

Article

## **STUART HALL'S LEGACY: THATCHERISM, CULTURAL STUDIES AND 'THE BATTLE FOR SOCIALIST IDEAS' DURING THE 1980S**

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### **Abstract**

While few analyses of leading cultural thinkers and scholars, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, consider their roles as socialist public intellectuals, engaged in the on-the-ground debates around party and/or movement strategy and tactics for the Left, such involvement can contribute to making their work more influential as scholars and their work as scholars can contribute to making their political interventions more efficacious. This paper focuses on Stuart Hall's role as a socialist public intellectual and his 'Thatcherism' thesis during the 1980s and argues that part of the latter's success was not necessarily due to the veracity of its analysis so much as the position of the author and the production and distribution of the ideas.

### **Keywords**

Stuart Hall; Thatcherism; Public Intellectual; alternative media; Raymond Williams; Cultural Studies; socialism

*There is a spectre haunting the Left, the spectre of the 1983 election.*

In paraphrasing the opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* in light of the media and pundit 'panic' around the unexpected rise and election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in September 2015, I want to draw attention to the legacy of an interpretation of the 1983 general election, which continues to haunt many in the Labour establishment.<sup>1</sup> These reactions highlight how far the Labour Party has moved to the right, as any attempt to re-assert a connection with reforming the system in favour of the working class, who have been on the wrong side of the growing inequality gap, is viewed with anathema. The attacks on Corbyn, whether explicitly or implicitly, use the spectre of Labour's 1983 defeat to keep 'social democracy', let alone 'socialism', at bay.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article was completed in December 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Labour narrowly escaped being relegated to third party status in the 1983 election with just 28 percent of the vote versus the combined 26 percent share of the Social Democratic Party and Liberal Alliance together.

Labour's 'wilderness years' are attributed to the 1983 election, despite its ongoing shift to the right afterwards, starting with Neil Kinnock's election as leader at Labour's October 1983 conference, and the subsequent 'rejection' of the party by voters in the subsequent 1987 and 1992 elections, as it kept shifting to the right after each defeat. The Conservative Party's 18-year rule, from 1979 to 1997, established under Margaret Thatcher's prime ministership (1979-90), was ended with Labour's landslide win in the 1997 general election. Whether this was attributable to Labour's shift to the right and transformation into 'New Labour', and/or to the support of Rupert Murdoch's media empire, including the best-selling tabloid, *The Sun*, and/or whether it was the electorate sick of an ailing government beset with internal squabbles and scandals, which was increasingly out of touch with the public, 'New Labour' under Tony Blair reaped the rewards.

The dominance of New Labour and the Labour Right has meant that the dominant understanding of Labour's 1983 general election defeat, can be summarized in then Labour MP Gerald Kaufman's quip that Labour's election manifesto was the 'longest suicide note in history': its demands were seen as 'too left-wing', including unilateral nuclear disarmament, re-nationalisation of particular industries and withdrawal from the European Economic Community. This interpretation became a dividing line across the Left and its memory has been used against attempts to shift Labour back towards the centre-left.<sup>3</sup> For example, Ed Miliband's half-hearted, slight move 'leftwards' in the 2015 election was claimed by Labour's Right as the reason why Labour lost that election. The dominance of the Labour Right can in part be attributed to the 'fear' of ending up again in that 'wilderness', which no doubt helped to militate against the survival of all but a handful of MPs on the Labour Left, out of which Corbyn reluctantly put his name forward for leader of the Labour Party.<sup>4</sup> Unlike 1983, the momentum pushing Labour is one in which the party is being influenced by a broad stretch of the public outside Labour, possibly more than it ever was in the 1980s, as tens of thousands are also (re) joining Labour because of its decisive shift away from New Labour.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are differing opinions on what the 1983 defeat meant and so for a recent perspective from the right of the party, see Francis Beckett (2015) 'Lessons from Labour's Wilderness Years', TotalPolitics.com (<http://www.totalpolitics.com/print/4358/lessons-from-labours-wilderness-years.html> accessed: 17 November 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Point made at the panel, 'Beyond Parliamentary Socialism? Corbyn's Labour Party', with Hilary Wainwright, Jon Lansman and Andrew Murray, Historical Materialism London Conference, 7 November 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Corbyn received 59.5 percent of votes in the first round of voting and thereby won the leadership of Labour. This amounted to more than 251,000 out of 422,664 votes cast (of a total electorate of 554,272). Rowena Mason (12 September 2015) 'Labour Leadership: Jeremy Corbyn Elected with Huge Mandate', *The Guardian* (<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/12/jeremy-corbyn-wins-labour-party-leadership-election> accessed 17 November 2015).

Notably, the 1983 general election defeat is the point at which the split of the Left into so-called 'hard' and 'soft' Lefts really begins to take shape. That same year Stuart Hall's 'Thatcherism' thesis was revised from its initial publication in the January 1979 issue of *Marxism Today*, 'the theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain' (CPGB), and published in a collection with a range of responses, marking its growing prominence as a topic for debate and discussion across the Left and within the academy (Hall and Jacques 1983). That same year, the split in cultural studies between 'cultural populism' and 'political economy' can be seen in the debate in *Screen* between Ian Connell and Nicholas Garnham over public service broadcasting (McGuigan 1992, pp.163-67). This split in both the political Left and the cultural studies Left is a legacy, in part, of the struggles that took place over the meaning and significance of Thatcherism in which Stuart Hall played a central role, as both a socialist public intellectual committed to the Left's 'war of position' and a socialist scholar contributing to cultural studies's 'political project'. Both roles included the promotion of his Thatcherism thesis that ensured its dominant influence on the academic and cultural Lefts. I want to focus in this essay on how his Thatcherism thesis came to be the dominant interpretation on the Left. It has remained an important contribution to the Left's thinking of how to develop a counter-hegemonic strategy to oust the New Right.

However, there were limits to Hall's Thatcherism thesis that were not fully understood at the time. Some of these critiques identify issues to do with the translation of Gramsci's ideas into English, drawn upon by Hall and others, alongside substantial criticisms of the discursive understanding of power that leaves out the material connections to people's consciousness, such as cultural and social practices, ways of life as well as political and economic factors, including institutions and workplaces. Finally, I do want to make it clear that my critique of aspects of Hall's thinking is done in a collegial manner, both as someone who drew inspiration and encouragement from his work during this period, as I felt part of the same broad social formation to which his ideas appealed,<sup>6</sup> and out of a deep and abiding respect for Stuart Hall, the person and his character and intelligence.<sup>7</sup>

One of Stuart Hall's most important contributions, of course, was to popularize cultural studies as an important *political* project. This dovetailed nicely between his work in academia and his work as a socialist public intellectual during the 1980s, contributing to a range of political and cultural publications, such as *New Socialist* (NS) and *New*

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<sup>6</sup> Alternative and oppositional cultural and intellectual formations, as defined by Raymond Williams, play an important part in bringing about social and political change (Williams 1977, pp. 118-120; see Pimlott 2014b).

<sup>7</sup> For a more personal and reflective piece about Hall in an earlier issue of *Socialist Studies*, see Pimlott (2014a).

*Society*, as well as his more significant and collaborative work with Martin Jacques and *Marxism Today* (MT). The period of Hall's greatest influence as a socialist public intellectual really begins with his collaboratively researched and co-authored, 400-plus-page *Policing the Crisis*, which helped to launch his role in public debates on the Left during the 1980s and 1990s (Hall et al. 1978).

The legacy of Stuart Hall's influence is in part related to a general shift that took place in the aftermath of '1968', as the Left shifted from a strategy of 'frontal assaults' on dominant institutions during the upheavals of '1968', to one of the 'long march through the institutions' in its aftermath, which emphasized the importance, even necessity, of joining and shaping institutions from within. By the start of the 1980s, however, a new imperative and *modus operandi* for the Left made its appearance: Antonio Gramsci's 'war of position'. To engage in a 'war of position', Hall stressed the importance of the *ideological-political* dimension of struggles in 'civil society', rather than workplace struggles or 'frontal assaults' on the state (ie Gramsci's 'war of manoeuvre', equated with the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917), before being able to establish the moral and intellectual leadership of a (counter-hegemonic) social-historical bloc. Under Hall's influence, via cultural studies and the Left's counter-public sphere, his Thatcherism thesis emphasized engagement in ideological struggle over 'common sense' and public discourses, which justified the focus on mainstream media and popular culture rather than factory struggles and political economy.

A key emphasis of this approach to (counter) hegemony included a focus on 'organic' versus 'traditional' intellectuals, which did draw attention to the role that such agents play in securing hegemony. Many of us were receptive to this message of focusing on the 'ideological-political dimension' of struggles and those of us who were engaged as 'grassroots advocates, agitators and organizers' could see ourselves as aspiring 'organic intellectuals', who Antonio Gramsci described as 'leaders', who combine the functions of 'specialists + politicians', and who are 'permanently active persuaders', whether or not we were closely connected to a political organisation or social movement, or chose to engage in the 'war of position' through other forms of cultural politics.<sup>8</sup> Part of Thatcherism's appeal was the promise of a 'frontline' commitment of *participation* in 'ideological struggle' for erstwhile 'organic intellectuals' rather than waiting to see how one might be called upon to *support* industrial or workplace struggles, especially if one was not actually employed in one of the 'productive worker' occupations. This engaged audience was constituted and addressed as part of a 'political-cultural formation', by such periodicals as *Marxism Today*, *New Socialist*, *New Society*, *New Statesman* and *City Limits*, and it was through these media that our engagement in the 'war of position' via 'ideological-political

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<sup>8</sup> Antonio Gramsci quoted in Thomas (2009, p. 416): "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, exterior and momentary mover of affections and passions, but in joining in actively in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanently active persuader' because not pure orator..."

struggle' was expressed. For cultural studies students and lecturers, these political, alternative and oppositional media articulated critiques of mainstream media and popular culture from vaguely 'left socialist' or 'libertarian socialist' perspectives. At times, this perspective could be read or understood implicitly as in essence the Labour Party or even the Labour Left, since for so many socialists in the UK, there is a sense of ownership or attachment to the 'broad church' of Labour regardless of membership,<sup>9</sup> and at other times as something more politically radical, if only vaguely defined. This vague understanding or articulation of 'radical' politics did not offer any explicit commitment to a particular organisation or ideology, although some became involved in small, far-Left groups, while others joined the Labour Party; for many others, radical politics were defined through 'single issue' movements, such as squatting, AIDS and peace activism, or 'identity politics', such as feminist and black activism.

Although Stuart Hall came to be seen as closely associated with *Marxism Today* and its political project, which increasingly through the 1980s pushed for the abandonment of key tenets of traditional Labour Party commitments, he was also important in popularizing areas that had traditionally been neglected because they were not seen as very important to the class struggle until the 1980s: popular culture, media, ideology (eg Pimlott forthcoming). The emphasis that Hall and others placed on what was understood as the war of position through 'civil society' ensured an important role for the intellectual in whatever way she might be defined. Yet, despite Hall's exhortations, a form of academic cultural politics became the defining element around *Marxism Today's* political project in part because of the lack of a connection to any kind of institution or organisation that could enact its politics, beyond discussion groups and conferences (as with the first New Left), and exhortations to the Labour Party leadership to make changes (eg Chun 1993; Pimlott forthcoming).

Part of the appeal of Hall's Thatcherism thesis was that it offered a means to understand how unemployed and working class people could end up supporting the Tories against Labour and 'social democratic' policies that protected or supported their own material interests. This in turn meant that as activist scholars, or organic intellectuals, we sought to uncover the means by which Thatcherism had successfully re-articulated aspects of popular belief and values to neoliberal policies so that we might contribute to the counter-hegemonic project of the Left that could win moral and intellectual leadership to establish a counter-hegemonic social bloc. It gave a seemingly *political* purpose to what would become the dominance of 'resistant readings' of mainstream media and popular cultural texts by 'active audiences', to which Hall's 'encoding/decoding' model contributed, and which rejected such concepts as 'false

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<sup>9</sup> This is most notable in the attempts of the CPGB to affiliate to the Labour Party almost from its inception in 1920, despite clear and ostensible differences between a pro-Soviet Communism and a loosely defined 'democratic socialism' under a commitment to parliamentary democracy (eg Callaghan 2005).

consciousness' and the negative definition of ideology (eg Miller 2002).

At least since the early 1960s, Hall participated in or contributed to a number of studies, commissions and other projects of civil society organisations, from local and national immigrant and anti-poverty groups, such as the National Committee of Commonwealth Immigrants and the Joseph Rowntree Social Services Trust, to national and international organisations, such as the Runnymede Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain and the United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organisation. A good example of his participation in extra-academic commitments was Hall's involvement in co-presenting the 30-minute video, *It Ain't Half Racist, Mum*, broadcast (1 March 1979) on BBC 2, produced by the Campaign Against Racism in Media with the BBC's Open Door Community Unit. It examined the racism in popular television programming and took its name from a then popular situation comedy broadcast on the BBC. In its attempt to reach beyond the narrower audiences of political periodicals and academic courses, the programme's focus was not just educational but also *political* because of street demonstrations against the National Front and the rise of 'Rock Against Racism', and Margaret Thatcher's incorporation of aspects of popular racism into her speeches (e.g. her infamous comments about being 'swamped by people with a different culture') (Schofield 2012, p.106).<sup>10</sup>

In 1979, Stuart Hall took up the position of Professor of Sociology at the Open University (OU), which he held until his retirement in 1997, and during this time he worked on broadcast and educational documentaries at the OU, which included helping to organise and run courses on popular culture, representation and related topics, presenting TV programmes, and editing and writing textbooks. All of this work, no doubt, contributed to extending his influence via media and cultural studies programmes in the (former) polytechnic sector where these texts were frequently used in teaching. While these texts reached a student cohort, some of whom would become further and higher education lecturers, Hall's other academic contributions via debates, conferences and articles promoted his Thatcherism thesis amongst faculty within the academy, which also contributed to his growing influence and public profile.<sup>11</sup> These academic contributions also helped to popularise and extend his influence beyond his political contributions in the Left's counter-public sphere.

However, I would make the case that any understanding of the success and pervasiveness of Hall's Thatcherism thesis, on the Left and within the academic fields of communication, media and cultural studies, cannot be explained by claiming its success

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<sup>10</sup> For an account of Enoch Powell's influence on Thatcher's speech, see Schofield 2012, pp. 302-03, footnote 61.

<sup>11</sup> For example, many of Hall's (1982, 1988a, 1988b) talks and essays were responses to debates on the Left and in the academy, including beyond the UK.

based upon the veracity of his analysis, since that would be a tautological explanation. That is, if Hall's Thatcherism is 'successful' because it is the most widely accepted account, such a claim provides no means by which one can ascertain the veracity of its ideas *per se*, but whether they are dominant because of the available means of communication for their reproduction and distribution.

Interestingly, a comparison between Stuart Hall and another founding member of cultural studies, Raymond Williams, raises the question of why did one particular socialist public intellectual become more influential than the other. Since the late 1950s, Williams and Hall had collaborated as leading intellectuals of the first New Left, including working on *New Left Review*, where Hall became its first editor (1960-62), and two editions of the *May Day Manifesto* in 1967 and 1968, and were part of the same broad social formation on the Left of the Labour Party. Both contributed to the two leading discussion magazines during the 1980s: *New Socialist* and *Marxism Today*. Although differences between these two leading socialist public intellectuals did already exist in terms of their approaches to cultural studies, it was only on the political front from 1979 that their differences over working-class and socialist politics began to emerge more concretely, including over Hall's Thatcherism thesis and the trajectory of cultural studies (Milner 2002: 115-18).

Raymond Williams had had a greater public profile than Stuart Hall on the Left at least until the late 1970s. Terry Eagleton has noted, for example, that by 1979 Williams's books had sold more than 750,000 copies, but because the UK during the 1970s and early 1980s lacked an organised counter-public sphere comparable to that of the German Left during the Weimar Republic, with its vast range of organisations and groups which composed a dynamic counter-public sphere, there was no space within which his writing could be taken up and debated (Eagleton 1984). It is important to note that the number of copies of Williams's books that were sold by 1979 would have extended far beyond the 'ivory tower', since some of his contributions were built around communications policy or commentary on technology and since universities in the 1970s had much smaller cohorts of students, who would have only accounted for some of the sales of his books. Eagleton's contention also needs to be qualified by the recognition that there was a counter-public sphere or spheres on the Left, but that the Left was - and is still - fractured by (sectarian) divisions. Williams's critiques, of both Eric Hobsbawm's 'Forward March of Labour Halted?' (FMLH?) and Hall's 'Thatcherism', offered different ways of interpreting these twin themes of the 'crisis of the Left' and the 'rise of the (New) Right' respectively to the then better known, or popularized, counter arguments on the Left, but they were sidelined or overlooked. Both Hobsbawm's FMLH? and Hall's Thatcherism benefitted from the platforms provided via MT's conferences and discussion groups, and sympathetic CPGB branches and journals.

It is important to note, however, that Stuart Hall wielded considerable influence

over how Raymond Williams was received, read and interpreted, in part because Stuart Hall was in a considerably more influential position vis-à-vis cultural studies than Williams, since he was employed as associate director (1964-69) at the newly established Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and then as director (1969-79), with its graduate students, many of whom also went on to teach in academia. Hall also wrote key accounts of cultural studies's development, such as the essay that identified the 'two paradigms' and in which Williams (and E.P. Thompson) was (were) labelled as 'culturalists' (Hall 1980). Such labelling in some ways served to limit Williams's influence at a time when structuralism and other theoretical approaches were considered much more sophisticated approaches to culture than 'humanism'.<sup>12</sup> Equally disappointing is the failure of other socialist scholars to take up Williams's cultural materialism via his 1977 book, *Marxism and Literature* and 1981 book, *Culture*, or even his prescient account of neoliberalism (aka 'Plan X') in *Towards 2000* (McGuigan 2014). Williams's position as a professor of drama at Cambridge University did not give him the same kind of position to wield influence over the newly emerging field of media and cultural studies, despite being employed at one of the two top elite universities in the UK.

The classic 1970s collaborative project, *Policing the Crisis: 'Mugging', the State and Law and Order*, based upon Stuart Hall's and four graduate students' involvement in a community support campaign, which resulted in their 'multilayered' analysis of the state, media and crime, formed the basis from which Hall produced his analysis of Thatcherism; it remained an exemplar of cultural studies as political engagement for Hall (Pimlott 2014a: 193). It also helped to raise Hall's profile from work he presented in other fora beyond the academy. For example, during the second half of the 1970s he attended the annual Communist University of London (CUL), which had evolved from its initial incarnation as an orthodox party school in 1969 into a forum of heterodox ideas. Two presentations of his were included in CUL collections published by the CPGB, including the widely reproduced article, 'The Whites of Their Eyes' (Hall 1981a). It was not just the CUL, however, that enabled this annual intellectual engagement to take place. The CPGB itself had expanded its range of journals and other serial publications, which focussed upon various specialist topics, such as *Red Letters*, a literary journal, and *Euro-Red*, which provided a critical, 'unofficial' perspective on the 'existing socialist' states of Eastern Europe. The proliferation of journals represented a fermentation of ideas alongside the development of two broad tendencies and some smaller factional groupings within the CPGB, at a time when the CUL in the late 1970s was bringing in more than 1,500 attendees at its peak, including many cultural studies graduate students and lecturers, not all of whom were CPGB members or sympathizers.

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<sup>12</sup> Jones (2004) and Milner (2002) point to some serious misinterpretations or misunderstandings of Williams.

It was at the Communist University of London that Martin Jacques, the last editor of *Marxism Today*, encountered Stuart Hall and asked him to write for the journal. The result was Hall's classic January 1979 MT article, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in which he identifies and names 'Thatcherism' five months before Margaret Thatcher's first general election victory as Conservative Party leader on 3 May 1979. This marked the beginning of the collaboration between Hall and Jacques on MT's political project, although Hall also contributed to *New Socialist*, Labour's version of MT, and remained a member of the Labour Party.

It is the twin critiques of the 'crisis of the Left' and the 'rise of the (New) Right' by Eric Hobsbawm and Stuart Hall which helped to propel *Marxism Today*, via its diligent, relentless self-promotion into the centre of debate on the Left and which spurred on the introduction of the Labour Party's first ever 'theoretical' journal, *New Socialist*, in the autumn of 1981, when MT moved to national newsagent distribution (Pimlott forthcoming). Initially, however, Hobsbawm's 'Forward March' argument dominated debates on the Left while Hall's 'Thatcherism' received much less attention from readers, although four features that were published in MT in the year after 'The Great Moving Right Show', drew upon or responded to Hall's analysis.

During this period of the late 1970s, there was a general expectation on the Left that 'History' was moving inexorably towards 'Socialism'. Thus, when Hobsbawm's and Hall's critiques first appeared in the late 1970s, they challenged long-held beliefs on the Left. As part of the ideological struggle over the future trajectory of the Left by the mid-1980s, Hall and other critics in MT referred to these beliefs as 'shibboleths', and invoked other negative religious connotations of 'unshakeable faith' held by 'true believers', to characterise the traditional Left of both the Labour and Communist parties in a particularly unflattering manner.

In the three years between the first publication of the 'Forward March of Labour Halted?' in *Marxism Today* and the 1981 anthology of responses from across the Left (Jacques and Mulhern 1981), Eric Hobsbawm's analysis became part of a new orthodoxy on the Left that Hall's Thatcherism thesis complemented. The period between the 1979 and 1983 general elections, though, was a time when many left activists joined the Labour Party, just as at present Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader has encouraged others to join the party. It was also a time when political periodicals, such as the CPGB's *Marxism Today* and Labour's *New Socialist*, worked together to promote debate and discussion on the Left, particularly around Tony Benn and his campaign for the deputy leadership of the Labour Party, around which the Left had united.

Hall's analysis, however, had been mostly neglected or overlooked until 1983, when a collection was published by Lawrence & Wishart, the CPGB's publisher, which included a substantially revised chapter of his Thatcherism thesis and responses to it (Hall and Jacques 1983). More significantly, Labour's disastrous showing in the June 1983

general election, when its share of the popular vote fell by nearly 10 percent to 28 percent, barely two percent more than the Liberal and Social Democratic (SDP) parties' combined share of the popular vote, helped push Hall's analysis to the forefront of debate on the Left. The Tory share of votes declined by almost 700,000 while Labour's declined by three million, most of which appear to have gone to the Liberals and SDP; thus, the split on the Left, in a first-past-the-post parliamentary electoral system, enabled the Conservatives to gain nearly all 60 seats lost by Labour. This latter interpretation also explained the divisions which were not so much the result of Thatcherism's resonance with the population as a divided Centre-Left and Left. The debate over the impact of Thatcherism often revolved around the psephology of the 1983 general election, as if a one-day snapshot of votes cast in a general election provides an adequate account of competing ideologies, motivations of voters or any number of other factors, such as the rise in patriotic nationalism as a result of the military victory over the Argentinians in the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982, which contributed to making a then deeply unpopular government popular.

After 1983, however, divisions on the Left grew over the interpretation of Labour's general election defeat. What *Marxism Today* called the 'realignment of the Left' was the process whereby both Labour and the CPGB were involved in more intense internecine strife: Labour faced internal fracturing and the leadership ousted Trotskyist 'entryists' and other 'hard' leftists, while MT, as part of the 'Eurocommunist' and 'Gramscian' wing of the CPGB, manoeuvred increasingly for a position from which to outflank internal opponents on the 'traditionalist' wing, while allying with CPGB loyalists.<sup>13</sup> This internal fight absorbed Jacques's energy and some of the limited resources available to *Marxism Today*, although it did lead to the eventual expulsion of many traditionalists, while others left out of frustration. Yet, the expulsion of the traditional left or 'hardliners' ensured that the CPGB's financial lifeline for MT was much more secure.

These critiques by Eric Hobsbawm and Stuart Hall gained in authority and credibility as Thatcherism maintained its hold on government and the media and increasingly undermined the post-war social-democratic consensus to which all parties had adhered after 1945. Both Hobsbawm and Hall helped to establish a basis for proclaiming a new, 'realistic Marxism' to counter the 'hard Left', as it cleared the path for 'New Labour' in the 1990s (e.g. Pimlott 2005, forthcoming).

In this period, Hall became more popular, reaching out increasingly through various publications, albeit primarily associated politically with *Marxism Today*, and via the growth in cultural studies across the UK and internationally. The 1983 election results

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<sup>13</sup> These broad categories of 'Eurocommunist', 'Gramscian', 'traditionalist', 'hardliner' and 'loyalist' are only meant to capture general differences to communicate a sense of the deep divisions within the CPGB and not the nuances that existed within and between the party's two 'wings' or 'tendencies' (eg Pimlott forthcoming).

provided ammunition for Hall's critique of the Left's 'economism', the reading off of ideological-cultural 'superstructure' as a result of the economic 'base'; the related promotion of the 'political-ideological' was in contrast to the dominance of the idea of the working class as the revolutionary agency for overthrowing capitalism, especially as many working-class voters supported Thatcher despite three million unemployed, that many on the Left did not appear to recognise. Nor did Hall argue that this was necessarily false consciousness, but the Conservatives' successful re-articulation of ideas to their ideology that appealed to certain groups of workers.

Hall's argument for learning from Thatcherism or 'authoritarian populism' was able to win consent by detaching ideas normally associated with the Left or social democracy and re-articulating them to Conservative ideology. In many ways, Hall's Thatcherism thesis was an important and necessary development in, and provocation to, the conventional thinking on the Left because there was the long standing expectation of reading off people's allegiances based upon their place or role in the capitalist mode of production: that working-class voters would vote Labour, while the middle class would vote Conservative.

In contrast, however, Raymond Williams pointed out that since the advent of mass democracy, the Tories have attempted to secure the support of the rural (and sometimes urban) working class, and that there were always working-class people who supported the Tories and the Establishment (Williams 1983, pp.157-174). Against Hall's 'authoritarian populism', Williams argued that it would be more accurate for it to be understood as 'constitutional authoritarianism' (Williams 1979). This argument has been substantiated by the degree to which there was considerable opposition to Thatcher and her government throughout the 1980s and her government made considerable use of repressive state apparatuses, whether around the black uprisings or the miners' strikes or other forms of industrial, social and political unrest. However, Williams's concept did not get the exposure that Hall's did nor did it appear to have much influence, perhaps, in part because he was not closely affiliated to such a well organised grouping as that around *Marxism Today* and therefore it did not get any of the assiduous promotion that MT provided for Hall's Thatcherism thesis.

One other aspect of Stuart Hall's contributions as a socialist public intellectual was his focus on popular culture, especially his 1981 intervention, 'Deconstructing the Popular', and his January 1984 article for *Marxism Today*, 'The Culture Gap', which raised the importance for the Left of attending to culture and especially popular culture (Hall 1981, 1984). Whereas it is virtually unheard of today that radical, alternative and oppositional media would not analyse or otherwise cover 'culture' in its myriad forms, back in the early 1980s, it was still a struggle to get regular ongoing coverage of popular culture in a way where it was taken seriously and not thought of as secondary or simply read off of the economic base or mode of production: i.e. a capitalist mode of production

produces a capitalist culture. First, *Comment*, the CPGB's fortnightly party review, as edited by Sarah Benton (1978-80), had a regular 'TV column' written alternately by three cultural studies lecturers and then *Marxism Today* began to expand its regular coverage of culture to more than book reviews as MT recognised the importance of popular culture, not only in terms of political issues, but also as a means to both attract readers and advertisers (Pimlott forthcoming).

Of course, an important part of this gradual shift on the Left was the development of cultural studies and its focus on the popular and other forms that were not considered traditional high art or 'great' literature. Soap operas, television shows and romance novels, for example, became topics for what was to become dominant in cultural studies: the focus on the mundane, everyday, the seemingly mass or popular media forms or 'debased' cultural products and programming. There was also the emphasis on 'active audiences' and 'resistant readings', which Hall's 'encoding/decoding' model enabled with its emphasis on the reader-listener-viewer to determine whether she would accept (wholly or partially) or reject the messages being offered through various media (Hall 1980). Although there is not the space to go into the problems with this approach, Greg Philo (2008) identifies some significant problems with it and its contribution to the 'active audience' approach in cultural studies.

The focus on popular culture was part of what was a general sense at the time of being part of movement to establish a counter-hegemonic bloc on the Left. That is, there was a sense by which if we (aspiring organic and traditional intellectuals) could develop an analysis of how common sense worked by analysing forms of popular culture that appeared to resonate with people, then perhaps we could help contribute to developing a more effective counter-hegemonic politics via the 'war of position'. There was this sense that it was an increasingly important part of developing a strategy to oppose Thatcherism, particularly after the 1983 general election. This was part of Stuart Hall's appeal and that of *Marxism Today*. They focused upon the political aspects of popular culture as well as the more obviously 'political' issues and they offered a way of thinking about them that offered some kind of promise of an eventual victory if we could just somehow learn from Thatcherism or aspects of its popular and common sense appeal.

Over the last decade or so, a number of articles and books have identified aspects related to what might be categorised as key weaknesses in Stuart Hall's Thatcherism thesis. One overlooked critique of Hall's work points out that Hall himself was guilty of 'economism', albeit different from the 'economism' for which he critiqued the Left, because in avoiding the economic, capitalism is treated as a 'force of nature', 'external and prior to thought, discourse, practices, and social relations' (Peck 2001: 236-38). There was little focus on *how* and in what ways Thatcherism was articulated and reproduced during the 1980s, with the exception of just one article: Alan O'Shea (1984) identifies a few key

metaphors and phrases used in some of Thatcher's speeches and circulated through the media. Hall's analysis moves from including a significant focus on mainstream media in *Policing The Crisis* to a much more limited analysis in the inaugural article on Thatcherism. Hall provided plausible descriptions of Thatcherism, albeit largely at an abstract, macro level of social and political developments. Although the mainstream media get mentioned, or 'leader writers' at least, the idea of the media remains largely an abstract part of understanding Thatcherism.

Yet, this is an important part of understanding the degree to which Thatcherism was, or was not, successful. It is about the role that the social production of ideologies play in the development and obtaining of both hegemony and counter-hegemony. It is also closely related to a key aspect of Gramsci's theory of hegemony which has largely been overlooked in the Anglophone world but which is crucial to the theory: the 'concrete hegemonic apparatus' (eg Thomas 2009, pp.224-28).

What is most important is a recognition of the role of grassroots alternative and radical media and cultural production play in being able to construct a counter-public sphere and, ideally, operate as part of the concrete (counter) hegemonic apparatus. This was a particularly fecund period, between the mid-1970s and the 1980s, when there was an expansion of the means of media and cultural production for the lower middle and working classes due to greater accessibility from lower costs and less complex skills required for the technologies that had been made generally available (eg Pimlott 2014b).

Stuart Hall's Thatcherism also based its idea of 'counter-hegemonic' strategy upon a 'mirror image' of Gramsci's 'passive revolution' and '*trasformismo*'; that is, 'revolution from above' became the model, rather than revolution from below, which would have required a different strategy. For example, Thatcherites had been able to effect considerable change via corporate organisations, including think tanks and newspapers, and state institutions, via policy changes to industry and the use of 'Repressive State Apparatuses' (RSAs) against the organized working class. A key element here is also the role of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in Althusserian structuralist Marxism, such as the media, which are not likely to be available as part of any counter-hegemonic apparatus, which means there is not really any equivalent of the passive revolution or *trasformismo* for oppositional groups. Thatcherism, on the other hand, could rely on its domination of the ISAs, including support from mainstream media, including the popular press that had made the greatest shift to the political Right since the 1920s (including the pro-Labour *Daily Mirror*) (Williams 1978, pp. 20-21).

## Conclusion

Stuart Hall made many important contributions to both left politics and cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s. First of all, both he and his analysis of Thatcherism

stressed the importance of paying attention to ideology, media and popular culture, including the ways in which the Right attempted to re-articulate concepts, ideas and phrases from the Left or the 'national interest' to its own particular ideology as part of its attempt to organise a cross-class social-historical bloc to secure hegemony. Hall's approach also stressed the importance of the role of intellectuals in a 'war of position' for civil society and ultimately for leadership of a social-historical bloc that could bring about a counter-hegemonic transformation. Finally, by rightly emphasizing areas that had been neglected, ignored or overlooked, Hall encouraged hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of organic and traditional intellectuals, as 'permanent persuader-organisers' in civic society and social movement organisations, and graduate students and lecturers to engage with a political project of countering the rise of neoliberalism and seeking the transformation of society. The degree to which we have been unsuccessful does not reflect directly upon Hall so much as upon ourselves and our failure to shape or find a political instrument to help make a counter-hegemonic strategy viable.

On the other hand, Stuart Hall's Thatcherism also failed to provide an adequate model for developing a counter-hegemonic strategy, in part because of its particular configuration and means of producing ideology via its hegemonic apparatus of newspapers, think tanks and other entities, in addition to Thatcher's control of government and its agencies. This was a consequence of the neglect or omission of Gramsci's key concept of the hegemonic apparatus from using his theory of hegemony.

It is also interesting to note the differences between Hall's influence via an overview of his academic positions and political contributions, particularly in his role as a socialist public intellectual and scholar, versus Raymond Williams, whose contributions were neglected in part due to his own marginalization within academia and on the Left during the 1980s. This can be explained in part, not by the veracity of Hall's Thatcherism thesis per se, but by its promotion and circulation via *Marxism Today* and through post-secondary institutions where cultural studies was taught (which might also account, in part, for its emphasis on cultural politics over political economy). Williams's account of Thatcherism was neglected in part because he was not in the same position as Hall, who had established a particularly influential position in terms of his public profile across a number of areas, including cultural studies, which no doubt contributed to his greater influence on the Left compared to Williams. That is, the influence of Hall's Thatcherism thesis can be attributed not so much to the veracity of its ideas but to his position as a socialist public intellectual and the means of the production and distribution of his ideas.

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