

The North's history is littered with opportunities lost because its councils could not work together as a team for the common good. It is folklore that a succession of governments used this penchant for disunity as a means of escaping their financial and developmental responsibilities to the North. ... Certainly the North now has the opportunity to be much more aware of itself as a united whole, but that awareness needs to be continually emphasized so that action results. Fortunately the issue of George Town's attempts to persuade the ferry consortium to use York Cove as its home terminal has concentrated the mind of the Launceston City Council on the issue as one for the region, not just George Town.⁵²

The Examiner did not canvas the merits of George Town's, Burnie's or Stanley's respective cases in its editorials. The only indication of its

⁵¹ibid.

⁵²Examiner, July 25, 1988, 6.

preference was after the decision had been announced, when it said that it was based on "simple economics".⁵³ In this issue, a clearer indication may have been gleaned from the general news items. Even articles in the North-West edition of the Examiner appeared to favour the George Town option over one of the North-West Coast possibilities.

It is important to compare the approach adopted in Examiner editorials with those in the Advocate. Both used the issue to engender regional unity, albeit by different routes. While the Examiner saw in it an opportunity to further develop a Northern regional consciousness, the Advocate appeared to adopt a more aggressive tack. Its editorials clearly favoured one of the two North-West options - Burnie to Hastings or Stanley to Hastings. While it accepted that the George Town to Port Welshpool was the shorter, cheaper option and was favoured by the majority of Tasmanians surveyed, it argued that the North-West Coast to Hastings route was preferred by the larger potential Victorian market.⁵⁴

⁵³ Examiner, November 10, 1988, 6.

⁵⁴ Advocate, November 7, 1988, 6.

The Advocate was protective of the North-West Coast's claims to the ferry service. It criticized the Opposition Leader, Neil Batt, for silencing Greg Peart, the Labor Member who spoke out in favour of the North-West Coast.⁵⁵ Furthermore, it warned that the issue should not become marred by government or opposition attempts to influence the decision in an attempt to buy votes.⁵⁶ And it greeted the announcement that George Town's bid had been successful with the warning that Tasmanian Ferry Services was taking a "calculated gamble", one it hoped would not prove incorrect.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

The competition between the North and the North-West for the fast catamaran ferry service highlights the depth of regional divisions within Tasmania. Newspaper coverage of this issue does support the contention that Tasmania can be divided into three distinct regions and not simply a two-way North-South division as is sometimes suggested. The

⁵⁵ Advocate, July 22, 1988, 6.

⁵⁶ Advocate, July 25, 1988, 6.

⁵⁷ Advocate, November 10, 1988, 6.

results show that the tensions between the Northern and North-Western interests can be just as intense as those between more the traditional North-South rivals. The dispute also shows how the newspapers can play a major role in provoking and maintaining the parochial sentiments that characterise Tasmanian regionalism. The distinctly issue-inspired regional stance adopted by the Advocate in both its general news articles and editorials, as opposed to the less aggressive stances adopted by the Mercury and the Examiner, is evidence of that. The Examiner's editorial stance showed its commitment to the maintenance of a regional consciousness, however it appeared less involved in the actual issue than did the Advocate. The almost passive role adopted by the Mercury suggested a distinct preference for not becoming involved in an issue which was of little importance to readers inside its prime circulation areas. After all, the main issue as far as the Mercury was concerned was the construction of the ferry and the benefits that would flow on from that, not the choice of a home port. However it is interesting to note that in this issue the Mercury's stance was closer to that of the Examiner than it was

to the Advocate.

While the Examiner and Advocate adopted clearly different approaches in their editorials, the views expressed in their general news columns suggested similar sentiments. The Examiner may have given the appearance of being more interested in the broader issues in its editorials, however the content analysis shows that its general news articles adopted a distinctly Northern stance. One only has to consider the prominence it gave to pro Northern and anti North-Western articles to reach that conclusion. Its approach was much the same as that adopted by the Advocate in its treatment of pro North-Western and anti Northern articles. In fact the Examiner's approach clearly highlights that it was more closely aligned with the North than with the North-West. Although its low-key editorial approach suggests that it did not wish to offend readers on the North-West Coast and hence undermine its efforts to promote itself as an alternative to the Advocate, its overall approach shows a clear Northern bias. The Advocate, on the other hand, made its allegiances quite clear - its loyalties were with the North-West Coast.

The battle for home port honours, which clearly involved the Examiner and the Advocate, shows the depth of regional feeling within the State. This was evidenced by a number of factors, including the general rallying of community and business interests both in the North and along the North-West Coast behind their respective ports, the split this issue caused within the ALP, and the latter's attempts to engineer a similar split within the Government. It was a parochial dispute, much like many others.

Newspaper coverage of this issue confirms the link between the reporting of regional issues and newsworthiness. The greater attention and coverage this issue received in the Advocate and the Examiner highlights the importance of the decision for the Northern and North Western regions. This is evidenced by the fact that coverage in the Examiner (87 articles) and Advocate (83 articles) outnumbered the Mercury's coverage (42 articles) by a ratio of 2:1.

There was almost unanimous support among the newspapers for the fast catamaran ferry service. The regional fervour of the newspapers was highlighted by the different attitude of the Examiner and the Advocate

to the more specific questions - namely those highlighting the benefits of either the Northern or North-Western options. For example, it is significant that 52 percent of Examiner articles (45 of 87) supported the Northern option, and just 5.74 percent (5 of 87) opposed it. On the other hand the Examiner published just six articles (6.89 percent) supporting the North-West option. Equally significant was the fact that 50 percent of Advocate articles (41 of 83) supported the North-West option and just 1.2 percent (one of 83) opposed it. Almost 16 percent of Advocate articles, however, opposed the Northern option - appreciably higher than in either of the other newspapers. The apparent disinterest of the Mercury in this issue was confirmed by the fact that its support for either option was quite low.

From a regional perspective it is significant that the Examiner published 70.31 percent of articles supporting the Northern option (45 of 64) and the Advocate 80.39 percent of those supporting the North-West (41 of 51). Likewise, the Examiner ran 55.55 percent of articles opposed to the North-West option (5 of 9) and the Advocate 65 percent of articles opposing

the Northern route (13 of 20).

The apparent newsworthiness of the ferry dispute was confirmed by the positioning of articles within the newspapers. All newspapers gave a large proportion of their ferry articles prominence by positioning them on the major news pages. It is notable that the Advocate published 72.26 percent of its articles (60 of 83) on pages one to five inclusive. The Examiner published 59.74 percent of its articles (52 of 87) and the Mercury 45.22 percent. The higher percentage of Advocate articles on these pages may reflect its greater interest and involvement in the issue. Likewise, the tendency of the Mercury to publish some of its ferry articles further back in the newspaper suggests that they attached different priorities to this issue. The Advocate's preference for the North-West option is illustrated by the fact that it published 85.36 percent of supportive articles on pages one to five. By comparison, the Examiner ran only 68.88 percent of articles supporting the Northern route on those pages. Equally important was the fact that the Advocate ran all articles (13) opposing the Northern option on pages two to five and the Examiner 80 percent

of its articles opposing the North-West option on pages one to five.

One very significant finding relates to the positioning of articles within the page as per an adaptation of the Gutenberg Diagram. While the Examiner and the Mercury began more than 50 percent of ferry articles in the prominent top left hand corner (quadrant one), the Advocate began less than 40 percent of its articles in that position (33 of 83). It did, however, favour this quadrant for articles supporting the North-West option - its preferred route. In this case it began 46.33 percent of supportive North-West articles in quadrant one. Even so, this was well below the number of supportive Northern route articles (73.33 percent) which the Examiner began in quadrant one.

Thus it is suggested that newspaper coverage of this issue gives further weight to the contention that the media can play an important agenda-setting role. The lower profile adopted by the Mercury suggests that this role may be restricted to issues in which they have a strong interest. However the fact that it did devote considerable column space to this issue suggests that newspapers are attracted to conflict reporting,

even if the events do not directly affect their readers. On the other hand, the stronger editorial stance adopted by the Advocate, and to a lesser extent the Examiner, demonstrates yet again that Tasmania's newspapers are prepared to stand up for their regions on issues which affect them directly.

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between a community and its newspaper is often difficult to determine or define. Relationships can range from the nebulous and detached to the clearly defined and obvious. The type and closeness of the relationship can be influenced by many factors, including the size and nature of the community and the type and ownership of the newspaper. In Tasmania's case, each of the State's three daily newspapers - the Mercury, the Examiner and the Advocate have developed strong, close relationships with their communities.

The mortar for these relationships is the State's unique, in Australian terms, regional breakdown. While no clearly defined geographic boundaries exist to delineate one region from another, their existence is now taken for granted. They are not the "natural" regions defined by Herbertson; nor are they the result of an exercise in cartography or bureaucratic decision-making. Yet the three regions can be readily identified. They correspond with the three newspapers' primary coverage areas as determined

by circulation data, the divisions used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics for the collection of census data and Telecom Australia for its telephone districts. They also recognise the State's local government boundaries, although, despite the influence of regionalism on the State's history and political agenda, they do not correspond with the electoral divisions.

The type and closeness of the relationships is confirmed by both independent research and studies commissioned by the newspapers themselves. These studies have found that Tasmania's daily newspapers enjoy virtual monopoly status in their respective primary circulation areas - the Mercury in the South, the Examiner in the North and the Advocate along the North-West and West Coasts. The research shows that within these regions the dominant newspaper faces little or no competition, either from one of the other Tasmanian dailies or from interstate publications. While there are areas of circulation overlap, these do not affect the overall composition of a regionalised map of Tasmania. The only competition can be found on portions of the North-West Coast where the Examiner

fancies itself as an alternative to the Advocate in seeking Monday to Saturday readers, and the Sunday Examiner and Sunday Tasmanian vie statewide for weekend readers. There has also been some competition between the Mercury and the Advocate in the southern reaches of the West Coast for circulation ascendancy. However, neither the Examiner nor the Mercury have really undermined the Advocate's pre-eminent position within its region. This is confirmed by circulation data and polling which shows that people not only have a purchasing preference for their particular regional daily, they actively identify with it as well.

This regional identification is part of the process which has seen the three newspapers grow and develop with the communities they serve. Theirs is more than the symbiotic relationship referred to by Gurevitch et al. Symbiosis does not necessarily convey the closeness of the relationships that have developed over time. This relationship has seen proprietors, editors and senior executives of all three newspapers play a major role in community affairs - both at a State and regional level. Within each newspaper there have been people who were prepared to use their

position and the newspaper to assist the regions upon which they relied for support. Over time the newspapers have become the mouthpiece, in many respects a vehicle, for their separate regions.

The regions have evolved as a response to a number of often unrelated factors - historical, economic, political, administrative and geographical alike. The State's early history provides some pertinent insights. For example, there is little doubt that the decision in 1804 to divide the then colony of Van Diemen's Land into two separate administrations at the 42nd parallel contributed in no small way to the development of inter-regional rivalries, particularly those between the North and the South. In fact many of the North-South clashes have their origins in this historical decision and the later resolution to make one colony (that centred north of the 42nd parallel) dependent on the other (south of that imaginary line). Even today, there is considerable debate over which of Tasmania's two largest cities - Hobart in the South and Launceston in the North - should be the State's rightful capital. Hobart's claims to retain the title are essentially gubernatorial; Launceston bases its

claims on considerations of an economic and geographic nature. It is a debate which is not likely to be readily resolved.

The emergence of a third region is also due to a combination of historical, economic and geographical factors, namely the discovery and settlement of the resource-rich North-West and West Coasts. That, and the fact that communication and travel were difficult during the State's early days, contributed to the development of a distinctive region, with its core population centres and economic foci. The North-West has also developed a regional consciousness to match that which is so evident in the North and the South.

Regionalism has become very much a part of the Tasmanian ethos. Its influence is such that it touches all aspects of Tasmanian life. One does not have to delve too deep to find evidence of parochialism within the State's social, political and sporting institutions. History and the issues studied for this paper are testimony to that. Few people deny that it exists; how they differ is in relation to its effect. Some argue that regionalism manifesting itself as parochialism is healthy; others claim that it is

detrimental to the State's well-being and future.

The claims for and against parochialism have been levelled by, amongst others, senior people within the three newspaper organisations. In making such claims they, and the newspapers they represent, have been accused of using parochialism for their own purposes. Certainly there is evidence of the newspapers being involved in the parochialism debate. None of the newspapers deny that. In fact the Examiner and the Advocate are proud of their roles. They see it as an integral part of serving their communities. The Mercury is not so forthcoming; it frequently decries parochialism. In recent editorials it has become one of the harshest critics of parochialism.

Despite the Mercury's exhortations to the contrary, it can be argued that all three Tasmanian newspapers are parochial in their outlook and coverage of news events. Their respective treatments of the State bank, statewide football and fast catamaran ferry debates confirm that. The research shows that a clear link can be established between the editorial opinions expressed in newspapers and the views espoused by people in their primary circulation areas. Furthermore,

the greater the involvement of a community in a particular issue, the stronger the opinions expressed in its newspaper and the broader the coverage it receives. It also appears that newspaper coverage of an issue is influenced by another factor too - the emotionalism of the debate. This ties in with the immediacy of the issue and the direct bearing of the ultimate decision on the community, that is, whether it would be to its advantage or disadvantage.*

*These findings point to interesting areas of speculation which may be worthy of further study. For example, the Mercury's treatment of the State bank and State league disputes was more comprehensive than its coverage of the fast catamaran ferry issue. This may have been influenced by the fact that the ultimate decision on where the fast catamaran service would have its home port was of little immediate concern to Mercury readers in Southern Tasmania. After all, the company proposing to establish the service had clearly indicated that the choice was between the North and North-West. With a Southern shipyard building the vessel it had benefited in a regional sense anyway and with State tourism the likely winner, it would recoup further benefits, irrespective of which port won the service.

The outcome of the State bank and State league disputes, on the other hand, was of more direct

Herein lies the crux of the regionalism/parochialism debate - it is the fear of losing something, of not gaining a share of something or seeing someone else receive something which you believe should be yours. Inextricably linked to this is the question of pride; in this case regional pride. After supporting the formation of the State bank, the Mercury and the SBT adopted very similar courses throughout the dispute. When the SBT pulled out of negotiations, the Mercury said that its decision was justified. The arguments espoused by the SBT, both for

interest to the Mercury and Southern readers. Of the two, the State bank dispute was the more emotion-laden. Irrespective of the motives for forming a Statewide football competition - be it a genuine concern for the state of Tasmanian football or merely a ploy to prop up an ailing local league - Hobart did not risk losing anything. With the State bank dispute it did; namely the identity of one of its oldest institutions - the SBT.

and against the proposal, were reiterated by the Mercury in its editorials. When the SBT criticized the State Government over its handling of the dispute, the Mercury joined in. And, when it seemed likely that the State bank would proceed without the SBT, it urged the Government's Southern-based politicians to lobby for Hobart as the headquarters. The Mercury's treatment of this issue clearly shows the close relationship which has developed between itself and the Hobart community.

The same can be said of the Examiner's treatment of all three issues, although its coverage of the fast ferry catamaran dispute was not as emotive, for example, as the Advocate's. A number of direct comparisons may be drawn between the Examiner's treatment of the State bank and State league football disputes and the Mercury's coverage of the State bank issue. In both cases Northern Tasmania stood to lose. At risk in the State bank dispute was the Northern identity of the Launceston Bank for Savings (LBS); in the Statewide football dispute it was the Northern Tasmanian Football Association. Both had developed long associations with the Northern region - the LBS over 151 years, the NTFA over 99 years. Like the

Mercury with the SBT, the Examiner's editorials reflected the arguments and concerns of the LBS and the wider Northern community in the State bank dispute. Throughout the Statewide football dispute its editorials became a mouthpiece for groups and individuals concerned about the future of Northern football.

During the State bank dispute the Examiner changed its stance from one which advocated that the Northern bank's pre-eminent position be protected at all costs, to one of equality between the LBS and the SBT. Later, when head office functions were being divided between the two cities, it praised the LBS for being prepared to give ground. It supported the introduction of a Statewide football competition. At the same time, however, it recognised the effect this would have on Northern football, and strongly supported the re-establishment of a joint Northern league.

The Examiner's motives in supporting the Northern Tasmanian Football League (NTFL) may have been ulterior. Not only did it provide a solution to the NTFA's problems, but it also gave the Examiner an excellent opportunity by which to increase its

circulation along the North-West Coast. Such commercial thinking may also explain its reluctance to become parochially involved in the dispute over a home port for the fast catamaran ferry service. While football rivalry may help to sell newspapers, a distinctive Northern bias in the Examiner over the choice of a home port for the proposed ferry service would not enhance its sales on the North-West Coast or further any plans it harboured to extend into the region.

While the Examiner appeared reluctant to turn the fast catamaran dispute into a parochial brawl, the Advocate displayed no such inhibitions. Its coverage of the ferry and Statewide football disputes simply confirmed its own claims - that it is a regional newspaper and proud of it. In fact, the Advocate provided not only a mouthpiece for groups supporting the North-West Coast as a home base for the fast catamaran service, it rated amongst the proposal's most emphatic supporters. In this case it was an advocate by nature as well as by name.

The Advocate's treatment of the Statewide football dispute was not as forthright as the Examiner's. In this issue the North-West Coast was much

like the South; both would have retained their senior football competitions, irrespective of whether the Statewide league proceeded or not. The Advocate's coverage of the State bank dispute was more detached even though it did support moves to headquarter the new bank in the North. While it was not directly involved, it did support this option on the basis that it was geographically more convenient for people living on the North-West Coast.

The three studies show that in a multi issue analysis, it is difficult to base conclusions on comparisons of general news or editorial column coverage alone. A clearer and more accurate assessment is gained if the study draws on a number of options, including general news, editorials and cartoons. This was highlighted by the fact that in two of the three studies there were clear differences between general news and editorial coverage, involving at least one of the newspapers. For example, the Examiner's State bank and State league editorials showed a distinctive Northern bias. Yet its general news coverage of those issues was more balanced. Its ferry editorials showed no Northern bias and yet its general news articles

showed a distinct preference for a Northern home port over a North-Western option. The Advocate, on the other hand, did nothing to disguise the regional slant of its ferry coverage. Its editorials and its general news articles showed a clear bias in favour of the North-West Coast. Its general news coverage of the State bank issue was balanced, while its editorials showed a distinctly Northern bias. Neither the Mercury's general ferry coverage nor its editorials showed a preference for either the North or the North-West. And while its State bank and State league general news articles were relatively balanced, its editorials on these issues left no doubt as to what the Mercury's policy was.

The general questions - whether there should be a State bank, a Statewide football competition and a fast catamaran service between Tasmania and Victoria - did not produce a great deal of conflict between the three newspapers or the regions. Generally they agreed that the proposals should go ahead. It was the more specific questions which produced the conflicting responses. For example the division of State bank head office functions between Launceston and Hobart; the

costs and benefits of a Statewide football league; and the most suitable home port for the fast catamaran service. These were the questions which produced the regional responses and highlighted the differences between general news and editorial coverage of the issues.

To illustrate, the Examiner published 73 percent of articles supporting the division of State bank head office functions between Hobart and Launceston, 70.31 percent of those supporting the Northern port and almost 60 percent of those warning of costs to the North and North-West if a State league should be established. On the other hand, it published 55 percent of articles opposing the North-West port, just 26 percent of articles opposing the division of State bank head office functions, only 25 percent of articles opposing the Northern port and 27 percent of articles outlining the benefits of the State league to the North or North-West. These figures support the argument that the Examiner adopts a distinctly regional stance in its coverage of issues which may affect the North.

Much the same can be said of the Mercury with

respect to issues affecting the South. It published 52 percent of articles opposing the division of State bank head office functions between Hobart and Launceston and 35 percent of those which outlined the benefits of the State league. Equally significant was the fact that it published just 11 percent of articles supporting the division of State bank head office functions between Launceston and Hobart and 14 percent of those which pointed to the costs of the State league proposal. With respect to the fast catamaran ferry dispute, it published not quite 16 percent of articles supporting the Northern port and eight percent of those favouring a North-West port, 10 percent of articles opposed to the Northern port as a home base for the fast catamaran service and 33 percent of those opposed to the North-West option. Again, there is a clear bias towards articles with a pro-southern stance. that is, those arguing for Hobart as the State bank headquarters, rather than a division of responsibilities and those highlighting the benefits as opposed to the costs of the Statewide football competition.

Whereas the Mercury concentrated on Hobart's bid to become the proposed State bank's headquarters,

the Advocate focussed on the North-West's claims for the fast catamaran ferry service. It published 80 per cent of articles supporting the North-West Coast's bid for the ferry service and just 11 percent of articles opposing that option. On the other hand, it published 65 percent of articles opposing the Northern ferry route, and only 14 percent of articles supporting the Northern bid. Like the Examiner and the Mercury, the Advocate showed a distinctive regional bias in its coverage of these issues through its general news columns. The only issue in which its coverage was lower than may have been expected was in relation to the State league, when it published only 27 percent of the articles which outlined the costs involved. This may be due to the fact that the NWFU was confident its domestic competition would survive in one guise or another. Its coverage of the State bank dispute was lower than that of the other newspapers, but that reflects the less direct involvement of the North-West region in the dispute.

Thus it is argued that the three newspapers gave greater priority and coverage to issues affecting their respective regions than they did to those which

did not directly impact on readers. Furthermore, it can be argued that as a share of total issue coverage, as determined by column centimetres and articles published, the newspapers gave greater exposure to articles supporting their adopted regional stances than they did to those which opposed them.

Like the responses to the specific questions, the editorials highlighted the conflict which characterises newspaper reporting of regional issues in Tasmania. In most instances a clearer insight could be gained of a newspaper's attitude to a specific issue from its editorial coverage than its general news. There were exceptions, however. For example, the Examiner's editorial coverage of the catamaran dispute was more circumspect than its general news, despite the fact that it obviously supported the Northern route. In this instance it appears that the Examiner did not wish to jeopardise its standing on the North-West Coast over an issue, the outcome of which would benefit the whole State.

From a regional perspective, the editorials in both the Examiner and the Advocate show a distrust of and wariness towards the South. In both newspapers

there is a distinctive "us versus them" attitude. This sentiment is also evident in the Advocate's ferry editorials, although in this case the concerns were directed at the North. While the Mercury expressed concern that the Government was siding with Northern interests in gradually undermining Hobart's capital city status, the Examiner and Advocate contained more frequent and emotional appeals on behalf of their respective regions. At the same time, all three newspapers were protective of their local institutions - the Mercury of the SBT and the TFL, the Examiner of the LBS and Northern football, and the Advocate of North-Western football. This was despite the fact that the Mercury had been critical of the TFL, as had the Examiner of the NTFA during the State league dispute. Indeed, as noted previously, it has not been unusual for either the Examiner or the Advocate to overtly defend its parochial posture by proclaiming that an institution had to be part of a community to serve it properly.

Despite occasional overt editorial support for a parochial stand, the newspapers have displayed some ambivalence on the general issue of parochialism. At

times the newspapers have attacked not only parochialism in general, but also each others parochialism. It is interesting that parochialism on one's own part may be construed as statesmanship while the parochialism of others is interpreted as self-serving and thus the object of derision. For example, the Mercury's parochialism was evident in both its editorials and cartoons. Mercury cartoons, particularly those on the State bank dispute which, from a Southern perspective, was the most bitter of the issues studied, tended to highlight the conflict, the bitterness and the division which these disputes produced. The Examiner's cartoons tended to address the parochial aspects of these debates in a somewhat lighter vein, but like those in the Mercury they very clearly endorsed its own regional viewpoint.

While the Mercury, Examiner and Advocate differed substantially in their attitudes to the issues from a regional perspective, they concurred on the positioning of articles within the newspaper. This applied from issue to issue and was tested according to two criteria: (1) positioning according to page number and (2) placement on the page according to an

adaptation of Arnold's Gutenberg Theory of newspaper readership. Apparent community interest - newsworthiness - saw State bank and fast catamaran articles positioned mainly on the major news pages and State league articles both on major news and major sport pages.

These findings further highlight the importance Tasmania's three daily newspapers attach to regional issues. The results show that a correlation can be drawn between the importance a newspaper attaches to an issue and its positioning within the paper. To illustrate, the Mercury published 68 percent of its State bank articles on pages one to six, 60 percent of its State league articles on either the front or back pages, but only 45 percent of its ferry articles on pages one to five. The Examiner, on the other hand, published 65 percent of its State bank articles on pages one to six, 56 percent of its State league articles on the front or back page and 59.74 percent of its ferry articles on pages one to five. The Advocate published 84 percent of its State bank, 58 percent of its State league and 72 percent of its ferry articles within these page groupings. While there does

appear to be one anomaly here - the fact that the Advocate appears to attach greater importance to the State bank dispute than the other two issues - it is suggested that too much should not be read into this. Rather, it is contended, that it simply highlights the importance the Advocate attaches to all issues of a regional nature, even those which do not directly affect the North-West Coast. In this respect it differs somewhat from the Mercury which did not, for example, give the same coverage to the ferry dispute as it did to the other issues.

According to this method of analysis, the three newspapers featured these issues prominently, irrespective of whether they supported or opposed their respective positions. For example, the Mercury published almost 72 percent of articles supporting the division of State bank head office functions between Launceston and Hobart on pages one and four, despite the fact that editorially it opposed this stance. Likewise, the Examiner published 62 percent of its articles opposing the division of head office functions and 66 percent of ferry articles supporting the North-West option on pages one to five. In both cases the

stances expressed in these articles were contrary to its own. The Advocate published almost 45 percent of articles supporting the selection of a Northern port for the catamaran service on pages one to five, despite the fact that it strongly opposed this option. It is interesting that the Mercury tended to place a high percentage of its fast catamaran ferry articles off the major news pages - an attitude which confirms its disinterest in the dispute.

Not only did the newspapers give these issues prominence by placing articles on the major news or sports pages. They also placed them prominently on the page. The test for on-page prominence was an adaptation of the Gutenberg Theory of readership. It is argued that depending on which quadrant the newspapers commenced articles, they could influence their prospects of being read and as such play a major agenda-setting role.

All three newspapers showed a distinct preference for starting articles in the top left hand quadrant, identified for the purposes of this study as quadrant one. The Examiner began 58.1 percent of its State bank articles, 62.44 percent of its State league

and 58.62 percent of its fast catamaran articles in quadrant one. The Mercury began 54.76 percent of ferry articles, 71.76 percent of State bank articles and 49.30 percent of State league articles in quadrant one. The Advocate began 60 percent of its State league, 41 percent of its State bank and 40 percent of its fast ferry articles in quadrant one. Quadrant two (the top right hand quadrant) was the Examiner's next most favoured, with nearly 30 percent of ferry, 21 percent of State bank and 17 percent of its State league articles beginning there. Quadrants three (bottom left hand) and four (bottom right hand) did not rank highly for Examiner article starts on an issue by issue basis. Seven percent of Examiner ferry articles, two percent of State bank and 18 percent of State league stories began in quadrant three, with five percent, three percent and two percent of articles on these respective issues beginning in quadrant four.

Like the Examiner, the Mercury began a significant proportion of its articles in quadrant two. It began 24 per cent of ferry, 19 percent of State bank and 12 percent of State league articles in quadrant two. It made more use of quadrant three, however, with

14 percent, 26 percent and 31 percent of its articles on the respective issues beginning in the bottom left hand corner. The Mercury made little use of quadrant four, beginning just 7 percent of articles from each issue in that segment. The Advocate published 22 percent of ferry articles, 13 percent of State bank articles and 15 percent of State league articles in quadrant two. It published 25 percent, 38 percent and 19 percent of articles on these respective issues in quadrant three and 13 percent, 7 percent and 5 percent in quadrant four.

Thus it can be seen that the while all three newspapers showed a preference for quadrant one, their second preferences varied from issue to issue. The Examiner and Mercury appeared to favour quadrant two as their second choice for ferry and State bank articles, but preferred quadrant three for State league coverage. The Advocate, on the other hand, indicated a second choice preference for quadrant three in its coverage of all issues.

The results show the same preferences when calculated on a question by question basis. Examiner articles supporting the various questions still tended

to begin in quadrant one, with the exception of articles showing a positive response to question three on the ferry issue (support of a North-West port). In that case there was a slight preference for quadrant two over quadrant one, although the difference was only two articles - two in quadrant one as opposed to four in quadrant two. The only Mercury exception was for articles supporting a combined Northern league in the State league dispute. In that case six out of eight Mercury articles began in quadrant three. There were two exceptions in the Advocate's coverage of these issues. The first was in response to question two on the State bank issue, where articles supporting the division of head office functions were split between quadrant one (4 articles) and quadrant three (five). The other was in response to question one in the State bank study. Sixteen of the 29 Advocate articles supporting the formation of a State bank began in quadrant four.

Responses opposing the various questions displayed a similar preference for quadrant one. That was particularly evident with responses in all newspapers to the State league (question two) and State bank (question two). In the Examiner's coverage there

were only two exceptions to this trend - the State league (question 3) and ferry (question 2) where the second quadrant was favoured. However in both cases the difference was just one article. In the only Mercury example in which the coverage went against the trend - the ferry dispute (question 1) - just one article was involved and that began in quadrant two. The Advocate's coverage of the ferry dispute (question two) showed a slight preference for quadrant three over quadrant one (five articles to four), but again the difference is almost insignificant.

The obvious tendency of all three newspapers to commence State bank, State league and fast catamaran ferry articles in quadrant one is significant. It both tends to confirm the importance of the top left hand position on the page as advanced by Arnold and others and it demonstrates that the newspapers have attached particular newsworthiness to the State bank, State league and fast catamaran ferry issues. By enhancing their prospects of being read, the newspapers drew public attention to these issues and kept them prominently on the community political agenda.

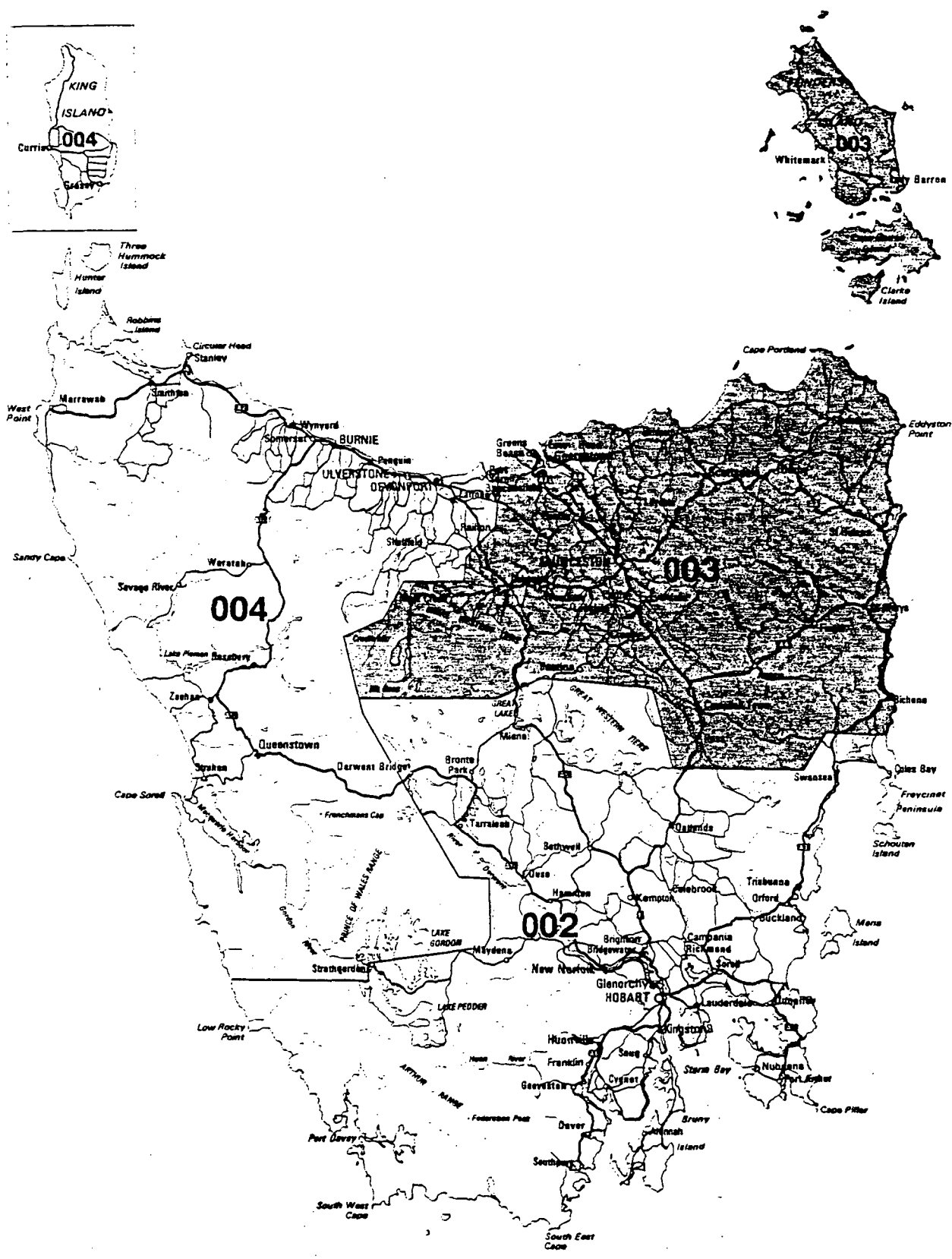
It is equally significant that the newspapers have so positioned articles, irrespective of whether they support or oppose their respective regional stances. From a conflict reporting perspective, this is important, because it suggests that the newspapers, by placing the articles in a prominent position - both within the newspaper and on the page - are seeking an agenda-setting role. On the other hand, it may seem somewhat unusual that they are giving such prominence to articles that may not necessarily accord with their own pre-determined stance on an issue. This apparent contradiction is resolved, however, when it is recalled that in all instances the newspapers gave much greater coverage to articles which accorded with their own regional perspective, than those which did not.

In attempting to assess the impact of newspapers in a community it is necessary to weigh the results derived from all the component units - in this case: (1) total coverage (as determined by the number of articles and column centimetres) the newspapers devoted to each issue, (2) their interpretation and presentation of the issues in a news sense (as indicated by responses to the questions) and (3) the

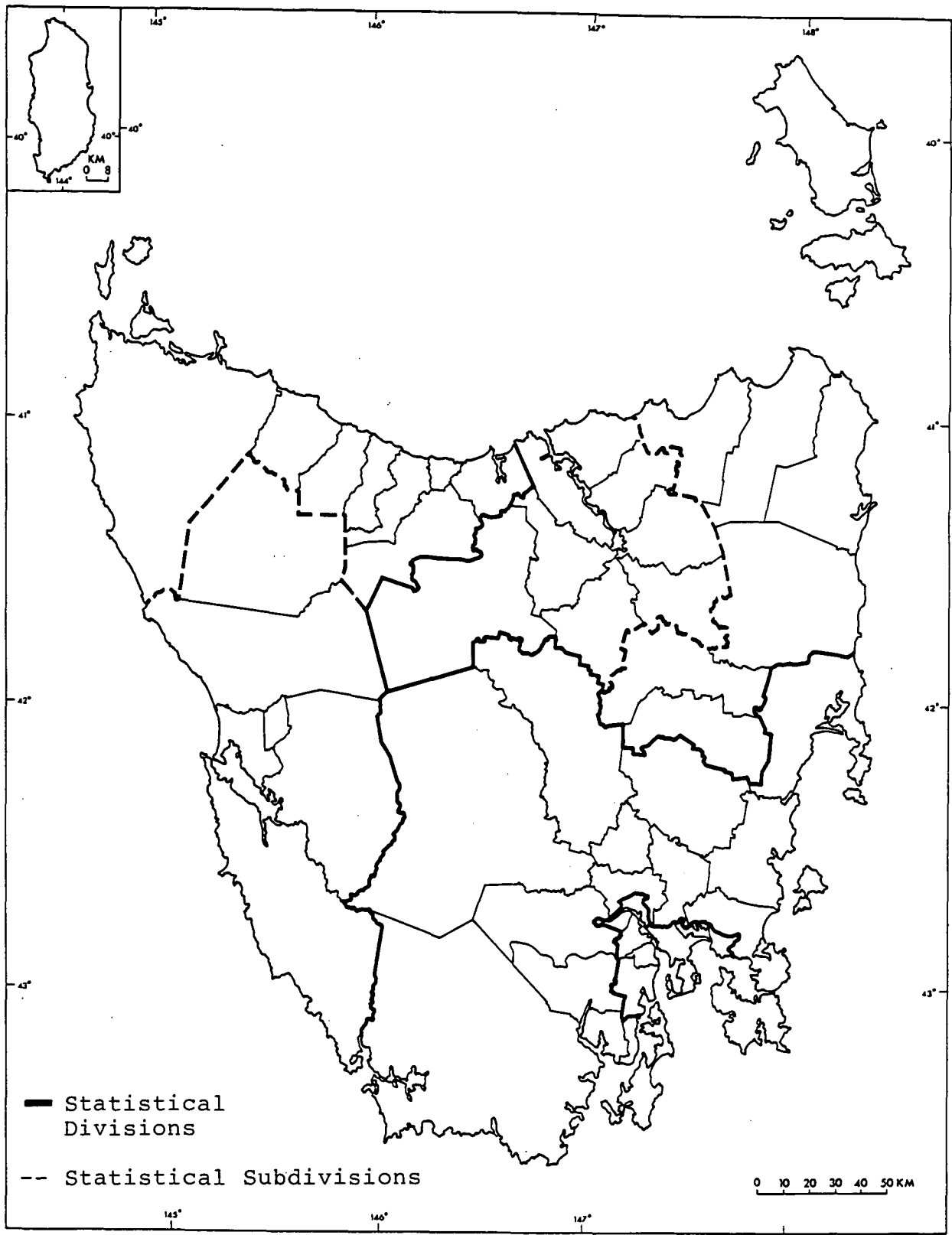
positioning and placement of articles within the newspaper and on the page. By these criteria, it appears that Tasmania's three daily newspaper contain a significant regionalist outlook. This is underscored by the fact that while they give prominence to all sides of a regional issue, by sheer weight of information they favour their own regional positions. It is this which gives them an agenda-setting role within the community on issues involving inter-regional conflict.

It can be argued that, despite the possible constraints on media influence identified by Davies and others, the role of newspapers within Tasmania has been an influential one. This is evidenced by a number of factors not the least being the high market penetration and readership the newspapers enjoy within their respective prime circulation areas. Admittedly the publication of an article, even the purchase of a newspaper, is no guarantee that a particular news item will be read. But in a small State like Tasmania, where newspaper readership is habitual, the likelihood of prominently placed articles on topics which generally elicit wide community interest being read is very high.

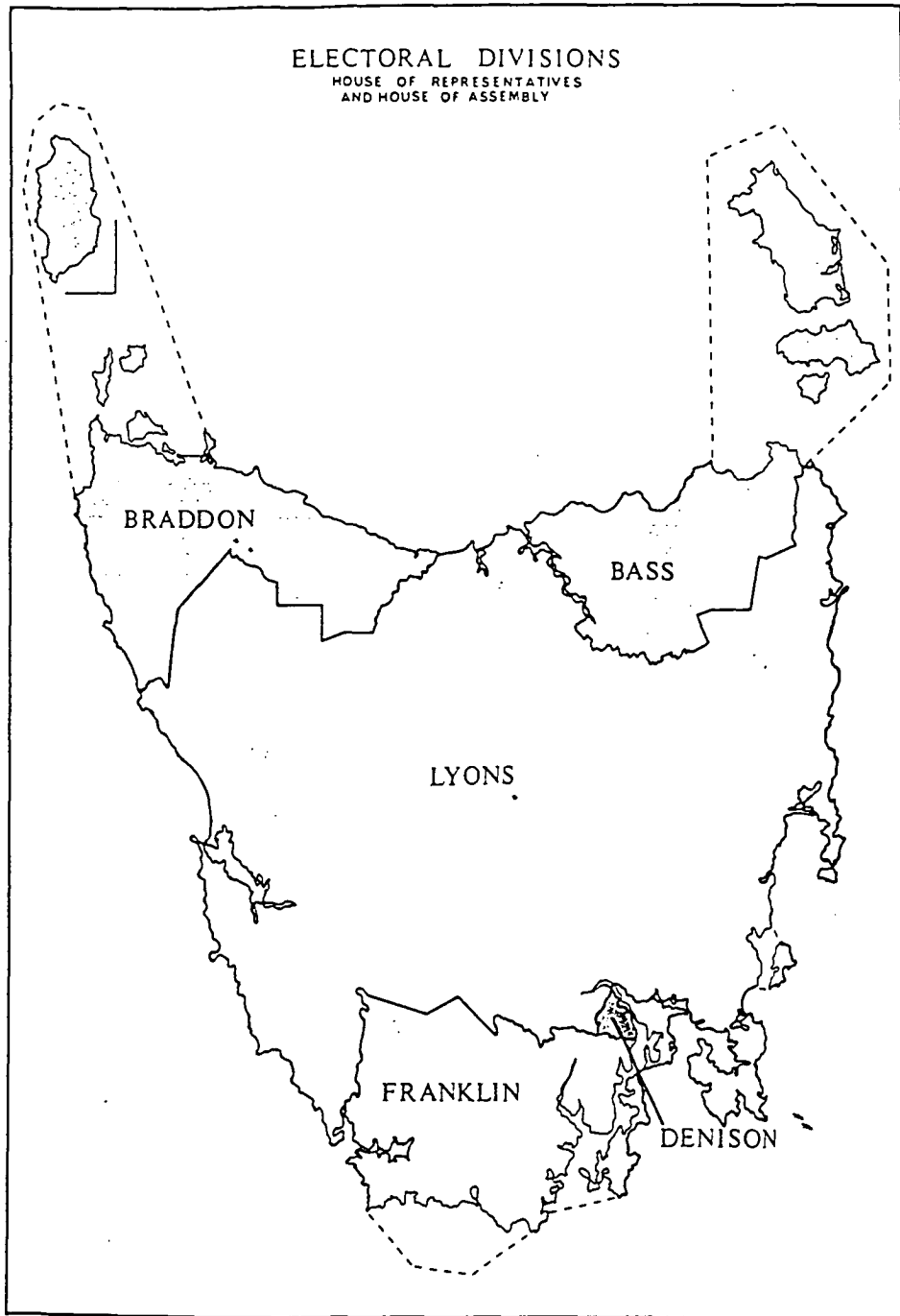
This study therefore offers strong support, if not confirmation, of the existence of regionalism in Tasmania and the important effect it has on state politics. Furthermore, it supports the argument that the newspapers play a major role in reporting inter-regional conflict and that by so doing they help to promote and foster the historical divisions which have developed over time. Accordingly, it can be argued that in taking a regional stance in the reporting of these issues, the newspapers have confirmed Inglis' claim that they not only reflect, but contribute to the development of a provincial outlook. While these conclusions support Kramer's comments that Australian society is influenced by strong regional and local loyalties and affiliations, they do not fully endorse those made by Donohue, Olien and Tichenor. They support their overall contention that newspapers have an integration role within the local community, but do not support the proposition that this role extends to relations between communities as well. Rather, these results would support the proposition that with respect to the reporting of inter-regional disputes, the Tasmanian newspapers have tended to promote these divisions, rather than seeking to heal them.



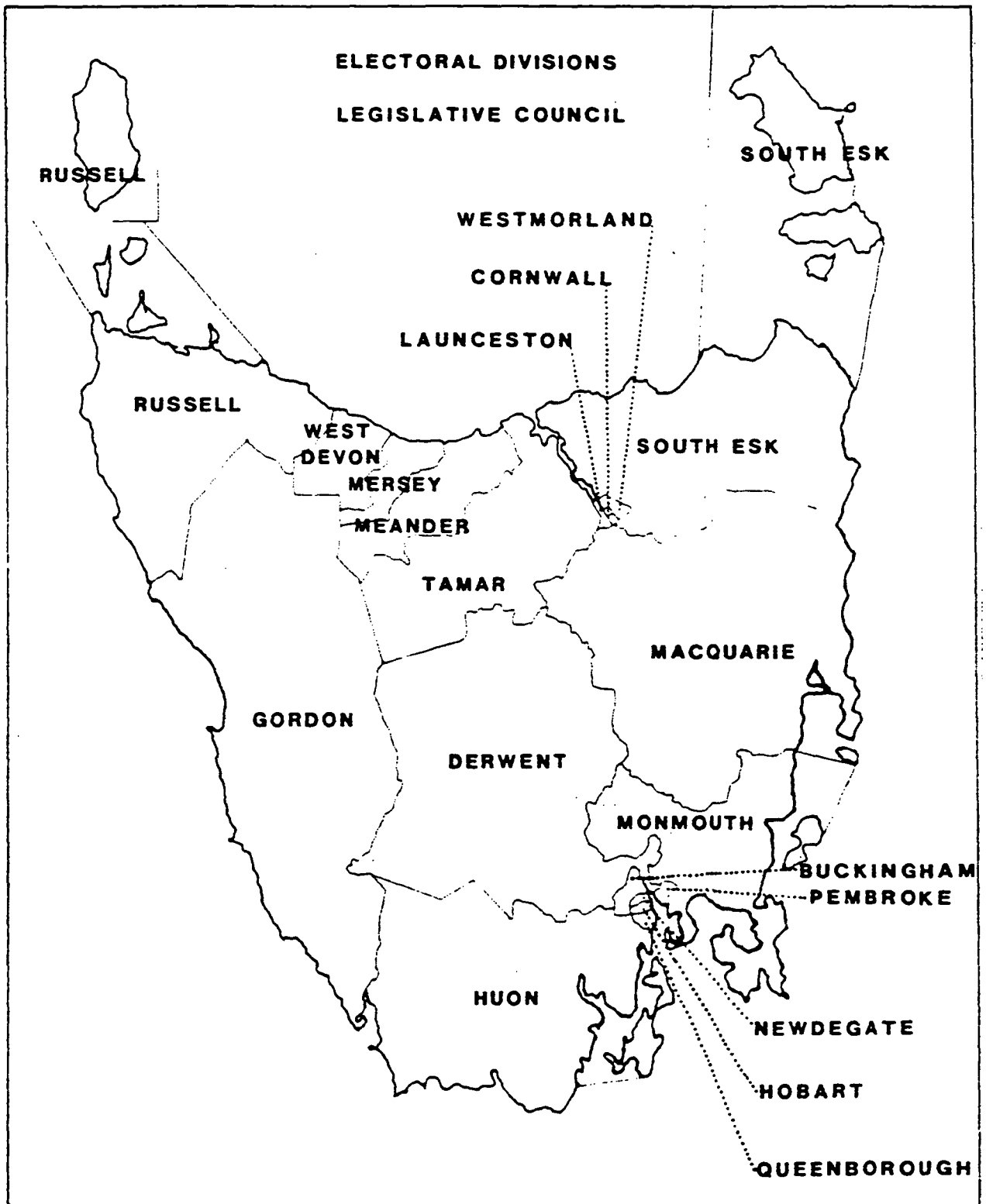
Appendix 1, Map 1.



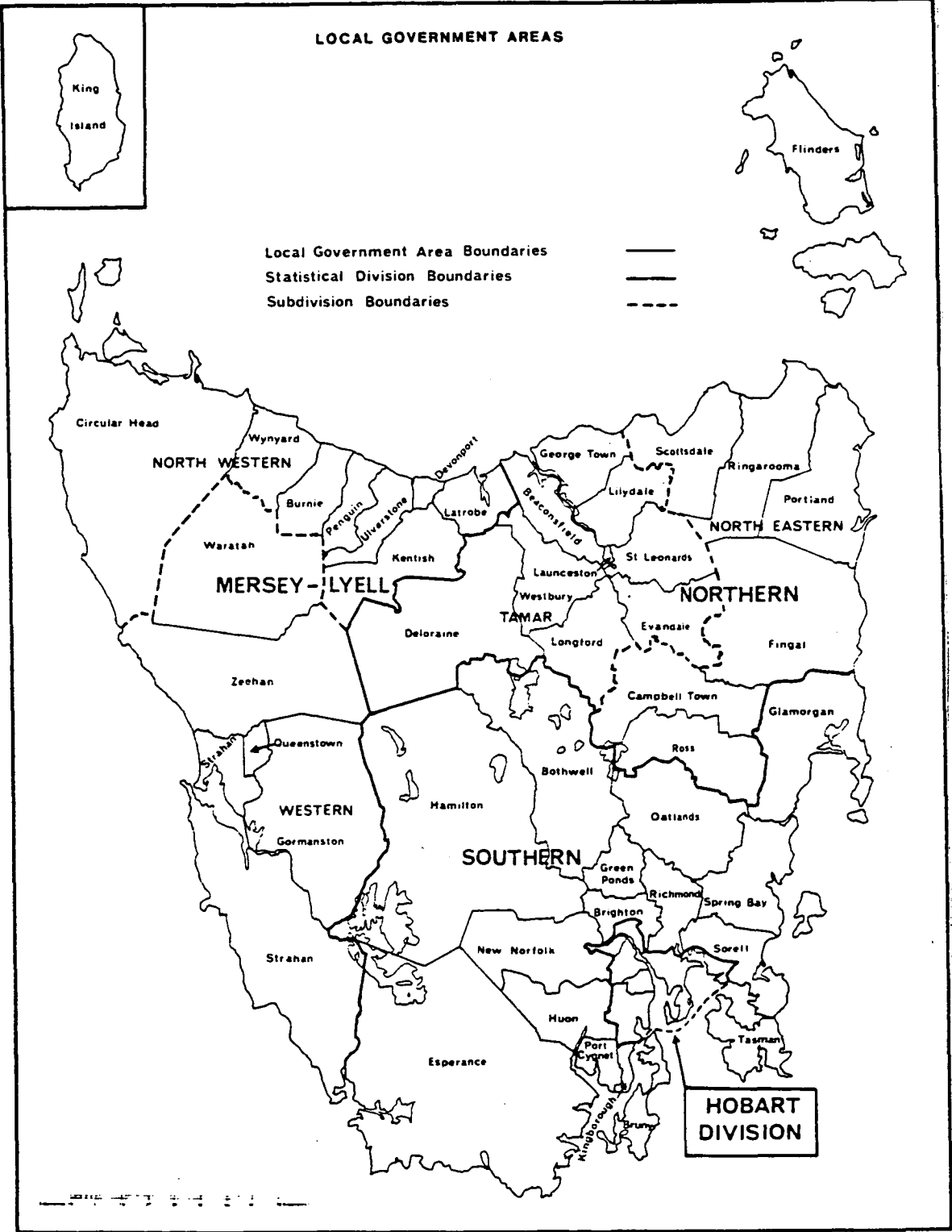
Appendix 1, Map 2.



Appendix 1, Map 3.



Appendix 1, Map 4.



Appendix 1, Map 5.

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