

ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE 1

SCOTLAND: WHERE HAVE ALL THE TRADE UNION MEMBERS GONE?*

by P B Beaumont, Department of Social and Economic Research,
University of Glasgow and R I D Harris, Department of Economics,
University of Waikato

Introduction

The dimensions of the substantial decline in the extent of trade union membership in Britain as a whole in the 1980s (and into the 1990s) are well known, although there is some disagreement as to the major causes or factors involved in this membership fall.⁽¹⁾ However, when we take a more disaggregated look at the contours of union membership in Britain in the 1980s we still find evidence of the traditional 'North-South divide', with membership being disproportionately concentrated in the Northern part of the country.⁽²⁾

However, what if we disaggregate still further by looking at the union membership position of the individual regions which make up the Northern part of the North-South dichotomy? Are they all still individually representative of the Northern part of Britain as regards their level of union membership? This is the approach and issue pursued in this particular paper, with our basic finding being that Scotland appears to be no longer performing as a Northern region in this regard, at least as regards manual employees. This finding is particularly apparent when the position in Scotland is compared with that in Wales, one of the other traditional areas of union strength in Britain.

An Historical Perspective

In their early classic study of trade unionism in Britain the Webbs estimated that some 20 per cent of adult male manual workers were trade union members in 1892.⁽³⁾ The economic and political significance of this figure was largely attributed to the fact that membership was disproportionately concentrated in particular areas (and industries) of the country. Specifically, the Webbs indicated that union membership was very largely centred in (i) the North of England (i.e. the 7 counties north of the Humber and Dee), (ii) South Wales (including Monmouthshire) and (iii) Scotland (in particular the narrow industrial belt between the Clyde and the Forth). Furthermore this geographical concentration of membership was viewed as deriving essentially from the fact of industrial concentration.

The key role of industrial structure in accounting for the concentration of union members in the Northern part of Britain was further emphasised in a number of early studies of industrial organisation. For instance, it was reported that in 1907 some 60 per cent of the manufacturing workforce was concentrated in South Wales, the North East coast, Lancashire and mid-Scotland,⁽⁴⁾ while in 1921 some two-thirds of the workforce in the staple industries of metals, chemicals and engineering, textiles and mining and quarrying were found North of the Trent, with a large proportion of the remainder in South Wales and the Midlands.⁽⁵⁾ These staple industries were highly unionised ones.

Previous Research

From the late 1970s, George Bain (with a number of colleagues at Warwick University) conducted a series of studies of the determinants of the level of union membership in Britain, at various levels of disaggregation. In the initial study of inter-industry variation in union membership, the regional variables were generally insignificant, a result that the authors felt was not totally unexpected in that if regional variation in union membership was largely a function of the regional distribution of industries, then controlling for the latter would eliminate the influence of the former.⁽⁶⁾ In contrast, the two subsequent studies of the determinants of inter-establishment⁽⁷⁾ and inter-personal⁽⁸⁾ variation in union membership found the regional factor to be statistically significant. In the latter study, for example, they had three groups of regions, namely (i) the South East (excluding Greater London), (ii) Wales and (iii) the North, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and Scotland. Their results indicated that individual employees were more likely to be union members if they worked in Wales or the North of Britain - as distinguished by a line from the Trent to the Severn - and, with the exception of women non-manual workers, were less likely to be a union member if they worked in the South-East. Interestingly, they reported in a footnote that the coefficients estimated separately for the North, North-West, Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and Scotland, were not significantly different

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from that for the group as a whole. Their analysis was undertaken on a data-set for the mid-1970s, and the question raised here is whether this relationship between the individual regions which make up the Northern group and the Northern group as a whole has been maintained throughout the 1980s.

More recent research, using various data sets for the 1980s, has overwhelmingly confirmed the maintenance of the North-South divide in union membership in Britain.⁽⁹⁾ This research has also revealed that this spatial difference in union organisation is not explicable in terms of regional differences in contemporary industrial structures. Rather than contemporary structures being important, it would appear that what matters are differences in historical industrial structures (as indicated above) with these tending to generate externalities (as a result of physical proximity) to the employees and management of other firms and industries in the regions concerned over the course of time.⁽¹⁰⁾ The result is a regional tradition in favour of (or not) union membership which some authors have referred to as a "social custom" explanation of unionisation.⁽¹¹⁾

The question which we seek to examine in the remainder of the paper is whether the regional tradition of union membership in Scotland has weakened over recent time. The possibility of such a change is suggested by making some explicit comparison with the position in Wales.

The Inklings of Change Between Scotland and Wales?

As was suggested above, the traditional, historical industrial structures of Scotland and Wales made them central to the union heartland of Britain. However, has there been some recent divergence in the positions of Scotland and Wales in this regard, with Scotland becoming rather less of a union stronghold? One of the first suggestions along these lines was contained in a study of union-management relations in the electronics industry of South Wales which suggested that:⁽¹²⁾

Notwithstanding all these innovations in management-labour practices, the fact remains that there is little sign in South Wales of a non-unionised belt that has emerged in Central Scotland which, in many other respects, is comparable to South Wales... Although the reasons for such a stark contrast are by no means clear, two possibilities in particular merit consideration. First, the "Scottish" electronics industry is far more dependent on US entrants, and IBM, Motorola and National Semiconductor have long been prominent non-unionised "flagships" whereas in South Wales, the most conspicuous new entrants - the Japanese plants - have all respected

unionisation, albeit in distinctive ways. Second, the Scottish New Towns have been privileged locations for inward investment in the electronics industry, particularly East Kilbride, Livingston and Glenrothes; it is of some interest that these New Towns consciously recruited the most "respectable" families and so never became centres of indiscriminate "overspill" as was the case with Cumbernauld.

In fact the position is not quite as simple and straightforward as is suggested above. This is because some research has revealed that the electronics industry in Scotland is far from being a sector of employment dominated by non-union plants.⁽¹³⁾ This being said, it is important to note that (i) the various New Towns in Scotland do currently contain a relatively high proportion of new, small (independent) establishments which are non-union ones,⁽¹⁴⁾ (ii) only 16 per cent of all US plants established in Scotland in the 1980s recognised trade unions,⁽¹⁵⁾ (iii) the five Japanese plants located in Scotland in 1990 were all non-union ones,⁽¹⁶⁾ and (iv) some small scale survey findings suggest that the level of union recognition among recent inward investors to Wales exceeds that in Scotland.⁽¹⁷⁾ These various facts and figures certainly raise some important issues and hypotheses concerning the level of union organisation among inward investors in Scotland compared to the position in Wales. For instance, have the unions in Scotland suffered from facing a relatively high (compared to Wales) proportion of US entrants, or have the union movements of the two regions presented very different "images" to potential entrants which has resulted in different employer responses concerning the matter of union recognition, or have the unions in Scotland been relatively less successful in gaining access to and influence within the political decision making circles which have strongly shaped the respective inward investment streams? These various possible influences are all certainly deserving of future examination through systematic empirical research.

However, what is happening in the inward investment sector of the two regions (as regards union organisation) is likely to be important more as a pointer to larger (possibly divergent) developments in union organisation in the two regions rather than being the sole or even major cause of these developments as such. In other words, we view the inward investor sector more as a symptom than a cause of any larger, divergence between the two regions. Accordingly we need to look beyond the findings of individual studies of the inward investor sector to obtain a more fully rounded picture of what is happening to union organisation in Scotland and Wales.

The Basic Data

The two workplace industrial relations surveys conducted

in 1980 and 1984 provide the largest, nationally representative sets of information on industrial relations structures at the individual establishment or plant level in Britain for the decade. These two surveys contain information on whether an individual employment establishment recognises a trade union for the purposes of collective bargaining. Accordingly these two sources are drawn on to provide the information in Table 1 which indicates the extent (i.e. employee coverage) of union recognition arrangements for all the individual regions of Britain; this information pertains to the private sector only (the public sector is excluded because of its relatively high level of union membership throughout Britain as a whole).

The Table documents three well-known features of union organisation in Britain, namely that union organisation is more a feature of manual than non-manual employees, union organisation is heavily concentrated in the northern regions of Britain and the extent of union organisation declined for the country as a whole (and in most individual regions) in the period 1980-84. For present purposes, however, what is particularly striking about the Table is the position of manual employees in Scotland. In 1980 the proportion of manual employees in unionised establishments in Scotland was above that for Britain as a whole and similar to that in Wales, whereas by 1984 the figure for Scotland had fallen below that for both Britain as a whole and Wales. Indeed the figure for Scotland in 1984 was well below that for the other northern regions and was essentially similar to that in southern regions such as East Anglia. In short, the contents of Table 1 seem to point to the relative decline in the "northern status" of manual workers in Scotland as regards union organisation.

This reduced number of (manual) employees in unionised establishments in Scotland could have come about from some combination of the following possible developments: (1) a reduction in the number of unionised establishments (i.e. closures and/or the derecognition of unions); (2) a reduction in the average employment size of unionised establishments (i.e. principally through redundancies); (3) an increase in the number of non-union establishments; and (4) an increase in the average employment size of non-union establishments or (more likely, given the labour market circumstances of 1980-1984) a smaller average sized employment reduction for non-union establishments compared to their unionised counterparts. None of these possible developments constitute good news for the unions, and one suspects that all of them were to some extent at work in Scotland (and indeed other regions) during the period under examination. Unfortunately the nature of our data does not allow us to identify precisely the relative importance of all four possible routes or mechanisms in accounting for the declining proportion of employees in unionised establishments in the years 1980-84.

However, in the next section we do address the issue of

the probability of an establishment being unionised in Scotland relative to the position in the Northern regions as a whole and in Wales. This investigation essentially examines the possibility of a growth in the size of the non-union sector in Scotland which is of obvious importance, not to say concern, to the union movement, particularly given the present state of their (limited) financial and manpower resources for new organising purposes. In view of the basic findings in Table 1 our analysis below is based on the data in the 1984 survey.

Our Analysis

The limited number of observations (i.e. only 29 for Welsh establishments and 60 for Scottish) meant that it was not possible to estimate separate equations for these two regions. Accordingly, we estimated a set of logit regression equations for the determinants of trade union recognition for Britain as a whole (with a Northern regions dummy) and for the Northern regions only (with separate dummies for Scotland and Wales). These equations, which are for private sector establishments only, contained a set of variables to control for certain characteristics of both the workforce and the employment establishment, variables which have regularly featured in similar work along these lines.⁽¹⁸⁾ In addition (given the discussion of earlier sections) a set of industry dummy variables was included to control for the influence of industrial structure(s).

The results obtained are those set out in Table 2. (The data appendix lists the definition of all variables used in this analysis.)

In Table 2 the first column results are for all GB plants (with a NORTH dummy), while those in columns 2 and 3 are for northern plants only (with dummies for Scotland and Wales respectively); there are separate results for manuals and non-manuals.⁽¹⁹⁾ The first column in the Table confirms the expected North-South divide, with being in the north, *ceteris paribus*, increasing the probability of recognition for manuals and non-manuals by 23.5 per cent and 15.2 per cent respectively. The second column in the Table reveals for manuals a significant 11.7 per cent lower probability of recognition for Scottish establishments when compared to all Northern establishments,⁽²⁰⁾ whereas Welsh establishments are not significantly different from the mean across all Northern establishments. As to non-manuals, the Scottish establishments do not have a significantly lower recognition probability than all Northern establishments, but Welsh establishments have significant 19 per cent higher probability of recognition of unions for non-manual employees (*vis-a-vis* other Northern establishments).⁽²¹⁾

Some Final Issues

The basic purpose of this paper has been to document, using evidence from nationally representative data sets, a phenomenon that individuals have been talking about in

a rather loose, general fashion, or else pointing to on the basis of small, partial sample evidence. That is, our evidence, at least from the 1984 survey, suggests that Scotland is no longer performing as a representative Northern region of Britain as regards the level of union membership, at least in the case of manual employees. This was not, however, the case on the basis of the 1980 survey, in that when we re-ran the equations in Table 2 on the basis of the 1980 data set, we found that Scotland did not significantly diverge from the Northern regions as a whole as regards the probability of union recognition for either manual or non-manual employees; for Wales there was no significant difference for manuals (compared to the mean for the Northern regions as a whole), although there was an above average probability of recognition for non-manuals (these results are available upon request). It will be obviously both important and interesting to see if the 1984 finding is only a "short-term blip" or whether it has been maintained in more recent years, an issue which can certainly be investigated once the data from the 1990 workplace industrial relations survey becomes available.

Unfortunately, the nature of our data did not allow us to investigate, much less document, the basic reasons for the changed position of Scotland in 1984. The most we can say at this stage is that for Britain as a whole it is apparent that union recognition is disproportionately associated with older industries, older companies and older plants, with the union movement very much needing to make organisational inroads into the newer, more recently established organisations. And it would seem that this need is rather more acute in Scotland than in other Northern regions such as Wales, although exactly why this is the case remains an open question. (As an illustration, the earlier references to the inward investor sector can usefully be recalled at this stage.)⁽²²⁾ Finally we need to acknowledge the fact that we have looked at only one particular set of measures (albeit an important set) of union organisation, namely the proportion of employees in union (non-union) establishments and the probability of union recognition. There are other possible measures of union organisation, such as the overall level of union density for the workforce as a whole or the proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining arrangements, which may point to Scotland continuing to perform as a traditional Northern region. An examination of these other measures, using different data sources, is clearly another avenue of future research.

DATA APPENDIX

UKEMP size of UK employment in organisation (coded 1 through 10 for <100 up to >100,000 employees)

AGE length of time establishment has been in operation (coded 1 through 5 for < 3 years up to >25 years)

COMPAR categorical variable denoting whether an establishment considered itself above average (coded 1), average (coded 0), or below average (coded -1) when compared with other establishments in the industry on the basis of financial performance

GROWTH categorical variable denoting whether an establishment considered itself to have achieved above-average growth in sales (coded 1), average (coded 0), or below average (coded -1) when compared with other establishments in the industry

SECTOR dummy variable, coded 1 if high-technology establishment (see R. L. Butchart "A New UK Definition of the High Technology Industries", Economic Trends, No. 400, 1987, p.82-8

OWNER dummy variable, coded 1 if foreign owned

MULTI dummy variable, coded 1 if establishment was part of a multi-establishment enterprise

SHIFT dummy variable, coded 1 if shiftworking was not a regular feature in the establishment

MANUF dummy variable, coded 1 if the establishment is classified as non-manufacturing

% P/TIME percentage of part-time employees in the establishment

% FEMALE percentage of female workers in the establishment

% MANUAL percentage of manual workers in the establishment

SIZE number of employees in the establishment (divided by 10 in regressive equations)

TABLE 1 PROPORTION OF EMPLOYEES IN ESTABLISHMENTS WHICH ARE¹:

REGION	(i) UNION		(ii) NON-UNION ²	
	1980	1984	1980	1984
(i) <u>Manual Workers</u>³				
Scotland	81.5	67.2	18.5	32.9
Wales	81.3	73.3	18.7	26.7
North	88.5	84.1	11.5	15.8
North West	86.9	83.6	13.1	16.2
Yorkshire-Humberside	83.5	85.4	16.5	14.6
West Midlands	88.7	77.1	11.3	22.3
East Midlands	91.1	63.1	8.9	37.0
East Anglia	81.8	66.1	18.2	33.9
South West	76.9	61.2	22.5	38.8
South East	63.4	51.5	36.6	48.6
London	70.1	68.3	29.9	31.8
Great Britain	79.8	70.3	20.1	29.7
(ii) <u>Non-Manual Workers</u>				
Scotland	56.9	46.5	43.1	53.4
Wales	67.6	66.9	32.4	33.1
North	80.6	48.6	19.4	51.5
North West	68.4	64.6	31.5	35.4
Yorkshire-Humberside	59.9	55.8	40.1	44.2
West Midlands	71.8	58.5	28.2	41.5
East Midlands	72.5	56.8	27.5	43.2
East Anglia	69.8	39.1	30.2	60.9
South West	67.3	43.0	32.7	57.0
South East	45.9	43.2	54.1	56.7
London	56.4	39.0	43.6	61.1
Great Britain	62.8	48.7	37.2	51.3

Source: WIRS I and II

- 1 Figures refer to private sector establishments. "Population weights" were used.
- 2 The non-union establishments are those with no union members present or else with union members present but management does not recognise a union for collective bargaining purposes.
- 3 Note, establishments with no manual employment are omitted.

TABLE 2 Logit Regression Model of Trade Union Recognition (or Presence - Coded 1) or Non-recognition (or Non-presence - Coded 0) for Private Sector Plants in 1984

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	ALL GB PLANTS		"NORTHERN"			
			(i)		(ii)	
<u>Manual Workers</u>						
UKEMP	0.446	6.7	0.364	4.1	0.387	4.1
AGE	0.35	2.6	0.239	1.4	0.249	1.5
COMPAR	-0.013	0.5	0.001	0.1	0.007	0.2
GROWTH	0.024	0.3	0.081	0.6	0.074	0.5
SECTOR	-0.713	1.2	0.900	0.8	0.926	0.8
OWNER	0.145	0.4	0.019	0.1	-0.045	0.1
MULTI	0.025	0.1	-0.225	0.4	-0.295	0.5
SHIFT	0.372	1.4	0.212	0.5	0.204	0.5
MANUF	0.445	1.1	0.472	0.6	0.452	0.6
%P/TIME (x10 ₃)	-0.301	4.0	-0.166	1.6	-0.167	1.5
%FEMALE (x10 ₃)	-0.114	1.7	-0.067	0.7	-0.060	0.6
%MANUAL (x10 ₃)	0.214	4.3	0.179	2.4	0.177	2.4
SIZE	0.020	3.3	0.021	2.5	0.020	2.4
SIC25-26	0.145	0.2	-1.844	1.7	-1.875	1.8
SIC31	0.481	0.7	-0.844	0.8	-0.708	0.7
SIC32	1.281	2.0	-0.277	0.3	-0.229	0.2
SIC33-34,37	0.773	1.1	-	-	-	-
SIC35-36	0.568	0.6	-1.470	1.1	-1.450	1.0
SIC41-42	0.216	0.4	-1.236	1.3	-1.360	1.4
SIC43	2.017	2.5	-	-	-	-
SIC44-45	0.752	0.9	-0.784	0.6	-0.673	0.5
SIC46	2.400	2.0	-	-	-	-
SIC47	2.244	3.0	-0.402	0.4	-0.422	0.5
SIC48-49	-0.717	1.1	-1.677	1.4	-1.422	1.2
SIC50	1.224	1.7	-0.834	0.9	-0.778	0.9
SIC61-63	0.477	0.7	-0.519	0.5	-0.501	0.5
SIC71-79	1.374	1.8	-0.897	0.8	-0.783	0.8
SIC81-85	-0.046	0.1	-1.479	1.6	-1.493	1.6
SIC92-99	0.159	0.2	-2.004	2.3	-2.082	2.4
"NORTH"	1.058	4.7	-	-	-	-
SCOTLAND	-	-	-0.679	1.8	-	-
WALES	-	-	-	-	-0.361	0.7
Intercept	-4.912	4.7	-1.455	0.9	-1.539	1.0
Log L	-288.6	-	-122.9	-	-123.9	-
n	764	-	362	-	362	-
R ²	0.46	-	0.37	-	0.36	-
% correct predictions	82.3	-	83.7	-	83.7	-
̂	0.668	-	0.779	-	0.779	-

TABLE 2 (CONT.)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	ALL GB PLANTS		"NORTHERN" PLANTS			
			(i)		(ii)	
<u>Non-manual Workers</u>						
UKEMP	0.403	7.8	0.322	4.4	0.306	4.1
AGE	0.149	1.5	0.237	1.4	0.253	1.5
COMPAR	-0.036	1.6	-0.025	0.7	-0.023	0.7
GROWTH	0.073	1.2	0.076	0.6	0.078	0.6
SECTOR	-0.651	1.4	0.475	0.6	0.471	0.6
OWNER	0.241	0.9	0.541	1.2	0.508	1.1
MULTI	-0.068	0.2	0.357	0.7	0.451	0.9
SHIFT	0.143	0.7	0.340	0.8	0.322	0.8
MANUF	0.691	1.9	0.229	0.4	0.158	0.3
%P/TIME (x10 ₃)	-0.157	2.5	-0.030	0.3	-0.031	0.3
%FEMALE (x10 ₃)	-0.073	1.3	-0.174	1.9	-0.184	2.0
%MANUAL (x10 ₃)	0.004	0.1	-0.065	0.9	-0.067	0.9
SIZE	0.017	4.3	0.029	2.7	0.029	2.7
SIC25-26	0.093	0.2	-0.738	1.0	-0.736	1.0
SIC31	-0.201	0.4	-0.104	0.2	-0.132	0.2
SIC32	0.130	0.3	-0.151	0.3	-0.187	0.3
SIC33-34,37	0.494	0.8	-	-	-	-
SIC35-36	-0.376	0.7	-1.024	1.3	-1.167	1.5
SIC41-42	-0.480	1.0	-0.398	0.6	-0.458	0.8
SIC43	-0.181	0.3	-	-	-	-
SIC44-45	-0.474	0.7	0.494	0.5	0.415	0.4
SIC46	-2.769	3.1	-	-	-	-
SIC47	0.635	1.2	-0.078	0.1	-0.103	0.2
SIC48-49	-0.535	0.8	1.172	1.2	0.882	1.0
SIC50	-1.233	1.9	-1.809	2.3	-1.856	2.3
SIC61-63	-0.044	0.1	0.087	0.1	0.007	0.1
SIC71-79	0.398	0.7	-0.083	0.1	-0.186	0.2
SIC81-85	0.640	1.2	0.541	0.7	0.371	0.5
SIC92-99	-0.051	0.1	-1.040	1.4	-1.149	1.6
"NORTH"	0.607	3.4	-	-	-	-
SCOTLAND	-	-	-0.390	1.0	-	-
WALES	-	-	-	-	0.779	1.6
Intercept	-3.336	3.9	-2.934	2.3	-2.981	2.4
Log L	-395.9	-	-167.2	-	-166.7	-
n	841	-	383	-	383	-
R ²	0.38	-	0.41	-	0.42	-
% correct predictions	77.6	-	78.1	-	78.1	-
\hat{p}	0.493	-	0.574	-	0.574	-

t - values are based on Eicker-White variance-covariance matrix.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- (9) Beaumont and Harris, loc. cit.
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- (15) SDA, *US Corporate Excellence in Scotland*, 1990, p.20.
- (16) Keith Thurley, "Exporting National Management Styles: Joint Ventures and Japanese 'Transplants' in Europe", Paper presented at a Symposium at Merton College, Oxford, 1990.
- (17) IRS *Employment Trends* 482, 22 February 1991, p.5.
- (18) See, for instance, Beaumont and Harris (1989), loc. cit.; also Gregg and Naylor, loc. cit.
- (19) The % part-time and % female variables, for example, are linked, but various tests revealed that there was no important collinearity which would make both variables insignificant.
- (20) On a 1-tailed test (which we would justify on the grounds that we are only interested in whether the probability of recognition in Scotland is lower - i.e. it is not performing as a Northern region) - the Scotland parameter estimate is significant at the 3.6% level (given the degrees of freedom and worked out on the SHAZAM package).
- (21) Again on the basis of a 1-tailed test, the Welsh figure is significant at the 5.5% level.
- (22) As a further illustration, in the 24 months (January 1990 - December 1991) only 20 recognition claims were referred to ACAS in Scotland, with 15 of these resulting in union failure to achieve any form of recognition arrangements.