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Stand Down Margaret: Why did music become so much more politicised in the years 1979-90?

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to my dissertation supervisor Laura King for all the encouragement, support and advice I received over the course of writing my dissertation. I would also like to thank my tutor Malcolm Chase, as well as Sonia and Garfield White, and Cath Williams.

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Abbreviations:

- **RAR:** Rock Against Racism
- **ANL:** Anti-Nazi League
- **NF:** National Front
- **BAME:** Black and minority ethnic
- **CND:** Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- **NME:** New Musical Express
- **NCB:** National Coal Board
- **NUM:** National Union of Mineworkers
- **SDP:** Social Democratic Party

Glossary:

- Rudeboy – youth culture associated with the 2-Tone movement, clothed often in a suit and tie and pork pie hat.[1]

1 Dave Thompson, *Wheels out of Gear: 2-Tone, The Specials and a World in Flame (*Soundcheck Books: London, 2004) p. 44-5.

Introduction

The years 1979-90 were marked by a deep polarisation within British society that saw political rhetoric seeping into everyday discourse. Music, in particular, seems to be one of the primary indicators of this, as the period saw the rise of new protest music taking political issues to centre stage. It is important, at this point, to define the way 'politicised' and 'political' are used within this dissertation; that is, not just to discuss the activities of Westminster during this period, but also to discuss pertinent racial and socio-economic issues that plagued the 80s. This distinction is necessary for two reasons: firstly, to adhere to the contemporary usage of the word - used often to describe musicians who frequently discussed issues like unemployment or racism. Secondly, the government and specifically Margaret Thatcher were often seen as the causes of these social problems, and therefore to describe them as 'political' is entirely apt. It should be acknowledged however that the definition of a 'political band' was in a state of flux throughout the decade, sometimes being used to describe those that spoke about highly charged social issues, at other times being used to describe those that simply undermined the vision of Thatcherism. This dissertation seeks also to chart this ever-changing concept.

That is not to say that political protest music was a particularly novel concept. Previous music movements – from punk, to mod, to rock and roll could all be construed as rebellious within itself, and so in some ways, this new movement was a normal demonstration of youth's fight against older generations. This dissertation however seeks to address why music and musicians spoke so explicitly about political, social and economic issues, naming specific institutions as the causes of society's ills. In short, how and why did this acute political

consciousness develop?

It will become obvious throughout the course of this dissertation that Margaret Thatcher was the primary cause for this politicisation of music, both due to her bold personality and the strongly individualistic, free-market capitalist policies she pursued. That neither previous nor subsequent leaders provoked such a hostile response from artists[2] despite presiding over difficult periods throughout their leadership, is an important point to make. Her determination, illustrated best by her infamous declaration that the 'lady's not for turning' when faced with criticism for the high levels of unemployment and poverty in the first years as prime minister,[3] was in particular one of the major points of conflict, perceived by her detractors as evidence of her 'pigheadedness, perverseness and inflexibility.'[4] Tony Parsons – former contributor to the NME, one of Britain's top selling music magazines – summarised best the relationship between the music industry and the prime minister, when he wrote in an article, that she was a symbol of the uninhabitable world of the 1980s. The accusations he made about her 'blind selfishness,' and preoccupation with a righteous quest that 'trampled millions of lives into the ground'[5] were hyperbole, of course, as per the nature of salacious journalism – but he is not the only one to characterise the way in which she pursued policies as a sort of crusade within itself.[6] Fundamentally she was a personality and a conviction politician.[7] What distinguishes her from someone like Heath or Wilson was that she became a

2 Dorian Lynskey, 'Margaret Thatcher: the villain of political pop,' *Guardian*, 8 April 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-pop-rock-music> [accessed 1 October 2015]

3 BBC News, 1980: Thatcher 'not for turning,' (2008) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/october/10/newsid_2541000/2541071.stm> [accessed 12 March 2016]

4 Morrissey, *Autobiography* (London: Penguin Classics, 2013) p. 143.

5 Tony Parsons, 'Margaret Thatcher dead: She was hate figure for young in 1980s as popular culture raged against her,' *Mirror*, 10 April 2013, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/tony-parsons-margaret-thatcher-hate-1821684> [accessed 1 October 2015]

6 Clare Beckett, *Thatcher* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006) p. 72.

7 Andrew Gamble, 'Privatization, Thatcherism, and the British State,' in *Journal of Law and Society*, 1 (1988) 1-20 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1409974?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents> [accessed 30 November 2016]

distinct personality to rally against, a point concurred perhaps rather cynically by Penny Rimbaud of the band Crass, who stated that Thatcher was a 'fairy-godmother' and a 'gift' to a band such as hers – anarchist and anti-capitalist.[8] Determined in her approach to what she undoubtedly saw as a mission to restore Britain's prestigious economic reputation,[9] it was Thatcher's personality that helped stoke the creative fires that saw the explosion of political anthems in the early 80s.

Tied to this this was the way in which she governed: declaratively, decisions made publicly and loudly about government policy, that struck at odds with the deliberative, consolation-led governing method that marked the Wilson, Heath and Callaghan governments.[10] Of course when this worked, it worked well - the Miners' strike perhaps being a prime example of this - but its failure came at a high price, a point illustrated best through poll tax, a policy that eventually led to her resignation in 1990.[11] What this means is that criticism made of her on behalf of the Conservative party were in some ways accurate, in that she was not only its leader, but also the prime instigator behind policies.

This question, then, of how much her personality can be attributed to the vitriol she received is an interesting one. What also marked the Thatcher period was a complete departure from the way in which governments were judged – by sweeping away all of those values connected with the postwar consensus like commitment to full employment and public spending, Labour criticisms, such as rising inequality and reduction in social housing, could

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(p. 3).

8 Lynskey, *Guardian.*

9 Geoffrey Fry, *The Politics of The Thatcher Revolution: An Interpretation of British Politics,* 1979-1990 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 236.

10 Anthony King, 'Margaret Thatcher as Political Leader,' *Thatcherism,* ed. by Robert Skidelsky (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988) pp. 51-64 (p. 55).

11 Fry, p.179.

be bent into positives of the Thatcherite ideology.[12] Through an effective departure from egalitarianism, Thatcher in effect drastically changed the rules of the game.[13]

It was fundamentally, then, a period of change, one that can be a seen as two-pronged. First was the shrinking of the state and the rejection of prevalent socialist models that existed within society.[14] This therefore saw public expenditure cuts, removal of council housing, and the breaking of trade unions[15] and with it the dramatic social effects – most notably a rise in visible homelessness and unemployment,[16] controversial for a society that had at one time considered full employment as one of the sacrosanct duties of government. Characterised by a desire to end socialism through a process of centralisation, this period saw the transfer of power back to Westminister, to stop socialist 'city-republics' like those in Liverpool,[17] as well as a marginalisation of the government's harshest critics by diminishing their power – an example being Ken Livingstone, side-lined through the disbandment of the London City Council.[18] The flip-side to this was a passion for individualism and wealth creation through a pursuit of free market capitalism at the expense of the Keynesian mixed economics of the postwar period.[19] This asserted itself most tangibly through right-to-buy schemes for home-owners, wholescale privatisation of industries and housing, reduction in income tax and the launching personal pensions, all to benefit the individual.[20] There was a strict notion of 'our people'[21] – those of whom the Conservative government policies were designed to help, the

12 Alwyn, W. Turner, Rejoice! Rejoice! Britain in the 19890s (London: Autumn Press, 2010) p. 226.
13 Turner, p. 226.
14 Gamble, p. 6.
15 Beckett, p. 68.
16 Ibid., p. 70.
17 Jeremy Black, *Britain since the seventies: politics and society in the consumer age* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004) p. 134.
18 Ibid., p. 134
19 Gamble, p. 5.
20 Black, *Britain since the seventies*, p. 136.
21 Paul Goodman, 'The five things Mr Cameron MUST learn from Lady Thatcher,' *Daily Mail*, 10 June 2010 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1285461/The-things-Mr-Cameron-MUST-learn-Lady-Thatcher.html> [accessed 20 March 2016].

aspirational go-getters of the 80s. It was however from the working class that these protest anthems emerged from – a important factor to acknowledge in the discussion of why this politicisation of music came about in the first place.

Music is used as a historical resource in and of itself throughout this dissertation as it helps to shed light on issues that took place within wider society (an example being a song like 'Ghost Town' by The Specials taking place against a backdrop of the 1981 summer riots.) Chosen by popularity – singles and albums that featured in the official top 40 charts – as well as its relationship to this wider political activity; this music will hopefully illustrate its importance as a symptom of the broader politicisation taking place within the 80s. Linked to this also, is the historical and social context in which this music flourished, another important aspect to bear in mind. The legacy of the mid-70s punk scene undoubtedly fed through into increasing politicisation of music. In a retrospective article, Lynskey asserted that punk made people 'battle ready' for Thatcher,[22] which begs the question of whether musicians were already imbued with the values, and were now essentially awaiting a 'villain' to play the part? The problem with this interpretation is that it perhaps does not take into account the process of social upheaval that was already underway by the mid-70s. With the three day week, trade union disputes, financial crisis, and unemployment at 1 million,[23] historian Bill Osgerby wrote quite poignantly that 'the lights were going out all over Britain' and 'no one was quite sure if we'd see them lit again in our lifetime.'[24] In this way, punk was a symptom of

22 Lynskey, 'Margaret Thatcher: the villain of political music.'
23 Keith Gildart, 'The Antithesis of Humankind: Exploring Responses to the Sex Pistols Anarchy Tour 1976', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013) 129-149 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/147800413X13515292098313> [accessed 23 January 2016] (p. 132).
24 Bill Osgerby, '"Bovver" Books of the 1970s: Subcultures, Crisis and "Youth-sploitation" Novels' *Journal of Contemporary British History*, 26 (2012) 299-331 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13619462.2012.703011?journalCode=fcbh20#.VxTGnjArLIU> [accessed 30 Jan 2016](p. 308).

economic and political crisis.[25] Popular NEL books at the time, portraying the rise of the Far Right, racist skinheads and football hooligans, encapsulated notions of a society sliding into something like anarchy, and it is here that the beginnings of political extremism are seen[26]: punk and its links to the ANL[27] perhaps viewed from the other side of this coin. Certainly, punk fortified future musicians with the values that they would carry through into their own future careers, but this breakdown of the postwar consensus that was so strongly associated with Margaret Thatcher's premiership, was already beginning by the late 70s.

Punk itself was driven by a reaction against the 60s 'peace and love' movement', a desire to talk about what was considered 'real things,'[28] life from a working class perspective. A movement embodied by a complete rejection of authority and disaffection with society, it was a reaction to established modes and conventions that were considered oppressive.[29] The Establishment's response to this came in two forms: moral panic established punk as a 'folk devil'[30] a negative force that corrupted the young and innocent. The second response saw the threat these bands posed completely neutralised, through punk's assimilation into the music industry.[31] Ultimately, both are important to consider in the discussion of 80s political music. Moral panic was certainly at play with the rise of 2-Tone ska and its association with violence.[32] Crucially, though, it was the loss of momentum through commodification and fear of assimilation in late 1981-2 that would play a huge part, not only in the implosion of a lot of these bands, but also in other spheres where political opposition was raised, like comedy.

Ultimately, though, a direct correlation between the music of the late 70s and that of the early

25 Gildart, p. 130.
26 Ibid., p. 132.
27 Thompson, p. 28.
28 Gildart, p. 132.
29 David Beer, *Punk Sociology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) p. 22.
30 Gildart, p. 130.
31 Jon Savage, *Time Travel: From the Sex Pistols to Nirvana: Pop, Media and Sexuality 1977-96* (Vintage: London, 1997), p.92.
32 Horace Panter, *Ska'd For Life: A Personal Journey with The Specials* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2007) p. 75.

80s exists, through the relationship between reggae and punk which helps to shed some light on the ska revival. Reggae bands like Steel Pulse were deeply political, raising the issues black suppression and class inequality,[33] which chimed with The Clash's anti-racist, anti-captialist, anti-imperalist stance,[34] but this link became explicit with RAR, set up following racist comments made for Eric Clapton[35], as well as the rising threat of the NF.[36] It saw the collaboration of these different threads of punk and reggae and helped to forge a link between the two.[37] Not only did ska bands bands take this anti-racism a step further by having often multiracial line-ups but this connection between the new movement and the punk tradition was crystallised through the Specials supporting the Clash on a national tour.[38]

In terms of objectives, then, this dissertation has a few. It seeks to chronologically chart the period 1979-90 through political music's rise and decline, from anger and rebellion to something like disillusionment and ultimately escapism, exploring its reasons for doing so. Music is explored through analysis of a varied group of genres and artists, including the 2-Tone movement, the mod-revival led by the Jam, Billy Bragg and the tradition of folk, and the Smiths, Morrissey and indie. Autobiographies and interviews from back dated issues of music magazines are used in order to access musicians' views beneath the surface of their lyrics. This is set against a backdrop of political activity through the 1981 summer riots, the Falklands War, the Miners' strike and the general elections of 1983 and 1987, all of which helps to explain why music took the shape that it did. The New Romantic movement is also explored briefly along with the dance music scene of the late 80s in evidence of political music's gradual decline.

33 Mark Ellen, 'The Handsworth Revolution Meets the Berlin Wall,' *New Musical Express,* 30 June 1979, p. 8.
34 Antonio D'Ambrosio, *Let the Fury Have the Hour* (New York: Nation Books, 2004) p.5.
35 Thompson p. 25.
36 Ibid., p. 3.
37 Ibid., p.28.
38 Panter, p. 39.

Lastly, the question of consensus is one that will be explored; whether this image of a cabal of post-punk artists united in their hostility towards the government, truly existed. The dissertation seeks to do this through the exploration of the political-musical movement Red Wedge, as well looking briefly at comedic industry as an illustration of how extensive this growing counterculture was. If this consensus is found to exist, the question then arises: what does it say about the divisiveness of the Conservative party at the time?

I.

1979 – 1981.

The years 1979-81 saw the peak in protest music, and this asserted itself most clearly through the Midlands ska scene. Pioneered by The Specials – the forerunner and organiser of the independent record label 2-Tone, to which most subsequent ska acts were signed[39] – these bands were often multiracial, from a working class background and fused together punk ethos with Jamaican ska. The two key themes that seem to arise, not only within songs, but also in interviews, and indeed, in autobiographies are unemployment and the issue of police brutality. It is perhaps also through this prism that its popularity and influence can be understood. Ska was just as much an effect of the politicisation that overrode the decade, as it was a symptom of this burgeoning hatred of the state. Pauline Black, lead singer of the Coventry ska band The Selecter called it 'the last social movement in music'[40] and given its reach, its concern with having 'something to say' and it's dedication to breaking down boundaries between the audience and artists,[41] it is difficult to argue otherwise.

39 Panter, p. 84.
40 Civic Leicester, Q and A – Pauline Black, author of Black By Design, [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XaOqdQqxok> [accessed 17 April 2016]
41 John Orme, 'The Coventry Syndrome,' *Melody Maker*, 6th October 1979, p.20

SUS and the later 'stop-and-search' law, brought in by the Thatcher government, saw the disproportionate detainment of BAME and young people, thus in turn leading to greater divisiveness[42] and mistrust of the police.[43] Alongside this was the accusation that crimes routinely went ignored and uninvestigated within black communities, the most striking example being a case in which 13 young people were killed in a house fire. Not only was a racial motive hastily ruled out, despite there perhaps being evidence to the contrary, but the investigation itself seemed to move along incredibly slowly.[44] That chief constable of Greater Manchester, James Anderson's response the Scarman Report – the official investigation launched after the Brixton riots[45] - was to stage counter-offensive propaganda in the form of crime figures that showed race for robbery and theft, as if to suggest that black people caused all of the problems,[46] goes some way to demonstrating the police bias against the black communities at the time.

Undoubtedly this perceived dogmatic persecution of black communities was one of the factors that played into the wave of riots across the country, in Toxteth, Handsworth, Brixton and Chapeltown. Tied to this was the fact that unemployment reached an unprecedented height of 3 million in 1981, a result of the aforementioned reduced public spending. The story of Graeme Rathbone and Sea Grant from Widnes, tragically speaks to this. Their suicide in the summer of 1981 was a consequence of depression brought on by the lack of jobs and opportunity, writing in their suicide note 'what have I got to live for now there's no work for

42 Pauline Black, *Black By Design: A 2-Tone Memoir* (London: Serpants Tail, 2011), p. 162-3.
43 Thompson, p. 162.
44 Ibid., p. 162.
45 BBC News, *Q&A: The Scarman Report* (2004) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/bbc_parliament/3631579.stm> [accessed February 16th 2016]
46 Turner, p. 94.

anyone?'[47] The riots, then demonstrated the effects of the great upheaval society was going through: a reaction against the erosion of public services, against the police, against unemployment and against a creeping notion of isolation that was encapsulated entirely by one of the most infamous songs of the summer of 1981. At number 1 for 3 weeks,[48] it became an anthem synonymous with the riots, so much so that art critic Waldemar Januszczak wrote that during that time 'you were liable to hear one of two things: either a breathless BBC reporter passing on the fresh rumour that there would be a race riot in Brixton or Toxteth or St. Paul's tonight,' or a voice, 'telling you that this town, is coming like a Ghost Town.'[49] Jerry Dammers, songwriter and driving force behind The Specials[50] saw it from vantage point of a touring musician, 'Margaret Thatcher had apparently gone mad, she was closing down all the industries, throwing millions of people on the dole. We could actually see it touring around. You could see that frustration and anger in the audience. [...] It was clear that something was very, very wrong.'[51] Incredibly prescient in its ability to capture the common feeling, it was something that Januszczak describes as 'powerful social glue' that tied together the song with a moment of history.[52]

The wailing sirens at the beginning and the building organ give a sense of imminent chaos, but for the most part the song itself is incredibly tightly controlled, densely packed and well-orchestrated. It's plodding reggae rhythm and sparse lyrics[53] add to the sense of desolation and destruction, and led primarily by Neville Staple, it is sung in monotony, broken up only by vocals from Terry Hall and Lynval Golding. The echoing screams of 'lalalala' in the chorus

47 Ibid., p. 87.
48 Official Charts Company, *Official Charts*, 2016 <http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/19810705/7501/> [accessed 17 April 2016]
49 Waldemar Januszczak, 'A Chart Goes Busting,' *Guardian*, 28 April 1985, p.20, in *ProQuest*, <<http://search.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/186546461/A13A82F43CB4481FPQ/1?accountid=14664> [accessed February 16th 2016]
50 Panter, p. 16.
51 Thompson, p. 179.
52 Januszczak, p. 20.
53 Turner, p. 95

add to a feeling of horror. The speaker's assessment 'bands don't play no more/too much fighting on the dance floor' characterised almost entirely a situation experienced by Ska bands, where concerts were often prone to violence, stage invasion and seig-hailing from the crowd,[54] so much so that by 1981, The Specials retired from national touring to perform only in clubs and small halls[55]– a demonstration, perhaps, of the increasing sense of division that was taking place within society.

This contrast between the 'good old days before the ghost town' against a broken Britain, where 'all the clubs have been closed down' is the central message of the song, however it is perhaps more interesting that the youth are the main subject, a point made clear in the final verse, where Staple poses the question 'Why must the youth fight against themselves?' only to answer it himself with 'government leaving the youth on the shelf' and 'no job to be found in this country.' Here, the speaker attributes specifically the government and the spectre of widespread unemployment as the causes of racial and community tensions. The last few lines of this verse leave the listener with a sense of dread – the flat warning 'can't go on no more/the people getting angry,'[56] seem to be talking almost directly about the summer riots and the threat that Januszczak characterises as the feeling that 'if someone didn't take the lid off the inner city ghettoes, they would explode.'[57]

This sense of hostility was undoubtedly reinforced by a perceived sense of hypocrisy: establishment figures who spoke about 'tightening belts', and yet this mentality seemed to extend only to the working class.[58] That the riots took place alongside a royal wedding[59] goes

54 Black, *Black by Design,* p. 230.
55 Derek Johnson, 'Specials Brood,' *New Musical Express,* 1981, 24 January 1981, p. 3.
56 Jerry Dammers, 'Ghost Town,' *Ghost Town* [Vinyl] (Two-Tone Record, 1981)
57 Januszczak, p. 20.
58 Thompson, p. 183.
59 Turner, p. 95.

some way to demonstrate growing disparity between the very privileged and those at the bottom of the social heap. Historian Jeremy Black characterised the riots as isolated incidents that occurred as a result of local problems,[60] but this seems to be emphatically incorrect. For four unconnected inner cities to rise all in the course of one summer, that a song would be written and become so closely connected to this period of enormous social turbulence seems entirely too much of a coincidence without accounting for a common state of mind running between them. Against a background of stop-and-search, unemployment and the shrinking of the state, it seems entirely ignorant to disregard this when accounting for the rise of these riots.

The government's position in this, therefore, cannot be discounted. That Margaret Thatcher immediately dismissed police racism or unemployment as factors in the riots, asserting that 'nothing but nothing justifies what happened[61] demonstrated an unwillingness to engage with the nuance of the situation, and thus played into this concern that Westminster was far disconnected from the lives of ordinary people. This is a point compounded by Conservative cabinet member, Norman Tebbit's indifference to unemployment. His implication that those on welfare were not trying hard enough, when he said 'despite three million unemployed, I have been unable to find someone to paint the gates of my home in Berkhamstead,'[62] undoubtedly would have come across as insensitive. Morrissey in his autobiography accused Margaret Thatcher directly of turning the police against the people,[63] and furthermore, Pauline Black suggested that the Conservatives nurtured racism, as a tactic to divide and conquer the working class.[64] This latter point is course subject to interpretation, however it

60 Black, *Britain since the seventies*, p. 128.
61 Thompson, p. 165.
62 Turner, p. 94.
63 Morrissey, p. 143.
64 Lynn Hanna, 'Who Knows The Secret Of Black's Magic Pop?,' New Musical Express, 28 February 1981, p. 22.

must be added that the controversial stop-and-search law was brought in as part of Operation Swamp 81, named after Thatcher's speech in 1979, probably in attempt to seize the momentum of the NF, in which she stated 'people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture.'[65]

Geography also undoubtedly played another big part in the rise of these new bands. That a good deal of them – The Specials, UB40, The Beat and The Selecter – came from the Midlands is no coincidence. With its large West Indian community, as well it's deeply rooted economic problems, [66] especially compared to that of the south; – it makes sense that political commentary would play a part in music produced from there. This is perhaps best juxtaposed to Madness, the all-white, all-male septet who hailed from Camden Town,[67] and who made a point not to engage with politics, when Suggs stated in the *Melody Maker,* in 1979: 'there's no way that we're political. [….] if we'd wanted to talk about politics, we'd have formed a debating society, not a fucking band.'[68] It is difficult to say for certain whether their geographic background made a difference in their decision to remain for the most part apolitical, but it certainly raises the question. The problem, as touched on earlier in this chapter, was that politicisation went both ways in the 80s. This was fundamentally why so many ska bands – often explicitly anti-racist, espousing left-wing politics – clashed with NF supporters, skinheads and racists.[69] Madness' decision to toe the line between welcoming the skinheads while still remaining intolerant to violence[70] was a difficult middle road to navigate and which often led to their association with the white neo-Nazi movement.[71] Put simply: it

65 Thompson, p. 163.
66 Ibid., p. 101.
67 Graham Stewart, *Bang!: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013) p. 293.
68 Allan Jones, 'The Nutty Sound Takes Over,' *Melody Maker,* October 27th 1979, p. 32.
69 Black, *Black By Design*, p. 159.
70 Jones, 'The Nutty Sound Takes Over,' p. 32.
71 Internet Archive Wayback Machine, *The Madness Timeline: 1979*, 2007 <https://web.archive.org/web/20070928002827/http://www.madness.co.uk/time/1979/text.htm> [accessed 17 April 2016]

was difficult for Madness to simply remain the light-hearted band in such an era and in such a movement.

For the most part these bands that attached themselves so definitively to a time of great social disquiet were both the symptom and the effect of wider divisiveness within society. Here, the punk strand becomes more relevant in explaining the rise and impact of the ska revival. Post-punk and ska were grown organically from the results of social erosion and decay[72] - speaking for themselves and for the world around them, often from a working class, marginalised perspective, because, ultimately, that was the bands' lived experience. The music, therefore, was an articulation of an entirely authentic frustration with society. Punk's importance lay in its first hand demonstration that making music and transmitting ideas was entirely accessible to the ordinary person.[73] Punk, then, helped to level that playing field, not only within the music industry but also between the bands and audiences. It was this sense of egalitarianism that played into the 2-Tone movement, and therefore it is this overriding feeling of commonality that explains its influence and thus its importance.

Punk was also characterised by this idea of 'saying something,' that because of its platform, it had a duty to give a voice to the disenfranchised and neglected,[74] and certainly this way of thinking was visible in the ska movement. Charlie Anderson, bassist of The Selecter once argued that 'if a band comes out with nothing to say, but just plays, it doesn't work. It has to have some meaning,'[75] and it is through this perspective that the popularity of 2-Tone and ska as a whole needs to be understood. Music combated a sense of isolation and helped put

72 'Uncut, *Stand Down Margaret!* 12 April 2013 <http://www.uncut.co.uk/features/stand-down-margaret-23780#pTm2Wfl5mcHRIXqo.99> [accessed 1 October 2015]
73 Thompson, p. 104.
74 Robert Martinez 'Punk Rock, Thatcher, and the Elsewhere of Northern Ireland: Rethinking the Politics of Popular Music,' *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 48 (2015) 193-219 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43549877> [accessed 30 Jan 2016] (p. 207).
75 Orme, p. 20.

people's perspective into a coherent narrative. In other words, people did not feel as if they were alone.

It was also important as a voice of coherent opposition towards the government, one of its most notable examples being 'Stand Down Margaret' by The Beat, an attempt to quite literally get the Prime Minister to resign. It represented, fundamentally, a major shift in songwriting.[76] Addressed directly to Margaret Thatcher, there was absolutely no attempt to hedge, or obscure its meaning. The optimistic ska rhythm struck directly at odds with the pessimistic subject matter. Its long imploring verse sung by Ranking Roger, in which he muses 'Our lives seem petty in your cold, grey hands/ Would you give a second thought, would you ever give a damn?/ I doubt it.' The use of the word 'our' suggests the speaker is including the audience in his diatribe against the government, and this disconnect between the ordinary folk to the establishment figures becomes more defined with the portrait he paints of the governments' 'cold, grey hands' unfeeling, distanced and powerful. Particularly effective were the disjointed phrases 'work, white law/shell shock, world war,' an attempt to summarise the current problems plaguing Britain. 'Work' and 'white law' obviously being a reference to the racism, police brutality and unemployment, but the mention of 'shellshock ' and 'world war' were references to the threat of nuclear war, something that will be explored later in this chapter.[77]

The importance of 'Stand Down Margaret' lay in its ability to go beyond what was expected of a protest song. 'An insurrectionary anthem,' Dave Wakeling of The Beat characterised it, it was meant to be radical and challenging – a point supported by the fact that it was played on early children's television show *Cheggers Plays Pop*, by pretending it was an old Caribbean

76 Uncut, *Stand Down Margaret!*
77 The Beat, 'Stand Down Margaret,' *I Just Can't Stop it* [CD] (Go-Feet, 1980)

dance.[78] It was also an attempt to re-assert Thatcher's own class background. From a working class family, The Beat and particularly Wakeling saw her as pretending to be someone she was not, and so the song had multiple meanings: 'stand down' as in, resign, 'but it was also stand down as in get off your soap box. Get off your high horse. Stop trying to talk down to people. You don't really know that much more than them, anyway.'[79]

There are some similarities that link together the ska bands with the mod revival led by The Jam. Both were heavily steeped in nostalgia: the mod revival being brought on by the release of the film *Quadrophenia*, as well as the aesthetic style of The Jam frontman, Paul Weller.[80] With ska bands, it was the 'rudeboy' uniform teamed with the frequent homage to 60s rocksteady artists like the infamous Prince Buster – the subject of Madness' 1979 hit 'The Prince.'[81] While this was denounced by music journalist Jon Savage at the time for serving as a device and propaganda tool of the New Right,[82] it ultimately portrayed an unwillingness to face the present. Strummer articulated this attitude best when he said that people 'are looking for yesterday because tomorrow's so shitty.'[83]

The second similarity was one of ideology. The concept of duty was once again bound up in the bands' philosophy, a point made quite succinctly by drummer Rick Buckler who answered in response to the question of The Jam's political motivation, 'I think music is great communication between people and it should be used for something more than just entertainment.'[84] Similarly, spurred on by a working class perspective society, Weller

78 Uncut, *Stand Down Margaret!*
79 Carl Wiser, *Dave Wakeling of the Beat* (2008) <http://www.songfacts.com/blog/interviews/dave_wakeling_of_the_english_beat> [accessed 29th February]
80 Panter, p. 67.
81 Internet Archive Wayback Machine, *The Madness Timeline: 1979*
82 Savage, *Time Travel: From the Sex Pistols to Nirvana: Pop, Media and Sexuality 1977-96,* p.144.
83 Charles Shaar Murray, 'Yes, it's the Strummer in the city,' *New Musical Express*, 30 June 1979, p. 15.
84 The Tomorrow Show – Punk and New Wave [online video] 1981, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ZqDrJC1zM&nohtml5=False> [accessed 16 March 2016]

remarked in the retrospective *Uncut* magazine article, that he wrote what he knew because 'when you're confronted by headlines every day about mass unemployment, when you're seeing devastation of industry and public services, it's going to find a way into your lyrics.'[85] Perhaps more so than a lot of musicians at this time, Weller's strength lay in his ability to articulate the acute problems that existed within society. He spoke the language of class consciousness, and ultimately, the language of class conflict. That Weller would say in 1984 *NME* interview, the bonds of class transcended everything and the power lay within the people to overcome a societal 'organised condition' in which the working-class were downtrodden from school age,[86] is rhetoric tinged with socialist ideology. Class was often recurring feature in Jam songs, 'Eton Rifles' in particular was supposed to be a mockery of the class system, because in his own words, in 'this day and age? It's ridiculous that one still exists.'[87] Weller was critical, not only of the Conservative government for creating these divisions, but Labour as well for not 'doing enough' to help the working class.[88] That a successful and and influential musician could speak so openly and articulately about something as controversial as class demonstrates the level of politicisation that was already in place by the early 80s.

Weller characterised his own song-writing motivation as one driven by anger,[89] and there is nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the 1980 number 1 hit,[90] 'Going Underground.' Released a year after Thatcher's electoral victory, the song narrates the speaker's disillusionment with the electorate for voting for corrupt political leaders. The first person perspective in this song is interesting, at some points being used to assume the identity

85 Uncut, *Stand Down Margaret!*
86 X. Moore and Tony Parsons, 'Boardroom Blitz,' *New Musical Express*, 10 March 1984, p. 55.
87 Paolo Hewitt, 'Number One with a Target,' *Melody Maker*, 1 Dec 1979, p.20.
88 Moore and Parsons, p. 55.
89 Uncut, *Stand Down Margaret!*
90 Official Charts Company, *Official Charts*, 2016 <http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/19800316/7501/> [accessed 17 April 2016]

of the audience, in order to mock the public's naivety such as in the lines, 'I'm so happy and you're so kind/You want more money, of course I don't mind.' It also used to represent the speaker's 'real' feelings: a complete rejection of society and its values, such as in the line, 'I don't get what this society wants/I'm going underground.' The 'brass bands play and feet start to pound' satirises a complete blind patriotism and faith in the state. The picture that Weller paints is one of an ignorant, apathetic populace in which the speaker is the only one willing to see through the visage of the lies, to see that war and wealth are more important to the state than basic human rights.

The line 'you'll see nuclear textbooks for atomic crimes,'[91] alludes, once again, to nuclear war. Its prominence in music was owed to the agreement made in 1980, allowing American nuclear cruise missiles to be stationed Greenham Common Airbase[92] - the worry was of course that Britain was in the front-line should nuclear war come about. With this, alongside all the other social problems that seemed to exist in tandem in society, it should come as no surprise that political music reached its zenith, with Margaret Thatcher quickly becoming the favourite target of criticism for artists.[93] Her image became evermore defined as 'the man' – an alienating figure, who seemed to operate at a level far removed from the interests of the everyday man.

Songs like The Specials' 'Man & C+ A' demonstrated the perceived gulf between political figures waging nuclear war and the helpless, ordinary man unable to 'have a say in the war games that they play.'[94] That it was used as a CND anthem,[95] along with the fact 'Stand Down

91 Weller, Paul, 'Going Underground,' *Going Underground* [Vinyl] (Polydor, 1980)
92 Thompson, p. 147.
93 Martinez, p. 194.
94 Jerry Dammers and Terry Hall, 'Man at C&A' More Specials [CD] (Two-Tone Records, 1980)
95 Thompson, p. 149.

Margaret's proceeds were donated to the organisation[96] demonstrates the increasing closeness between musicians and formal political organisations. The UB40's 'The Earth Dies Screaming' depicted the world as an apocalyptic wasteland, and The Beat's 'Dream Home in New Zealand' was inspired by a drawing competition in which children sent in illustrations of the world blowing up.[97] Anger once again was the motivator behind a lot of this music, and more importantly, so was fear. The outbreak of nuclear war, from a contemporary perspective, was imminent. In 1981, 59% of young people believed that nuclear war would happen,[98] and Wakeling perhaps best known for the Beat's upbeat music, drew no distinction between his own attitude and the 'depressing strains of the gloom brigade,' (the post-Joy Division bands) in their shared belief that the bomb would be dropped soon.[99]

The question of the music press' role in the politicisation of music has been touched on earlier in this essay. How much of a role did they play into this growing anti-Thatcher sentiment? The *NME* was certainly a contributor. Born in the hippy underground and the punk movement, during a time in which left-wing music magazines were not acknowledged by the mainstream, Bragg called it a continuation of the radical press of 60s, and this thread of radicalism continued into the 70s, where it was also involved with RAR and ANL.[100] That it was involved in Red Wedge, a mid-80's musical coalition loosely affiliated with the Labour party, should come as no surprise – but that they were so overt as to print a picture of Neil Kinnock on the front cover in the 1987[101] portrays an explicit party-political bias, and speaks to the growing political discourse permeating out into different aspects of society. Bragg in

96 Panter, p. 256
97 Thompson, p. 148.
98 Ibid., p. 148.
99 Ben Holdship, 'The English Beat: 2-Tone Survivors Make Joyful Noise,' *Musician,* in *Rock's Backpages* <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-english-beat-2-tone-survivors-make-a-joyful-noise> [accessed 29 January 2016]
100 Pat Long *The History of the NME* (London: Portico Books, 2012) p. 152.
101 Long, p. 153.

particular saw it as a mouthpiece to communicate left wing politics to the mainstream, helping to create an atmosphere in which discussion about politics was normalised[102]; a point reinforced by the fact Joe Strummer wrote a personal election manifesto on behalf of the NME advocating the reunification of Ireland for which he received death threats.[103]

That, for example, The Jam stormed most of the awards for the second year running in the *NME*'s 1980 Readers' Poll, winning or running up in the categories of 'best group', 'best guitarist', 'best drums', 'best songwriter,' 'best single' and 'best album'[104] alongside the fact Margaret Thatcher was named 'creep of the year'[105] may seem trivial. However, speculation does, and should arise over how legitimate the poll truly was. If this was voted for by the public, it illustrates the politics of the readership. If not, it proved at least the politics of the magazine and by extension, the political message it wanted to represent to its' readership. The *Melody Maker* similarly, although obviously not to such an extreme extent, seemed to pose a left-wing slant in a 1980 edition, in which journalist Patrick Humphries wrote on Weller 'he has proved his ability at articulating the frustrations which form a sad foundation for this society. A society governed by those pursuing a madcap monetarist policy, unfeeling and indifferent,' alongside his reverence for 'That's Entertainment' which he suggested was a 'picture of an arid society that was not too far around the corner.'[106] Though at least this instance in the *Melody Maker* could be written off as political opinions of one journalist, the *NME* in particular during this period should be treated as a vehicle for political opposition.

II.

1982-4.

102 Ibid., p. 153.
103 Ibid., p. 152.
104 [N.A.] 'NME Readers' Poll 1980,' *New Musical Express*, 24 January 1981, p. 20.
105 Ibid, p. 20.
106 Patrick Humphries 'Weller's Bleakest Vision,' *Melody Maker*, 22 November 1980, p. 21.

The new comedy of the eighties was a further example of society's growing politicisation. With the rise of alternative comedy spearheaded by Liverpudlian comic Alexei Sayle, it defined itself against mainstream 70s comedy and the bundle of sexism, racism and homophobia that often came with it.[107] Largely coming into mainstream public consciousness in 1982, *The Young Ones* was not the first expression of this new comedy, but perhaps it was the most significant due to its accessibility and the large scale impact it made on successive generations.

The episode *Bambi* made class war visual when the four main characters, all penniless and living in particularly dismal conditions (and, furthermore, played by comedians with standard university backgrounds) physically kicking down on the rich characters, (played by Cambridge Footlights comedians Stephen Fry, Hugh Laurie and Emma Thompson) in an game of University Challenge.[108] References made on the programme to the government, the reactionary right and the police were meant to satirise both the naïve student activist mentality, as well as figures themselves. This avowed disapproval of the establishment was made explicit in the episode *Sick* where Vyvyan, the violent punk, embarked on an out-of-character rant about the popular sitcom *The Good Life,* saying of the main characters 'they're nothing but a couple of reactionary stereotypes confirming the myth that everyone in Britain is a loveable middle class eccentric and I hate them.' Mike's reply of 'That was a very articulate outburst, Vyvyan,'[109] serves to legitimise the views – not just Vyvyan, but perhaps the writers' themselves. Of course this is speculation, but considering writer Ben Elton's own anti-Thatcher credentials at the time, it is informed speculation.

107 *The 80s: The Ten Years That Changed Britain*, Channel 4, 10 January 2016.
108 Ibid.
109 'Sick,' *The Young Ones* (BBC Two, 2002) [DVD]

Elton became very much a spokesperson for this growing counterculture – a figure idealised, perhaps romanticised through nostalgia, by comedian Andrew Collins who remembered watching *Saturday Live*, successor to *The Young Ones*, 'Ben Elton speaks directly to me, he speaks directly to all of us from his pulpit.'[110] Similarly Boy George concurred, 'watching Ben Elton was like, yeah, good I'm glad there's someone out there who's having a go about it.'[111] However, like music, the dangers of assimilation existed, perhaps even more acutely, with Elton filling in for Terry Wogan on his BBC 1 chat show by the end of the decade.[112] Alexei Sayle pinpointed the seeds of the movement's destruction, as early as 1984, recounting in the very same *Bambi* episode when he first saw the Cambridge Footlights in the studio, "'I thought these people were the enemy!" I railed at the writers. [...] "No, that was just you," the writers replied. "We never subscribed to your demented class-war ravings."'[113] Like punk, it was about removing the threat by turning key players into harmless figures.

Political satire similarly challenged the status quo through its most infamous comedy, *Spitting Image*. Its power lay in the ruthless way it caricatured political figures. Broadcaster, Jacques Peretti characterised it as 'vicious like a knife' which it twisted week in, week out,[114] and it was reported that Thatcher would turn off the television whenever it was on [115] – understandable given the fact she was depicted as a masculine, deranged maniac surrounded by her ineffective lackeys, the Conservative cabinet, including football hooligan Norman Tebbit[116] – another major hate-figure for the left. *Spitting Image* represented and demonstrated several things: a willingness to demonise the government in no uncertain terms,

110 Turner, p. 167.
111 Ibid., p. 167.
112 Ibid., p. 168.
113 Sayle, Alexei, 'Alexei Sayle: I'm Still Full of Hate,' *Guardian*, 22 January 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jan/22/alexei-sayle-still-full-hate> [accessed 23 March 2016]
114 *The Ten Years That Changed Britain.*
115 Stewart, p. 254.
116 Ibid., p. 253.

a consistent challenge to the government (that it genuinely damaged political careers indicates the power it wielded[117]) and perhaps most importantly, escapism for those who needed it. In a documentary on the 1980s, John Lloyd, writer of *Spitting Image* and *Not the Nine O'Clock New*s recalled receiving letters from those who were going to commit suicide but decided to stay alive for one more Sunday – the day in which *Spitting Image* was broadcast.[118]

Ultimately, it picked up on the same thing that detractors accused alternative comedy of: the ease of which it was to satirise and caricature the government, and particularly Margaret Thatcher.[119] As such a readily identifiable politician, Thatcher almost attracted creative opposition. Unlike music, however, Thatcher became a figure of mockery rather than anger, and perhaps this helped combat the sense of helplessness that many people felt. Lloyd said about it, 'I can't remember in my lifetime a government that was disliked as much, so certainly it came at the right time.'[120] Julie Burchill, in an article in *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs* implicitly posed the question of whether Thatcher generated so much hostility because she was a powerful woman.[121] Certainly, the fact frequent depictions of her as masculine became almost a criticism of her in itself, both in *Spitting Image*, and in Morrissey's dismissal, 'she was neither iron nor a lady,'[122] is suspect. It would be a mistake, however, to attribute all of the hostility to misogyny. It was that she presented such a stark, radical challenge to what Britain had experienced since the war, that her policies were often controversial, that she seemed unrepentant about the visible unfortunate effects of her

117 Dominic Cavendish, 'Spitting Image: essential satire for a generation,' *Telegraph*, 20 March 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/comedy/comedy-news/10662154/Spitting-Image-essential-satire-for-a-generation.html> [accessed 24 March 2016)
118 *The Ten Years That Changed Britain.*
119 Stewart, p. 253.
120 Ibid., p. 253.
121 Julie Burchill, 'Slimeballs Always Hate a Strong Woman,' in *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs*, ed. by Eleanor Mills (London: Constable & Robinson, 2005)
122 Morrissey, p. 143.

policies.[123]

Historian Graham Stewart makes the point in *Bang* that these new comedies did not replace the traditional sitcoms of the 70s,[124] but then again, they were not supposed to. Anarchic and subversive, they spoke to a different audience – perhaps, as Alexei Sayle mentioned in the *NME* the same audiences that were listening to new wave acts of the early 80s.[125] It is difficult to tell whether this new music, by creating and shaping the mindset of an anti-establishment audience, helped to lay the foundation for this new comedy or whether, like music, alternative comedy was a reaction to 70s and the new political climate it found itself in. It is worth noting that Sayle himself argued the former interpretation, stating that music introduced a new market and broadened the horizons of what was accepted as performance.[126] That there was some overlap between the two industries is of note. The Reader's Poll edition of the *NME* named *Not the Nine O'Clock News* the best television programme,[127] there were mentions of The Beat's 'Stand Down Margaret' in *The Young Ones*,[128] and Sayle himself used to perform in an suit reminiscent of the ska 'rudeboy' look.[129] Could the formation of a left-wing consensus be argued, therefore? Parsons, argued that Thatcher never divided show-business, that everyone subscribed to the same viewpoint and a failure to do so would mean a lack of publicity. This is obviously a generalisation, as right-wing and apolitical musicians existed, perhaps as a minority. It certainly seems, however, that within a post-punk clique of young artists, there was a similarity in beliefs, values and aims. Crucially, the products – whether they be music or comedy - were often aimed at the young.

123 Tom Hibbert, 'The Margaret Thatcher Interview!!?' Smash Hits, 25 March 1987, in *Rock's Backpages* <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-margaret-thatcher-interview> [accessed 16 Feb 2016]
124 Stewart, p. 252.
125 Paul DuNoyer, 'Travels of a Nobhead,' *New Musical Express*, 10 March 1984, p. 24.
126 Du Noyer, p. 24.
127 'NME Readers' Poll 1980,' p. 21.
128 'Summer Holiday,' *The Young Ones* (BBC Two, 2002) [DVD]
129 Bloomsbury Publishing, 'Alexei Sayle and Stewart Lee talk about Thatcher Stole My Trousers,' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkOvwsyBMDc> [accessed 21 March 2016]

Several reasons for this arise: the fact that 27% of the young unemployed – Labour's natural voters - supported the Tories in the 1983 general election,[130] that it was believed police harassed the black and the young primarily,[131] and ultimately that it produced by the youth. It is then from this perspective that movements like Red Wedge in 1985, must be interpreted.

The Conservative party victory at the 1983 general election was primarily a result of popularity enjoyed due to the Falklands War as well as the failure of Labour and the SDP. The latter of which split the left-wing vote so much so that in South England it supplanted Labour as the majority party.[132] Ultimately this came from the rise of the Trotskyist left within Labour,[133] another important aspect of the process of political polarisation that occurred in the 80s. With Thatcher occupying the hard-right, Labour fell back to the radical left politics pushed by Michael Foot and Tony Benn. Infamously named the 'longest suicide note in history' by Gerald Kaufman,[134] its manifesto failed to attract voters.

Both in terms of musical opposition, and political opposition, then, momentum was beginning to wane by 1982, during which time Thatcherism finally saw a rise in popularity due to the rise in living standards and fall in interest rate, mortgage payments and inflation.[135] More fundamentally however, was the effect of the Falklands War. It was during this time that Margaret Thatcher managed to, for the most part rally the country around Britain's efforts, unleashing of what historian Black terms 'gut patriotism.'[136] Beckett argues that Falklands was both a national and personal crusade for Thatcher, and what was perhaps most demonstrative of this was the deterioration of the relationship between Thatcher and BBC

130 Turner p. 75.
131 Sean Moroney, 'Youth, Ideology and the Media,' *Melody Maker,* 13 October 1979, p. 16.
132 Black, *Britain since the seventies*, p. 131.
133 Ibid., p. 129.
134 Fry, p. 35.
135 Black, *Britain since the seventies*, p. 131
136 Ibid., p. 130.

over this period, due to the latter's refusal to call the Argentinian forces 'the enemy', which Thatcher perceived as the company taking an anti-war and anti-her stance.[137] The fallout result was military victory and crucially, electoral victory with a majority in 144 in the 1983 general election.[138]

Almost in tandem to this was the implosion of the majority of those most vocal political bands. Pauline Black's argument for the breakup of The Selecter, that it was a microcosm of society, and thus the tensions that existed in the wider world were reflected within the band,[139] is an interesting one to consider and certainly tensions in terms of power structures, frustrations and money problems existed within The Specials.[140] However, fundamentally, it was innate faddishness of a lot of these bands. By 1979, the *Melody Maker* was already portraying a certain wariness at the superficial characteristics of ska and rapid faddish saturation into youth culture.[141] That bands' later attempted to separate themselves from the title of ska/2-Tone is indicative of this.[142] By 1982, Madness was beginning to transition into pop, and similarly The Selecter in later 1981 left the indie 2-Tone label for Rough Trade which proved to be a commercial disaster.[143] Wakeling expressed in an interview a deeply cynical assessment of the style-consciousness of 2-Tone, that style elements often ranked above content, and that the whole movement had been an excuse to 'sell black and white chequered suits.'[144] The simple fact was that they were falling out of favour.[145]

Commercialisation was similarly another constant existential threat. As early as 1981, Bruce

137 Beckett, p. 73.
138 Ibid., p. 73.
139 Hanna, p. 21.
140 Jones, 'Return of the Dammers Busters,' p. 11
141 Allan Jones '2-Tone Dance Master' *Melody Maker,* 15 December 1979, p. 31.
142 Adrian Thrills, 'And We'll All Take a Ride,' *New Musical Express,* 24 January 1981, p. 36.
143 Thompson, p. 129.
144 Holdship, 'The English Beat: 2-Tone Survivor Makes a Joyful Noise.'
145 Pauline Black, p.230.

Foxton, The Jam bassist, spoke about a fear of assimilation into the establishment.[146] Adorno and Horkheimer stated that any attempt to create art that would enlighten individual consciousness would fall prey to capitalism.[147] Although the article in question was explicitly about punk and pop music, the analogy here can be extended to a lot of the bands discussed in this dissertation. Martinez' counter response was that punk's anti-authoritarian, anti-market stance presented a platform to challenge oppressive socio-economic systems,[148] however it must be argued that punk, ultimately was assimilated into the mainstream.[149] Faddishness, style and fashion was inextricably bound up in consumerism, and so in a sense, could this movement have ever sustained themselves? Was the implosion of a lot of these bands in effect, inevitable? Now that Thatcherism was perceived to be working, was the impetus for rebellion simply no longer there?

Dammers argued in 1983 that issues like unemployment and racism were becoming 'un-trendy' and therefore unimportant.[150] While he himself acknowledged that a lot of these issues were a lifelong battle,[151] the fact was that people wanted to forget. When Hall, Golding and Staple left the Specials to form 'Fun Boy Three' it was at an explicit denunciation of politics.[152] A new world of pop was beginning to emerge: that of escapism, and here is an important point in considering the chronology of political music.[153] The collapse of The Clash, The Jam, The Beat, The Selecter and The Specials over the period 1981-3 were all in some way indicative, not only of the way music was going, but of the way political fervour was going.

146 The Tomorrow Show – Punk and New Wave.
147 Martinez, p. 198.
148 Ibid., p. 200.
149 Savage, *Time Travel: From the Sex Pistols to Nirvana: Pop, Media and Sexuality 1977-96,* p. 92.
150 Jones, 'Return of the Dammers Busters,' p. 11.
151 Ibid., p. 11.
152 Januszczak, p.20.
153 Jones, 'Return of the Dammers Busters,' p. 11.

The success of the New Romantic bands,[154] often frequenters of the Blitz Club and characterised by flamboyant style and synthesizers were a tribute to the success of Thatcherism. One of the ways this can be observed is through the perspective the *NME*, which by the mid-80s had ever declining circulation figures, dropping from top selling music magazine behind both the *Melody Maker* and *Smash Hits*. The accusation, that the *NME* took itself too seriously, with it's semi-intellectual assessment of the musical landscape, struck a contrast against the glossy *Smash Hits*, which celebrated pop music's surface culture.[155] Part of the success of *Smash Hits* was owed to MTV, which was one of the platforms for the British invasion, showcasing talents like Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet, A Flock of Seagulls, Culture Club and Adam and the Ants.[156] 'Colourful and superficial' is the assessment made by journalist Barney Hoskyns,[157] *Smash Hits* was effectively MTV in magazine form. Even the *Melody Maker* embraced the new pop,[158] and it was perhaps for this reason that it managed to remain in second place throughout the decade.

Ultimately, the new pop movement brought with it a complete change in attitudes towards politics; no better illustrated by an interview conducted with the *NME*, in which Human League singer Philip Oakey argued it was not the place of artists to get involved and while he 'desperately wants Labour to win the next election' he saw it was counter-intuitive for pop to push politics.[159] Contrasted against someone like Weller, Oakey maintained that he did not believe he had earned the right to tell people how to vote, and perhaps most damningly,

154 Pauline Black, p. 241.
155 Long, p. 143.
156 Ibid., p.145.
157 Ibid., p. 145
158 Ibid., p. 143
159 John McCready, 'The Human League: Flesh and Blood,' *New Musical Express*, 20 September 1986, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-human-league-flesh-and-blood> [accessed 29 January 2016]

argued that Red Wedge was ultimately flawed because it rested on the value of celebrity in order to coerce people into voting Labour.[160] That bands like these were on the rise suggested a shift not just in musicians' priorities, but also audience priorities. While political pop had not completely become eradicated in the face of synthpop – the Special AKA made 'Bright Lights' criticising the empty hedonism of the current pop groups,[161] and The Smiths, along with Bragg would prove ultimately some of the last consistent voices of opposition – it is clear that by the mid-80s, this school of thought was beginning to lose the fight. Political pop was going into decline because Thatcherism was perceived to be working and thus politics became more and more the dirty word of the era. The rise of Live Aid and Comic Relief were symptomatic of this: they were a way for a lot of people to show awareness without necessarily devoting the energy to coherent and consistent political criticism.[162]

III.

1984-6.

This dissertation has discussed in depth the importance of punk/post-punk and the ska revival and its relationship with politics, but it is important to consider that as the period went on and genres of music waned in their influence, other forms of music began to take up that central position in the cross-section between music and politics. Folk, in particular, spearheaded by singer-songwriter Billy Bragg saw a rise in popularity in the mid-80s and here the context of the Miners' strike is crucial.

Unarguably, the desire to break the unions existed in Conservative policy, as they were considered in Thatcher's perspective 'as big a force for evil as socialism,' due to their

160 McCready, 'The Human League: Flesh and Blood.'
161 Jones, 'Return of the Dammers Busters,' p. 10.
162 Turner, p. 251.

perceived hindering of economic growth as well as the government's desire to see employers' completely managing their workforce, a power that unions ultimately limited.[163] Thus, when Ian MacGregor was appointed Chairman of the NCB, his official position was that pits were not profitable and thus should be closed, otherwise they would, in Thatcher's own words, 'become a system of outdoor relief, 'a view met with fierce opposition from Arthur Scargill and the NUM, who argued that pits should be made profitable with more investment.[164] That the debate was ultimately obscured by media portrayal of the miners' violence on the picket line is perhaps of no great surprise, given the sensationalist nature of journalism, but ultimately coverage of intimidatory and violent mass picketing directed against working miners helped to alienate public support for the strike.[165]

Though the Conservative party accused the BBC of a left-wing bias, this was largely unfounded, a point made quite clearly in a retrospective *Guardian* article in 1986 that found through an analysis of major news bulletins that while 'balance was usually demonstrated' where it was not, it was largely on the side of the NCB.[166] The report also found that Scargill was also more likely to be interviewed critically, and when prognoses were made of the outcome of the strike, it was once again favour of the NCB (by a factory of 5:1 on the BBC).[167] This was clearly not localised to televised media. *The Times* ran articles that favoured the side of the state: emphasising the part played by the police[168] and the violence of

163 Beckett, p. 71.
164 Ibid., p. 76.
165 Black, *Britain since the seventies*, p. 132.
166 Guy Cumberbatch, 'Bias that lies in the eye of the beholder / Assessing television news coverage of the 1984-84 miners' strike,' *Guardian*, London: 19th May 1986, in *Nexis* <https://www.nexis.com/results/enhdocview.do?docLinkInd=true&ersKey=23_T23868606162&format=GNBFI&startDocNo=201&resultsUrlKey=0_T23868627204&backKey=20_T23868627205&csi=138620&docNo=224> [accessed 24th March 2016]
167 Ibid.
168 'Policing Britain,' *The Times*, 11 July 1985, p.11, in *The Times Digital Archive* <http://0-find.galegroup.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/ttda/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=TTDA&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R2&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=7&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C6%29stri

the protesting miners, in one notable instance, writing an entire article setting out a timeline of attacks on working miners, and police by striking miners.[169] Even Labour leader, Neil Kinnock was found ominously silent on the issue, seemingly following Thatcher's lead on policy and distancing himself away from the violence on the picket-line.[170]

Bragg provided solidarity to the miners that was perhaps otherwise lacking. It is an important point to make that he considered himself very much a product of his own time,[171] attributing his socialism to growing up in the Thatcherite era.[172] 'Between the Wars', a single that reached number 15 and remaining in the charts for 6 weeks,[173] best articulated this support for the Miners' Strike. Through its first person narrative account from the perspective of a miner, it allowed audiences to empathise with figures otherwise demonised in the press, through the appeal to commonalities that audiences could understand and sympathise with. A prime example of this appears the line 'I raised a family in times of austerity,' portraying the male breadwinner ideal: the speaker invites the audience to sympathise, even admire the worker for still fulfilling his 'duty' in times of financial stress. Patriarchal it might be, but during a period

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169 'Working miners catalogue strike's violence, intimidation and abuse,' The Times, 6 October 1984, p.4, in *The Times Digital Archive*,*p* <http://0-find.galegroup.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/ttda/newspaperRetrieve.do?sgHitCountType=None&sort=DateAscend&tabID=T003&prodId=TTDA&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchId=R1&searchType=BasicSearchForm&currentPosition=4&qrySerId=Locale%28en%2C%2C%29%3AFQE%3D%28tx%2CNone%2C6%29strike%3AAnd%3ALQE%3D%28da%2CNone%2C10%2910%2F06%2F1984%24&retrieveFormat=MULTIPAGE_DOCUMENT&userGroupName=leedsuni&inPS=true&contentSet=LTO&&docId=&docLevel=FASCIMILE&workId=&relevancePageBatch=CS67473222&contentSet=UDVIN&callistoContentSet=UDVIN&docPage=article&hilite=y> [accessed 24 March 2016]

170 Hilary Wainwright and Jean McCrindle, 'How Kinnock has failed to take the initiative in the miners' strike,' *Guardian*, 9 July 1984, p. 16, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/186435306/pageviewPDF/81E7A30CF6A24A42PQ/14?accountid=14664> [accessed 24 March 2016]

171 Q on CBC, Billy Bragg on The Passing of Margaret Thatcher in Studio, [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTyz_cBs24U&nohtml5=False> [accessed 2 February 2016]

172 Democracy Now, Billy Bragg: Margaret Thatcher Made Me A Socialist, [online video], 2013 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jLI35_jbK4&nohtml5=False> [accessed 2 February 2016]

173 Official Charts Company, *Official Charts*, 2016<http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/19850317/7501//> [accessed 18 April 2016]

of increasing emphasis on the heterosexual family unit, it was effective.[174]

When the speaker lists his jobs, 'I was a miner, I was a docker/I was a railway man between the wars,' - all manual labour jobs – it serves to root him within a working class experience. From this position, the speaker creates a them-versus-us dichotomy, serving primarily to demonise the establishment. The lines 'theirs are the skies all dark with bombers/And mine is the peace we knew between the wars' portrays establishment figures are warmongers, whereas the speaker wants peace – something that is easy to identify with, particularly given the background context of the omnipresent threat of nuclear war. This, in combination with the speaker's tale of keeping the faith during economic hardship establishes the speaker a decent, hard-working person striving hard to keep optimistic despite society being against him. By the closing of the song, it invokes within the listener real emotion - they are in a sense 'rooting for the underdog.'

While it is very much an English folk song – sung in Bragg's Essex accent with mentions to 'the nation' – it appeals to socialism rather than nationalism. The speaker sings 'For theirs is the land with a wall around it/Mine is the faith in the common man,'[175] invoking a sense of solidarity. Contrasted against media coverage depicting miners as violent, unreasonable and militant – it portrayed them as ordinary people, struggling in the face of adversity: it disrupted the established media narrative. Played stripped back with an acoustic guitar, 'Between the Wars' was far removed from what journalist Mary Harron described as 'business oriented pop.'[176] Bragg himself spoke about his own distaste for mainstream pop acts, saying

174 Julian Stringer, 'The Smiths: Repressed (But Remarkably Dressed), *Popular Music*, 11 (1992) 15-26 http://www.jstor.org/stable/853224> [accessed 24 March 2016] (p. 23)
175 Billy Bragg, 'Between the Wars,' Life's A Riot/Between The Wars [CD] (Cooking Vinyl, 1996)
176 Mary Harron, 'Billy Bragg: Captain's Cabin,' *Guardian*, 1983, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/billy-bragg-captains-cabin-london> [date accessed 24 March 2016]

that his music was trying to reflect an image of a broken Britain, essentially reminding people that the 'welfare state is broken and things aren't good,'[177] echoing perhaps the earlier comments made by Dammers. It of course implies that he was a minority voice during this time, overtaken by the mainstream pop, which helps to situate the somewhat marginalised position of political music during this period,

Particularly on the subject of the Miners' Strike, Bragg said in a retrospective interview that when he first came down to the pickets, it was to see whether he, as a folk singer-songwriter, had any place within it.[178] This perhaps helps to unveil a general point about folk song and its left-wing tradition. An article written by music journalists Steve Redhead and John Street, makes several quite important arguments; one being that certain music forms are taken more seriously in relationship to politics, an example given that Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet adopted the acoustic guitar on the Red Wedge tour, instead of playing New Romantic rock.[179] Furthermore, they argue that musical-political ideology rests firmly on the idea that music is connected with 'the people,'[180] that it works through the notion of the musician's right to speak for the community[181] and has authentic sociological 'roots'.[182] Though Street and Redhead are critical of whether these claims are really true for folk music, and whether not it can truly 'speak for the people,'[183] there must be at least understanding that through its association with working class causes and left in general, it *has* been linked to this very idea

177 Gavin Martin, 'Big Ben vs Little Billy,' *New Musical Express*, 14 January 1984, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/billy-bragg-big-ben-vs-little-billy> [accessed 19 Feb 2016]
178 Q on CBC, *Billy Bragg on The Passing of Margaret Thatcher in Studio.*
179 Steve Redhead and John Street, 'Have I the Right? Legitimacy, Authenticity and Community in Folk's Politics' in *Popular Music*, 8.2, (1989) 177-84 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/853467> [accessed 24 March 2016) (p.179).
180 Ibid., p.177.
181 Ibid., p. 178
182 Ibid., p. 180.
183 Ibid., p. 182.

of a community, culture and authentic roots.[184] For perhaps the same reason Kemp played an acoustic guitar, here, Bragg's relationship with the Miners' strike becomes clearer, and speaks to an established and understood position of folk's place in politics.

Similarly rooted in the working class experience were The Smiths. Morrissey in an interview, when asked whether it was the duty of a pop band to be so politically opinionated, described it as an 'obligation,' - that the Smiths had a platform and an audience meant that it was almost their duty to say something worthwhile,[185] speaking to the punk tradition imbued in bands like The Jam and The Specials. However, despite the fact music journalist Julian Stringer characterised them as 'unquestionably one of Britain's most overly political bands' their politicisation took a different form.

What set The Smiths apart from their contemporaries was a covert, yet cut-throat assessment of Britain as they saw it and this attitude is never better articulated than in one of the highest charting Smiths singles[186] 'Panic' in which Morrissey delivers a devastating indictment not just on the state of the country but on the music industry. In it, the speaker juxtaposes two images: the 'hope' posed within the rural, idyllic England of 'Grasmere' and 'the safety of the town', against the 'panic' experienced in the large cities of London, Birmingham, Leeds, Carlisle, Dublin, Dundee, Humberside – places where there was most desperation through the breakdown of society. He then instructs an audience to 'burn down the disco/Hang the blessed DJ' because the popular music 'says nothing to me about my life. This last point is perhaps the crux of the whole song – that the DJ is the enemy for refusing to reflect the truth that the

184 Ibid., p. 177.
185 Martinez, p. 196.
186 Official Charts Company, *Official Charts*, 2016. <http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/uk-top-40-singles-chart/19810705/750140/> [accessed 17 April 2016]

narrator sees in his everyday life. This cry to 'hang the DJ"[187] is repeated for nearly a minute, until the song's close – the antagonist of the song is the music industry as a whole, for refusing to be vocal at a time when it seemed Britain most needed it. Maybe, then, this best illustrated the vacuum left by the implosion of punk and 2-Tone in the early part of the decade.

The depiction of Britain in The Smiths' music is incredibly important to the general argument posed in this dissertation. Music journalist Mark Sinker helps to illustrate this point through contrasting Madness' nostalgically optimistic view of Britain, 'unsustainable' in that it was completely at odds with the Britain that actually existed at the time, with the dreary, earthy, 'solid and real' vision the Smiths' create.[188] It has been said that the Smiths could not have come from anywhere but Britain, and more specifically Manchester, and certainly this seems to be an accurate assessment with the vision of a broken welfare state, wide-scale underemployment, and a desolate industrial city[189] painted all over tracks like 'Suffer Little Children,' 'Rusholme Ruffians' and 'Still Ill.' A lot is made of the weary, miserable sound of the Smiths music, but Morrissey's own assessment of Manchester in a *Spin* article that, 'people no longer live – they simply don't do anything anymore,'[190] begins to shed some light on why The Smiths made the music they did. They were ultimately rooted in geography, in much the same way bands like The Beat were.

What this proves however is simply another phase of politicisation – a covert, rather than overt denunciation of the government. Dorian Lynskey's article is helpful for this, in it he

187 Johnny Marr and Morrissey, 'Panic,' *Louder Than Bombs* [CD] (Rough Trade, 1987)
188 Mark Sinker, 'England: Look Back In Anguish,' *New Musical Express*, 2 January 1988, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/england-look-back-in-anguish> [accessed 16 February 2016]
189 Ibid.
190 Jon Savage, 'The Smiths,' *Spin*, June 1985, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-smiths-2> [date accessed March 24th 2016]

outlined three anti-Thatcher attitudes: the overt character assassination in tracks like 'Stand Down Margaret' and 'Margaret on the Guillotine,' that engaged directly with Margaret Thatcher as a figure; the more subtle 'having a hard look at the country' attitude portrayed in tracks like 'Ghost Town' that attacked the vision of Thatcherite Britain, the implication of course being that the government's policies had led to its desolation; and finally, bands like the Smiths, in which their whole careers were implicitly underpinned by opposition to Thatcherite values.[191] The Smiths were a working class, Mancunian band, who sung explicitly about the desolation in their own communities. Furthermore, during an era of increasing moral conservatism led by the New Right, section 28 and government handling of the AIDS crisis, the fact that the Smiths actively challenged the heterosexual monogamous family unit[192] could certainly be argued as political. Though perhaps this was not as direct and confrontational as the cry to 'stand down Margaret, stand down please,' it was undoubtedly radical within itself.

There were of course overtly political displays: that the Smiths played a benefit for the Labour council along with New Order in 1985,[193] and bassist Andy Rourke along with guitarist Johnny Marr, played for Red Wedge in 1986 gives weight to this.[194] Similarly, Morrissey's statement in 1985, 'the sorrow of the IRA Brighton bombing is that Margaret Thatcher escaped unscathed,'[195] speaks entirely for itself - it would be 1988 before Thatcher was explicitly denounced in Morrissey's lyrics, but his hostility was obvious. Furthermore, although defined against the loud, angry DIY nature of punk, the Smiths apparent distaste for

191 Lynskey, 'Margaret Thatcher: the villain of political pop.'
192 Stringer, p. 23.
193 Uncut, *Stand Down Margaret!*
194 Red Wedge Film and Video, *Red Wedge: Days Like These*, [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJCCzQZw8jc>[accessed 30 January 2016]
195 Savage, 'The Smiths.'

the royal family,[196] seen through the naming of their third album *The Queen is Dead*, as well as the verse in 'Nowhere Fast' in which the speaker states 'I'd like to drop my trousers to the Queen/Every sensible child will know what this means/The poor and the needy are selfish and greedy/On her terms,'[197] speaks to a relic of punk's resolute anti-monarchy stance.[198] It certainly seems that The Smiths were in that same strand of anarchic rebellion that characterised earlier political bands.

IV.

1986-90.

The importance of Red Wedge has been neglected in secondary material, particular in the discussion of anti-Thatcher hostility within the music industry – a surprising fact given the frequency with which it arose within primary material. Its absence is probably due to the fact it ultimately failed to bring about a Labour government at the next general election, though musicians often underplayed this party political aspect. While this may appear to be a trivial point to pick up on, it is crucial to understand its aims in order to understand the part played by Red Wedge.

Truthfully, the movement had a lot of aims: to motivate young people,[199] to modernise politics, to make it more comprehensible to the average voter[200]; however, the idea that Red Wedge was not affiliated with the Labour government is one that seems tenuous at best.

196 BBC Whistle Test, The Smiths - In the Studio, [online video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2MOuMWUa70> [accessed 4 February 2016]
197 Johnny Marr & Morrissey, 'Nowhere Fast,' *Meat is Murder* (Rough Trade, 1985)
198 Gildart, p. 137.
199 Denselow, Robin, 'Red Wedge,' *The Guardian*, 27 January 1986, p. 11, in *ProQuest*, <http://search.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/186639008/6A5A1F828C6847B5PQ/1?accountid=14664> [accessed 15 February 2016]
200 Red Wedge Film and Video, *Red Wedge: Days Like These.*

Music journalist, Robin Denselow, writing in the *Guardian* stressed its 'non-factional' aims,[201] despite the Style Council reportedly playing a drum and bass solo to Thatcher's speeches.[202] Junior Giscombe stated that political awareness was needed 'regardless of politics,' while Gary Kemp said that Labour 'is all we have.'[203] Regardless of the mixed messages conveyed by members of the movement – the question arises that if Red Wedge had not mobilised to explicitly stop another Conservative victory – what was it for? The effort of organising a band of disparate artists and touring nationally surely could not have been merely a rhetorical exercise in raising political awareness.

It is perhaps best, though, to see it through a prism of the continuation of RAR, ANL and the music produced during Miners' Strike – concerted, radical political activism.[204] It was trying to ameliorate the condition of the country through positive political action by appealing directly to younger voters. Toby Young was dismissive in his assessment that it was 'trying to make Labour trendy'[205] – which implies an element of superficiality and, ultimately, transience. Really, it was about trying to mobilise the efforts of the younger voters by making politics, and Labour, marketable and therefore change ultimately achievable. The fact was at the last general election half of those between the ages 18-26 did not vote at all.[206] It would be a mistake, however, to characterise them as apathetic, however. The youth have always been, in some ways, urgently political in their criticisms of social and economic issues that directly affected them, but there is every reason to suggest they were divorced from partisan

201 Denselow, p.11.
202 William Shaw, 'Red Wedge,' *Smash Hits*, 12 February 1986, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/red-wedge-2> [accessed February 16th 2016]
203 Ibid.
204 Rose Rouse, 'Rock's power play for Labour,' *The Guardian*, 23 Jan 1986, p. 10, in *ProQuest* <http://search.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/186600318/524CEB5B4E6B412FPQ/7?accountid=14664> [accessed 15 February 2016]
205 Toby Young, 'Putting the Pop into Politics,' *The Observer*, 1 September 1985, p. 33 in *ProQuest* <http://search.proquest.com/hnpguardianobserver/docview/476990991/66F128AC604F44F4PQ/1?accountid=14664> [accessed February 15 2016]
206 Turner, p. 75

politics. Red Wedge however was an attempt to harness the frustration and anger the youth felt and channel it into existing political structures that would effect change on a mass level.

Red Wedge also was largely indicative of this anti-Thatcher consensus. That it included such a large and diverse array of musicians from Weller to Bragg to Rhoda Dakar formerly of the Bodysnatchers, Jimmy Sommerville of The Communards, R&B singer-songwriter Junior Giscombe, Rourke and Marr, and Gary Kemp of Spandau Ballet,[207] a band considered by Denselow 'one of the least political bands in Britain,'[208] is indicative of this. It is relevant here that Marr stated, 'if you were an alternative musician, you were political because of the times. It was taken for granted that the bands you shared a stage with had the same politics.'[209] Red Wedge was a step further than creating protest songs out of frustration; it demonstrated musicians' willingness to escalate their opposition to its final level: a cooperative, organised effort to affect change on a wide-scale level. It was a testament to their level of desperation – as was Labour's, in their willingness to attach itself so definitively to pop culture.[210]

However, it is true that 1987 saw the return of a Conservative government, and so Red Wedge failed in its greater aim - it perhaps becoming clear that the movement was playing to a converted audience.[211] That is not to disparage what it did achieve: increasing Labour voter share from 34% to 41%, [212] and crucially injecting an ailing Labour with a shot of confidence it badly needed in 1987, through helping to modernise and bring it in line with the youth.[213] It

207 Red Wedge Film and Video, *Red Wedge: Days Like These*.
208 Denselow, p.11.
209 Dave Simpson, 'Johnny Marr on the Smiths, Morrissey and putting politics back into pop,' *Guardian*, 11 January 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/jan/11/johnny-marr-smiths-morrissey-politics-pop> [accessed 1 October 2015]
210 Lucy Robinson, 'Sometimes I like to stay in and watch TV...' Kinnock's Labour Party and media culture,' *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011) 354-390 http://tcbh.oxfordjournals.org/content/22/3/354 [accessed 12 April 2016] (p. 363)
211 Shaw, 'Red Wedge.'
212 Ibid.
213 Turner, p. 252.

also managed to set up and support youth projects like Sadel Cultural Club, Leigh Youth Co-operation for the Unemployed, Norwich Venue Campaign and Gatehead Youth Enquiry Status,[214] perhaps not quite on the scale of affecting a general election, but nevertheless certainly important to those who benefited from its efforts. Historian Alwyn Turner even went as far as to say it swayed public opinion back from the moral right to liberalism.[215] Crucially, though, what Red Wedge represented was the last mass effort to bring about political change through music.[216]

In 1988, a now solo singer, Morrissey released the number 1 album *Viva Hate*,[217] featuring the song 'Thatcher on the Guillotine.' The slow plodding pace of the acoustic guitar in tandem with Morrissey's reflective vocals, create a stripped back, earnest sound which in turn helps to portray the exhaustion, and the disillusionment in lyrics like 'people like you make me feel so tired/when will you die?' It is meant to sound weary, to reflect the exhaustion of pointless resistance, the sapping energy of opposition to what, after three successive Conservative won general elections, seemed the inevitable. This is a point supported by the image Morrissey painted in his autobiography of the 'drained young people of England, who see Thatcher's regime as militant and blinkered.' The song comes to an end with the abrupt sound of the guillotine falling, demonstrating the real menace, clouded otherwise behind the gentle melody and Morrissey's light tone.[218]

Disillusionment is probably the best way of describing the mood within the music industry after 1987. The The singer Mat Johnson said in a *Guardian* article in 1989, that there was no

214 Red Wedge Film and Video, *Red Wedge: Days Like These.*
215Turner, p. 252.
216 Ibid., p. 252.
217 Official Charts Company, *Official Charts*, 2016 <http://www.officialcharts.com/charts/albums-chart/19880320/7502/> [accessed 17 April 2016]
218 Morrissey, 'Margaret on the Guillotine,' *Viva Hate* [CD] (His Master's Voice, 1988)

point in 'browbeating the public with his opinions,' because everyone was truly aware of the situation in Britain, and so to continue this front would be to sound like 'a scratched record.'[219] In effect, there was nowhere left to go for political music by the end of the decade. It was the effect of a lack of progress – Thatcher after all was still in office - combined with the fact that so many of the original bands that spouted their opposition had imploded (The Smiths had broken up in 1987) along with the fact organised efforts to provide some resistance had failed. Thus, songs like 'Thatcher on the Guillotine' became something of a rarity.

By 1988 it was becoming superseded by the rise of acid house and rave, with Manchester as its epicentre – the origin of the so called 'class of '89,' the Happy Mondays, the Stone Roses and the Inspiral Carpets.[220] The city's cultural renewal came through dance clubs, and while it was very much a post-industrial city with a struggling day-time economy, the night-time economy thrived.[221] Figures like Tony Wilson – manager for Joy Division, and its successor New Order – were instrumental in the formation of this new scene; in fact it was the proceeds from New Order's biggest selling 12" record Blue Monday that went towards creating the infamous warehouse nightclub the Hacienda.[222] That drug taking was often central to the house music scene[223] begs the question of whether this could be considered another stage of protest against civil society. Much like the moral panic and outrage spawned by punk, could it be considered that this was similarly a way to push against society's barriers and rebel against the older generation? The main issue with this interpretation is that a lot of the new

219 Bruce Dessau, 'The The's Thatcher Years,' *Guardian*, 12 May 1989, in *Rock's Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-thes-thatcher-years> [accessed: February 3rd 2016]
220 Neil Nehring, 'Everyone's Given Up and Just Wants to Go Dancing': From Punk to Rave in the Thatcher Era,' *Popular Music and Society*, 30 (2007) 1-18 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03007760500453176#aHR0cDovL3d3dy50YW5kZm9ubGluZS5jb20vZG9pL3BkZi8xMC4xMDgwLzAzMDA3NzYwNTAwNDUzMTc2QEBAMA==> [accessed 13 April 2016] (p. 14).
221 Stewart, p. 299.
222 Ibid., p. 299.
223 Nehring, p. 14.

bands were completely apolitical, and in the case of The Happy Mondays claimed to vote Conservative, identifying themselves as Thatcher's children through their argument that dealing drugs and setting up illegal warehouse raves was similar to the Thatcherite enterprising mind-set.[224] Musical journalist Len Brown's argument that 'protest music is on the way out and drug taking haze is now 'in',[225] not only signals a complete demise of political protest music, but this treatment of politics as if it were a fad speaks to the same treatment of ska bands in the early 1980s. It confirms the diagnoses laid out by Dammers, and Adorno, Horkeimer and Roderick in Martinez' article: that the fickleness of the music industry and its commodification of the 'new trend' ensured that momentum would ultimately wear thin.

Bragg in particular voiced his distaste for the newer bands, not from a moral position on the use of ecstasy but because it made people complacent and stopped them from organising.[226] Ecstasy's main effect caused a euphoric state, encouraging a sense of togetherness and human empathy among dancers,[227] but ultimately this was temporary, chemically induced and therefore not conducive to providing a coherent opposition against policies pursued by the government. It therefore seems more likely that what fuelled the rise of acid house and its various sub-genres was that of a complete disillusionment combined with the music industry's need to adopt the new trend.

The question now remains whether this opposition in music – while it lasted – achieved anything? It is true that ultimately it did not bring about the end of the Thatcher government.

224 Stewart, p. 308.
225 Len Brown, 'Is Billy Bragg Pissing In the Wind or What?' *New Musical Express*, 4 November 1989, in *Rocks Backpages*, <http://www.rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/is-billy-bragg-pissing-in-the-wind-or-what>[accessed 24 March 2016]
226 Ibid.
227 Stewart, p. 301.

In Martinez' article, Roderick argues the government's stability demonstrated music's worthlessness, both artistically and politically[228] but this judgement lacks nuance. It does not take into account events like the Falklands War, and perhaps even, to some extent, the handling of the Miners' strike, that served to boost the popularity of the Conservatives nearing general elections. Nor does it consider the failure of Labour primarily for alienating a moderate electorate in 1983 and exacerbating divisions that formed the SDP. It is important to bear in mind that music was not the official voice of opposition. There were limits to what it could realistically achieve, a point demonstrated best by Red Wedge.

The real failure was that nothing substantial ever succeeded it. Within the decade, even if resistance was not at a consistent strength, there was almost always a voice of opposition whether that be in music or comedy. Marr said in a recent interview that a vacuum was left after what he defines as the 'indie generation' – or perhaps, more aptly, the political generation[229] – and this is a sense true. There are some practical reasons for why this occurred: change to the structure of labels meant that the independent labels that signed the indie and ska acts, functioned more like commercially driven major labels in the 90s.[230] Sayle, in particular, noted it was simply not as financially practical to make a living artistically, as it had been in the early 80s.[231] Perhaps, the vacuum also emerged because the threat Thatcher posed was somewhat diminished. Tellingly, this came from comedy like *Spitting Image* which satirised John Major in the early 90s, for being grey and dull[232] a far cry away from the demented, demonic, overtly masculine figure of Thatcher. Could, it therefore be that at least in the 20th century, there was not the impetus to rise against the government, as

228 Martinez, p. 202
229 Simpson, *Guardian*.
230 Stewart, p. 298.
231 Bloomsbury Publishing, 'Alexei Sayle and Stewart Lee talk about Thatcher Stole My Trousers.'
232 Cavendish, Dominic, 'Spitting Image: essential satire for a generation.'

there had been in the 80s?

Conclusion

It becomes clear over the course of this dissertation that the single biggest factor in politicisation of music throughout the decade was Margaret Thatcher. How much was she convenient embodiment of society's issues? Certainly, the figure presented in the media was one that was starkly unapologetic and bold in the new path she was leading Britain in, and it was that figure that became the subject of hatred, something ultimately that allowed creatives to rebel against in a way that they had never done before or since. The perceived unwillingness to empathise with the negative impact policies had on people added to this growing disconnect between the government and the rest of society. It must also be recognised, that while the media perception of Thatcher fed into this establishment of her as a villain, it is ultimately a trivial assessment and one that does not account for the deep level of hatred that the political generation of musicians carry well into the 21st century. Therefore, the radical and unprecedented policies enacted by the Conservative government must also be taken into her account. It was in her tenancy that the death of the postwar consensus accelerated, and with this the gradual erosion of the welfare state and the socialist institutions that had been a part of society for nearly 35 years. It is inescapable that a lot of these policies were seen to affect the most vulnerable within society and undoubtedly the frustration that nothing could be done to stop it, both within the official opposition and within creative circles, fed into this hostility towards her. Ultimately, as a representative of this government, and indeed a driving force behind a lot of these policies, it makes sense that – since a lot of artists were coming from a working class position or affiliation in the early part of the 80s – the vitriol in the music would be attributed to her specifically.

Punk also had a big impact that should not be overlooked. While the movement itself had died away for the most part in the late 70s, its legacy was lasting. The creation of RAR and its relationship with reggae played a huge part in the formation of ska groups. More importantly, punk served to imbue early music in this decade not only with a sense of defiance, but through its democratic ideology – that theoretically anybody, regardless of class, race or even gender could seize a platform to sing about the everyday existence of the ordinary person - it ultimately served to make music accessible.

What about this issue of a consensus? Through the research for this dissertation, outspoken right-wing figures within the creative industry have seemed few and far between. Apolitical ones existed, and Dammers' argument that certainly within the early part of the decade, silence was just as much of a political statement as explicit activism, may be one to consider.[233] It seems however that a left-wing counterculture existed. Whether that be overt through the explicit denunciation of the state, or through engagement in benefits that supported left-wing causes or through the quiet profession of an allegiance to Labour – the distinction between those 'political' bands and those who were not seems almost arbitrary at times. That a musical organisation so fundamentally tied to the Labour Party like Red Wedge could exist in 1986 is perhaps the most extreme and overt evidence of this consensus. Furthermore, this consensus fed through into other creative industries like comedy, and spheres that this dissertation has not had room to discuss, like drama and poetry. That culture was so bound up within politics serves to demonstrate the depth of this politicisation, and ultimately how divisive the Conservative government truly was.

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