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## A Vital Outlet for the British Left

*Marxism Today* as a discursive space, 1979-1983

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Gary Love

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of the contributions to *Marxism Today* in the period 1979-1983. In order to add to our understanding of the intellectual history of *Marxism Today* and the politics of both the Labour Party and the Thatcher governments, this thesis systematically researches the contents of the magazine as a whole. More specifically, this thesis primarily takes on three major discussion points in *Marxism Today* at this pivotal moment for the left in Britain. First, the reasons for Labour's defeat at the 1979 General Election. Second, the left's reactions to the politics of the Thatcher government. Finally, debates about what alternative politics the left could offer in the future so that it could defeat Thatcherite conservatism.

Reference style: APA 7th for footnotes

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Any errors that remain are my sole responsibility.

Marie Solgard  
Trondheim, May 2022

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
Historical Context	1
Thesis Question	5
Historiography	5
Method, Sources, and Chapter Structure	7
<b>The 1979 General Election</b>	11
The External Factors Precipitating the Left's Decline	11
The Internal Factors Precipitating the Left's Decline	12
The Conservative Party's Narrative: Commonsense & Crisis	14
Historical Explanations of the Decline: Wilson and Callaghan	15
The Effects of the Ideological Issues Concerning the Left	16
<i>Marxism Today's</i> Views on The 1979 General Election	17
<b>Thatcher's First Term, 1979-1983</b>	19
Public Expenditure: Fighting the Cuts	19
Workers and Trade Unions: A Presentiment of Paralysis	20
The Attacking Nature of Thatcherism	21
Thatcher's Foreign Policies as a Disconcerting Issue for the Left	22
Desired Responses Expressed in <i>Marxism Today</i>	23
<i>Marxism Today's</i> Views on Thatcher's First Term	24
<b>The Future of Leftist Politics</b>	26
Possible Alliances on the Left	26
Taking on an Offensive: Active & Aggressive	28
The Need for Self-Examination on the Left	28
Internal Change as Prerequisite for Resurgence of Support	29
New Focus for the Left: Building an Alternative	30
<i>Marxism Today's</i> Views on The Future of Leftist Politics	31
<b>Conclusion</b>	33
<b>References</b>	36
Primary Sources	36
Secondary Sources	38
<b>Appendix</b>	41
The Thesis' Relevance for My Work in the Norwegian Educational System	41

# Introduction

## Historical Context

### Unsuccessful Labour governments

Labour held office for ten years with Harold Wilson in 1964-1970 and again in 1974-1976, then Jim Callaghan was prime minister for three years until the 1979 General Election. The periods with Wilson and Callaghan as prime ministers were and are still seen as inadequate.<sup>1</sup> The scholar and previous policy and strategy advisor for the Labour Party, Patrick Diamond, wrote in his analysis of Labour's history for the past 40 years: "Labour administrations all too often abandoned their principles in office, embroiled in unseemly compromises."<sup>2</sup>

Harold Wilson faced criticism during and between his periods as prime minister. Critics included members of the opposition and, surprisingly, members of his own shadow cabinet and administrations.<sup>3</sup> Notably, his support of President Johnson's policy on Vietnam caused many of his supporters to turn their backs on him.<sup>4</sup> When Wilson became the party leader, people saw him as the socialist left candidate.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, when Wilson became prime minister, the voters expected to get a radical administration, but they did not.<sup>6</sup> They got a much more moderate prime minister and government than initially anticipated. Wilson resigned in 1976, likely due to a combination of poor health, frustration, and age.<sup>7</sup> Some interpreted his resignation as a way to protect himself because a sense of national crisis had started to form, which he did not resolve before he left office in 1976.<sup>8</sup> His last two years as prime minister became a prologue to a crisis that Callaghan inherited when he became the Labour Party leader.<sup>9</sup>

Like Wilson, the new prime minister James Callaghan was seen as too mild and moderate. This view was shared on both sides of the political spectrum and sparked fear within the Conservative Party as it would be more challenging to fight against a centre-left politician than a far-left politician.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the Conservatives did not need to worry for long because economic crises and industrial unrest would bring down the Callaghan government.

### The Winter of Discontent and the Rise of the New Right

In November 1978, a period of industrial unrest started known as 'the Winter of Discontent'.<sup>11</sup> Increasing strikes and, coincidentally, the coldest winter since 1963 characterised the following months.<sup>12</sup> A decline in Labour support followed the rise in the

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<sup>1</sup> Diamond 2021: 73

<sup>2</sup> Diamond 2021: 45

<sup>3</sup> Pimlott 1992: 619

<sup>4</sup> Layborn 2002: 225

<sup>5</sup> Heppell 2010: 151

<sup>6</sup> Wilson was a member of a left-wing grouping in the Labour Party called 'Keep Left' (Layborn 2002: 224); it was rumoured that Wilson had sympathy for the Soviet Union (Wilson's Legacy 1995)

<sup>7</sup> Layborn 2002 226

<sup>8</sup> Pimlott 1992: 651, 623

<sup>9</sup> Pimlott 1992: 724

<sup>10</sup> Saunders 2012: 36

<sup>11</sup> Shepherd 2013: 147

<sup>12</sup> Nobbs 2015: Ch. 9 The Winter of Discontent, 1978/79, para. 1



number of strikes. Labour had only been able to return to office in 1974 because of its “perceived capacity to work with the unions in a way that the Conservatives had long since demonstrated they were unable to do.”<sup>13</sup> In 1978, it was proved that Labour *also* was unable to do so. This led to the 1979 vote of no confidence, the collapse of the Callaghan government, and Thatcher’s success in the 1979 General Election.<sup>14</sup> ‘The Winter of Discontent’ destroyed the government’s reputation,<sup>15</sup> and its memory continued to haunt Callaghan’s successors.<sup>16</sup> Callaghan left the Labour Party weaker than it had been in a generation,<sup>17</sup> and the voters no longer believed that Labour meant what they said.<sup>18</sup> Political scientist Colin Hay points out the importance of this event:

What makes the Winter of Discontent so significant an episode in the political history of modern Britain—the symbolic point of transition from the postwar consensus to Thatcherism, from Keynesianism to monetarism, from corporatism to austerity, from ‘then’ to ‘now’—in the end owes little to the events themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The Winter of Discontent occurred just before the 1979 General Election, but Thatcher and the New Right<sup>20</sup> had been gaining momentum for a while. F.A. Hayek has been attributed as one of Thatcher’s and the New Right’s main inspirations through his book *The Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944—35 years before Thatcher became prime minister.<sup>21</sup> In other words, ‘New Right’ ideas had their roots in earlier decades (1930s-1960s),<sup>22</sup> but it was only in the 1970s that they influenced politicians more significantly. A younger generation of Conservatives advocated these ideas in the 1960s, but they had no influence until 1970. Scathing attacks from the left<sup>23</sup> towards the ‘New Right’ appeared in the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> There were various publications about the New Right theory at the time, and Enoch Powell stood for ‘revisionist’ economic rhetoric. This “set the scene” for Thatcher’s politics.<sup>25</sup> Although there was a New Right before Thatcherism, it was Margaret Thatcher’s victory that turned the theories of the New Right into ‘perceived challenges’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hay 2009: 545

<sup>14</sup> Shepherd 2013: 147-148

<sup>15</sup> Diamond 2021: 76

<sup>16</sup> Shepherd 2013: 148

<sup>17</sup> Layborn 2002: 54

<sup>18</sup> Shaw 1994: 24

<sup>19</sup> Hay 2009: 551

<sup>20</sup> The New Right is a cluster of components. Barker 1997 (p. 230) has listed certain aspirations and aversions of it. The list includes: hostility to socialism and Keynesian economics; active support of capitalism; hostility to universal social services and a fear of a ‘dependency culture’ amongst the ordinary working population; sustaining advocacy of individual responsibility in opposition to collective provision. For further reading on the New Right in Britain: Ben Williams (2021). The ‘New Right’ and its legacy for British conservatism. DOI: 10.1080/13569317.2021.1979139; Desmond S. King (1988). New Right Ideology, Welfare State Form, and Citizenship: A Comment on Conservative Capitalism. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/178936>

<sup>21</sup> Barker 1997: 239

<sup>22</sup> Barker 1997: 247

<sup>23</sup> ‘The left’ refers to those who have a certain allegiance to the Labour Party. Simon Hannah argues “what defines the left is its ‘transformative agenda’, one that seeks ‘far-reaching economic, social, constitutional and political changes that challenge the existing power relations in society’.” (A Party with Socialists in It, as cited in du Cros 2022: 54) However, du Cros prefers the Family Resemblance Model because “rather than seeing two fundamentally opposed factions, it views the Labour Party in its entirety as a rich source of diverse concrete ideas which can be utilised to increase the effectiveness and validity of the Left.” (du Cros 2022: 77). For the purpose of this thesis, a broad sense of the term ‘the left’ will be applied.

<sup>24</sup> Barker 1997: 253

<sup>25</sup> Williams 2021: 3

<sup>26</sup> Barker 1997: 253

The New Right policies were opposite to those of the left and possibly damaging in the sense that they could weaken those institutions and organisations with which Labour and the left had strong ties. After WW2, leftist ideals such as universal welfare and extended public sectors became a focus in British politics.<sup>27</sup> Trade unions and public institutions grew stronger under these conditions. When Thatcher won, these ideas and institutions faced an attack.

### **The Forward March Halted: The General Election of 1979**

Tara Martin states that 'the Winter of Discontent' had its roots in the dissolution of the 'postwar consensus' and that it was a pivotal moment for the Labour Party.<sup>28</sup> When Labour lost the 1979 General Election, traditional labour interest's<sup>29</sup> decline was confirmed. The abandonment of consensus politics meant a significant change in economics and values. Martin stated that this period of unease became a source of internal division within the party.<sup>30</sup> After Callaghan, the Labour Party was completely divided; "After Labour's defeat in 1979 the smouldering tensions between left and right ignited into a veritable civil war encompassing organisational as well as ideological and policy matters."<sup>31</sup>

The Labour Party now found itself in opposition, and the battles within the party were a part of a period of reflection and debate. The different sides of the Labour Party pitched each other as antagonists, and the leadership became unable to create compliance.<sup>32</sup> The prominent Labour politician Tony Benn argued in 1981 that to overcome their issues, Labour had to promote and implement a radical programme.<sup>33</sup> There was a sense of agreement that the Labour Party and the British Left had to develop.<sup>34</sup> This period became the last dice roll for harder leftist politics; Thatcher was at her weakest, but she would soon start implementing what Thatcherism stood for momentarily.

### **Marxism Today, Martin Jacques, and the Discursive Landscape of the Left**

In the wake of 1979, there was much soul-searching on the left about its political future; some of the most important debates took place in the journal *Marxism Today*. The contributions in the magazine were part of the process of looking at the crisis of the Labour Party and the left and assessing 'what had been done?' and 'what can be done?'. Many saw the crisis of the left and Labour as one of class politics, and the class debate was central in *Marxism Today*.<sup>35</sup> The contributors gained influence in the politics of the left and Labour. Simultaneously, the Thatcher government attacked institutions and organisations traditionally linked with the left. They had to react quickly to an increasingly aggressive politic on the right and, at the same time, deal with the fragmentation within its own ranks. *Marxism Today* was a key outlet for leftist opinion, which contributed to broader debates about how the left should respond to the policies of the Thatcher government.

Colm Murphy states that "*Marxism Today* remains totemic in left-wing debate" within and outside of academia, which is significant as there was a diverse print culture at

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<sup>27</sup> Gamble 1988: 49-50

<sup>28</sup> Martin 2009: 50

<sup>29</sup> Such as solid trade unions and an extensive welfare state.

<sup>30</sup> Martin 2009: 51

<sup>31</sup> Shaw 1994: 1

<sup>32</sup> Shaw 1994: 21

<sup>33</sup> Shaw 1994: 24

<sup>34</sup> Diamond 2021: 23-24

<sup>35</sup> Andrews 2004: 210

the time.<sup>36</sup> There are several recent examples of how historical accounts of the 1980s have continued to rely on contributions to *Marxism Today*, such as those by Stuart Hall, to explain the leftist views of the time.<sup>37</sup> The magazine was influential at its peak, and it remains an object of study and reference today. An investigation of *Marxism Today's* contribution and debates can help us understand why historians and thinkers on the left have given the magazine so much attention.

The magazine *Marxism Today* was founded in 1957, and it published its last issue in 1991. Its original purpose was to be a theoretical magazine for the Communist Party in Britain.<sup>38</sup> However, the ties with the CPGB were loosened as their support declined, particularly in the 1950s.<sup>39</sup> They lost the ability to carry out political action, and they had to seek a broader alliance to reach their aims. Young communists worked together with others as part of the broader left allowing the magazine to appeal to a broader audience.<sup>40</sup> During Thatcher's time as prime minister, its content was directed toward the whole left<sup>41</sup>, and it reached its peak in popularity.<sup>42</sup> Its editor was the scholar Martin Jacques. In an interview with *the Australian Left Review*, Jacques states that the magazine had:

A preparedness, by the late seventies, to come to terms with what was happening in politics both at home and overseas. In practice, this meant confronting Thatcherism and the crisis of the labour movement. These two themes became the hallmarks of the present political phase. It was that confrontation with reality that set *Marxism Today* apart from virtually everything else on the left.<sup>43</sup>

Jacques sought to encourage a different type of discourse in *Marxism Today* than what had been the standard under his predecessor, James Klugmann. He wanted the magazine "to explore 'strategic questions' and 'topical political issues', and 'the wider context, the deeper meanings of particular problems'."<sup>44</sup> The shifts in *Marxism Today* under Jacques indicated a turn in the magazine's project from being a theoretical journal to a magazine working to achieve a 'broad democratic alliance'.<sup>45</sup> The contributions in the magazine became increasingly concerned with internal politics, and the contributors became more politically diverse.<sup>46</sup> The size of the magazine increased, and so did its influence.<sup>47</sup> As mentioned, *Marxism Today's* ties with the CPGB were looser when Thatcher stepped into office. At the same time, it was not as directly tied to the Labour movement, or the Labour Party itself, as magazines such as *Tribune* or *the New Statesman* were. Martin Jacques' *Marxism Today* was more of an independent voice. Nonetheless, it had a significant influence on the Labour Party and other leftist organisations at the time.

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<sup>36</sup> Colm Murphy, "The forgotten rival of Marxism Today: the British Labour Party's New Socialist and the business of political culture in the late twentieth century". (Forthcoming in *English Historical Review*.)

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite 2017; Shalbak 2018; Rustin & Gilbert 2020

<sup>38</sup> Harris, 2018

<sup>39</sup> Pimlott 2000: 29

<sup>40</sup> Pimlott 2000: 30

<sup>41</sup> Harris, 2018

<sup>42</sup> Pimlott 2006: 794

<sup>43</sup> Connor, 1986: 12

<sup>44</sup> Jacques 1978, as cited in Pimlott 2006: 792

<sup>45</sup> Pimlott 2006: 789

<sup>46</sup> Pimlott 2006: 791

<sup>47</sup> Pimlott 2006: 792

## Thesis Question

This thesis systematically explores the nature and range of leftist opinion in *Marxism Today* to establish why historians have singled it out as an object of study. The scope of the thesis is limited to the years 1979-1983, which is a crucial period for the Labour Party and the left. Politics became more polarised, both between left and right but also on the left. The emergence of a new era of British politics frames this study. It enables an investigation of the similarities and differences and areas of agreement and disagreement on the left concerning the Labour Party's general election defeat in 1979, the politics of Thatcherism, and thoughts about Labour and the left's future. When assessing the content of the publications in *Marxism Today*, two questions are central:

1. How unified were the contributors on the major challenges facing the British Left in this period?
2. What do these contributions reveal about the politics of the Labour Party and the Thatcher governments?

## Historiography

### **Marxism Today and Leftist Publishing**

At the beginning of the 1900s, the Communist Party of Great Britain had a majority of working-class members and a lack of intellectuals.<sup>48</sup> This caused them to lack an active literary intellectual core. In the 1930s, this took a turn with a left-wing literary movement, and the communists were central.<sup>49</sup> *The Left Review*, set up by the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, became one of the outlets for far-left opinions in Britain at the time.<sup>50</sup> It was short-lived but still a part of "the development in England of a literature of the struggle for socialism."<sup>51</sup> The paper was a part of the intellectual process in Britain to recruit working-class writers, which affected the history of leftist intellectual writings for years to come.<sup>52</sup>

*Marxism Today* was first issued in 1954 in the wake of this intellectual spark on the far-left in Britain. It became an outlet for the thoughts of CPGB members<sup>53</sup> and other far-left members. The magazine "offered a fundamental revision of the standard left-wing project."<sup>54</sup> Despite the varied contributions, some have argued that it is given too much importance in historical writing about the British Left. As Colm Murphy mentions, the 'Eurocommunist' wing of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) sustained the magazine.<sup>55</sup> It is rare to find academic writings concerning leftist publishings during the Thatcher years that do not mention *Marxism Today*. It is given much weight, although magazines like *the New Statesman*, *Tribune*, *Spare Rib*, and the Labour Party's *New Socialist* were also active in these years.

There was a wide array of magazines in which those on the left could publish. An example is *The Morning Star*. The paper is attached to the Communist Party, but as Robert

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<sup>48</sup> Hilliard 2006: 40

<sup>49</sup> Hilliard 2006: 41

<sup>50</sup> Hilliard 2006: 41

<sup>51</sup> Hilliard 2006: 43

<sup>52</sup> Hilliard 2006: 64

<sup>53</sup> Smith & Worley 2014: 180

<sup>54</sup> Davis & McWilliam 2017: 3

<sup>55</sup> Colm Murphy, "The forgotten rival of *Marxism Today*: the British Labour Party's *New Socialist* and the business of political culture in the late twentieth century". (Forthcoming in *English Historical Review*.)

Griffiths states: "we're a paper for working people across the board, whatever work they do."<sup>56</sup> This is similar to what *Marxism Today* aimed for during Jacques' editorship. Despite the significance of *The Morning Star* and publications such as *The New Statesman*, *Marxism Today* remains one of the most heavily relied on leftist publications when discussing the opinions of the left in Britain in the years when Thatcher was prime minister.

### **Hobsbawm and Hall's Interlocked Relationship with *Marxism Today***

The historian Eric Hobsbawm and the cultural theorist Stuart Hall made some of the most memorable contributions to *Marxism Today*.<sup>57</sup> The British journalist John Harris claims that the pair defines the intellectual core of *Marxism Today* and that they provoked the same controversy.<sup>58</sup> They have been dominantly referred to when looking at the leftist opinion presented in the magazine and are seen as representative of the opinions shared in it. Professor Herbert Pimlott analyses the journalism style in *Marxism Today*. When discussing contributions to the magazine, he writes that Hall and Hobsbawm respectively "conveyed" and "used" imagery and metaphors, while others "attempted" to do the same.<sup>59</sup> Although Pimlott did not necessarily intend to minimise the contributions of the other authors, his descriptions tell a tale seen in other historical accounts of *Marxism Today*. Historians have repeatedly interacted with Hall and Hobsbawm when exploring the magazine or when stating the views of the left in the Thatcher era. Other contributors are mentioned in the stories of this period but often in passing, and their opinions come across as less significant. Hall and Hobsbawm's scholarly attention can be reasoned through their authorship of the two iconic essays, "The Great Moving Right Show" and "The Forward March of Labour Halted", respectively.<sup>60</sup>

### **A Period of Thatcher policies: Thatcherism**

This thesis is concerned with an array of responses to 'Thatcherism' in *Marxism Today*, which is why it is essential to understand what it was and what the Thatcher governments stood for. Scholars agree that *Thatcherism* cannot be defined as one thing.<sup>61</sup> Andrew Gamble attempts to give focus to the fact that terming the politics of the Conservatives 1970s after a political figure is to direct attention away from its content.<sup>62</sup> At the least, Thatcherism is a gathering of ideas or a political attitude. American academic Shirley Robin Letwin supports the latter view in her book *The Anatomy of Thatcherism*. She understands Thatcherism as a collection of responses to the conjunctural, as "a coherent set of responses as to things as they are, or were seen to be, in Britain at the end of the twentieth century."<sup>63</sup> Robert Saunders backs this view as he writes about it as a 'negative body of ideas'.<sup>64</sup>

Some widely recognised ideas attached to Thatcherism, such as 'the conception of individualism', were not necessarily uttered explicitly but rather implicitly through various actions and statements. This seems to be the essence of Thatcherism in Letwin's understanding. Thatcherism has to be understood as reactions to what could, according to

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<sup>56</sup> Griffiths as cited in Platt 2015

<sup>57</sup> Pimlott 2006: 800

<sup>58</sup> Harris, 2018

<sup>59</sup> Pimlott 2006: 800

<sup>60</sup> For examples, see: Cooke & Rutherford 2011; Worth 2014; Shock 2020; Ciáurriz 2020; Diamond 2021

<sup>61</sup> Gamble 1988: 21; Letwin 1992: 17

<sup>62</sup> Gamble 1988: 21-22

<sup>63</sup> Letwin 1992: 30

<sup>64</sup> Saunders 2012: 40

the Conservatives, hinder 'vigorous virtues'.<sup>65</sup> Margaret Thatcher wanted to abandon the post-war consensus, and her politics were expressions of precisely this.<sup>66</sup> Thatcher despised the term 'ideology', which adds to the understanding of the politics associated with her as a collection of ideas and reactions, and *not* an ideology.<sup>67</sup> Some realities disclose much about Thatcher's policies. Thane writes, "Poverty and income and wealth inequality increased dramatically during her period as premier [...] She believed inequality was the natural and desirable state of society."<sup>68</sup> Thatcher also worked to remove trade unions from the political scene, which she largely achieved by the end of her premiership.<sup>69</sup>

From 1979 to 1983, the Thatcher government laid the groundwork for its future policies. The Thatcherites started signalling what they were going to do.<sup>70</sup> However, the party was not in full agreement about the government's future direction until the reshuffle of 1981.<sup>71</sup> Gamble writes the following about the period, "The Thatcher Government seemed to be the latest in a long line of governments that had suffered irreversible damage due to bad judgement and ill-fortune. It appeared that the Thatcher experiment would be short-lived."<sup>72</sup> At this moment, Margaret Thatcher and her government were at their weakest, and they had not yet been able to introduce all of the reforms that they would be famous for in the 1980s. *Marxism Today* played a significant role in analysing and defining Thatcherism as a 'coherent hegemonic project'.<sup>73</sup> Stuart Hall's interpretation is the most influential.<sup>74</sup> Trying to understand Thatcherism was a key discussion point in *Marxism Today* in this period.

## Method, Sources, and Chapter Structure

This thesis is a historical case study where the primary sources are at the very heart of the research. Exploring the opinions in *Marxism Today* is possible by establishing the *range* of opinions in it. This creates a basis for analysis. The next step is to look at how the secondary sources about this period present the magazine's views. By going about it in this way, it will become possible to answer if historical accounts accurately recount the contributions to the magazine in this period.

The relevant contributions to the magazine fall into three main categories based on which debate they contributed to the 1979 General Election, Thatcher's first term, or the future of leftist politics. The opinions have been categorised to enable an investigation of the variation within these categories. This systematic review can contribute to a better understanding of *Marxism Today* as a source of information but also an object of criticism.

### Method

Reconstructing 'political culture' dominates the field of modern British history and has done so for the past three decades.<sup>75</sup> Murphy writes that "A common feature of this research

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<sup>65</sup> Letwin 1992: 32; 34

<sup>66</sup> Gamble 1988: 208-209

<sup>67</sup> Saunders 2012: 28

<sup>68</sup> Thane 2018: 346

<sup>69</sup> Green 2006: 126

<sup>70</sup> Gamble 1988: 99

<sup>71</sup> Gamble 1988: 110

<sup>72</sup> Gamble 1988: 110

<sup>73</sup> Gamble 1988: 23

<sup>74</sup> Gamble 1988: 175

<sup>75</sup> Colm Murphy, "The forgotten rival of *Marxism Today*: the British Labour Party's New Socialist and the business of political culture in the late twentieth century". (Forthcoming in *English Historical Review*.)

agenda has been extensive use of print media: manifestos, reprinted speeches, pamphlets, posters, newspapers, journals, and books."<sup>76</sup> In 'new political history', historians tend to focus on reconstructing the broader cultural context.<sup>77</sup> This change represents a linguistic change, focusing on the individual experience, the ideological competition itself, and the process of ideological competition in the public sphere.<sup>78</sup> The latter is especially central for the work with political debates in print media. Therefore, looking at magazines as a part of historical research has gained additional ground.

Similarly, in the history of ideas, the primary method is studies of text.<sup>79</sup> Historians have become increasingly concerned with the author's intention, as Skinner writes: "to know what a writer *meant* by a particular work is to know what his primary *intentions* were in writing it."<sup>80</sup> Issues of contextualisation are raised, as substantial knowledge is necessary to contextualise correctly, but it is challenging even then. However, as Southgate points out while being aware of our inability to attain the context 'correctly', historians can ask what the author wanted to convey.<sup>81</sup>

With the new political history, the 'linguistic turn' is embraced, and historians have started re-investigating the history of the Labour Party.<sup>82</sup> Lawrence Black writes, "The 'new political history' alerts historians to the manifold relations between politics and the people. If parties are more than reflectors of social change, voters are more than passive receptors of ideas."<sup>83</sup> This justifies looking at the range of opinions in *Marxism Today* to say something new about Labour and the left. Despite the contributors not always being attached to a party, their opinions reflect the present's ideas. No magazine writes with one voice; through assessing various opinions from politicians, activists, and intellectuals, it is possible to say something about the ideas of this period. Colin Hay highlights four core themes of the 'new political history of British politics'<sup>84</sup>:

1. The relationship between structure and agency, context and conduct
2. The relationship between the discursive and the material, between the ideas held about the world itself
3. The relative significance of political, economic and cultural factors
4. The relative significance of domestic, international and transnational factors

The second point is particularly central to this study, as the research conducted can assist in answering questions concerning "the relationship between political discourse and the environment in which it is formulated and, arguably, on whose development it impacts."<sup>85</sup> This systematic research will assist in understanding the magazine as a mouthpiece on the left and how elements of the left understood the Labour Party and the challenges it faced.

### **Self-set Limitations**

The selected time span in the research has been singled out due to its significance for the Labour Party and the left. In 1979-83, Labour politics were highly charged and contentious. Callaghan and other centrists had to fight the far-left within the party. The differences

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<sup>76</sup> Colm Murphy, "The forgotten rival of *Marxism Today*: the British Labour Party's New Socialist and the business of political culture in the late twentieth century". (Forthcoming in *English Historical Review*.)

<sup>77</sup> Lawrence 2010: 219

<sup>78</sup> Vieira 2011: 374

<sup>79</sup> Southgate 2010: 274

<sup>80</sup> Skinner 1988 as cited in Southgate 2010: 275

<sup>81</sup> Southgate 2010: 276

<sup>82</sup> Black 2003: 23

<sup>83</sup> Black 2003: 24

<sup>84</sup> Hay 2003: 182

<sup>85</sup> Hay 2003: 191

within the Labour Party were dividing and caused great debate. The far-left gained influence in the party in this period. Simultaneously, they discussed their views and Thatcher's policies in *Marxism Today*. The Thatcher government was at its weakest, and it had not yet implemented all of the policies that it is now most famous for, such as the full privatisation agenda. This was when the British Left could attack and regain political territory. 1983 was arguably crucial as a possible turning point, but Thatcher got to continue to destroy things for the left. The second win cemented the Thatcher government's dominance in this period, which is why Labour's course towards 1983 is significant.

A study of this period assists in seeing the initial responses of the left to the election loss in 1979 and Thatcherite policies before the left was 'fully defeated'. This can contribute to an understanding of the ideas on the left in this period, even if they were not embraced before or after 1983. It can assist in developing a better understanding of why historians have singled *Marxism Today* as an object of study.

### Sources

The primary sources used in this thesis originate from *Marxism Today*, which can be accessed through Amiel Melburn Archive, an open online database for socialist and radical writings. The database is nearly complete, but some articles are missing. This could be a source of misinterpretation, but as most of the content is there, this should not be an issue. Thomas Smits has raised concern about 'unequal access' to digital archives, but this is not an issue with the Amiel Melburn Archive as it is open for everyone.<sup>86</sup>

Holly L. Crossen-White has researched the use of digital archives in historical research. Although she is mainly concerned with personal information in such archives, she makes some general points too. The ease of access and rapidity causes the researcher to distance themselves from the material and not give it as much attention as physical archives.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the researcher must be aware of the occurring distance and remember the 'duty of care'.<sup>88</sup>

Roughly fifty contributions, from the period leading up to the General Election of 1979 and during the first Thatcher government, have been considered. About forty of them are used actively in this research. When reading and researching the material, handling the articles with care has ensured no misinterpretation or neglect. The contributions during Thatcher's first period in office have not been considered exclusively. Knowledge of how the left perceived the upcoming defeat would be lost by not addressing specific contributions before the 1979 General Election and some of the first contributions to the debate on what the left needs to do to rebuild. Notably, some contributions were put aside due to their lack of relevance to the analysis.

### Chapter Structure

To answer the thesis question, it is central to structure the thesis in a way that explores as much range as possible within the magazine. After looking through the contributions to *Marxism Today* in 1979-83, it became evident that it is possible to get a good sense of the range by looking at reactions to the 1979 General Election, Thatcher's first term, and thoughts on the future of leftist politics. At the end of each chapter, there is an encapsulation of what the findings presented in the chapter tell us about the range of opinions.

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<sup>86</sup> Smits 2014: 140-41

<sup>87</sup> Crossen-White 2015: 114

<sup>88</sup> Crossen-White 2015: 115



The loss in the 1979 General Election was significant as it represented the decline in leftist support. This caused the Labour Party and others on the left to ask questions about why the left was in decline. In *Marxism Today*, Eric Hobsbawm initiated a debate about precisely this. It was one of the big questions at the time. The chapter concerning the 1979 General Election includes the following subcategories based on the contributors' views as to what has caused the decline: both external and internal factors precipitating the left's decline, the Conservative Party's influence, historical explanations, and ideological issues concerning the left.

After 1979, Britain saw a Labour Party in opposition that had to react and adjust to the politics of the new government. The contributions in *Marxism Today* were a part of this. It is possible to map attitudes by looking at how different contributors reacted to the new government. Although the response to Thatcher is negative overall, some nuances are found in their perception of the ongoing events and what they found to be suitable responses. The chapter concerning the reactions to Thatcher policies from 1979 to 1983 has subsections primarily based on public expenditure, workers and trade unions, the nature of Thatcherism and its foreign policies, and what responses to Thatcherism the contributors wanted from the movement.

The third main chapter takes on the discussions about what the left and the Labour Party should or should not do to regain support and possibly win the upcoming election in 1983. This was a significantly precarious period for the Labour Party and the British Left. They had now witnessed the contours of what Thatcherism is and what Margaret Thatcher intended to do. Another election loss could be devastating. There were various takes on what kind of action was needed. The subsections in this chapter are based on the various ideas presented by the contributors: potential alliances, offensive strategy, self-examination and internal change, and, more broadly, building a new focus for the left.

## The 1979 General Election

"The period 1979 to 1983 was one of the most stormy and eventful in the Labour Party's history," Eric Shaw writes.<sup>89</sup> It started with the 'Winter of Discontent' leading to Labour's election loss in 1979. The failure of the left in the General Election became evident even before it was held. In 1978, the left had to acknowledge that the ascending of Labour had started to stagnate. The decline of leftist support provoked the existing tensions between Labour Left and Labour Right, leading to 'a veritable civil war' over organisational, ideological and policy matters.<sup>90</sup> Diamond calls this a structural crisis; the party had "little effective capacity for sustained intellectual rejuvenation";<sup>91</sup> they did not have the structures needed to initiate constructive reflection. Steve Ludlam's collection of historians' explanations points to issues of pluralism and a lack of socialism in the Labour Party.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the period marked by the 'Winter of Discontent' and the 1979 General Election exposed internal divisions.<sup>93</sup> These divisions were evident to the voting masses because, as Tony Benn said, "The greatest problem we face is not that our policies are unpopular. The problem is that many people don't believe what we say and don't know whether we would do it if we were elected."<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the press turned against the Labour Party; the papers were hostile to the party's leftward shift and its internal conflicts.<sup>95</sup> The Labour Left and other leftist actors looked to *Marxism Today* and other periodicals for ideological and strategic discussions to resolve their issues. Academics such as Hall and Hobsbawm triggered debates about ideology and Labour's failures.<sup>96</sup> The responses combined with freestanding articles reveal a complex picture of leftist thought at a time when the Labour Party shifted leftwards. These debates were significant as they had a great influence on one of the largest parties in Britain.<sup>97</sup>

## The External Factors Precipitating the Left's Decline

In examining what had caused the decline of the left, three of the most renowned contributors to the magazine *Marxism Today*, namely Hobsbawm, Gamble, and Hall, took on the external issues they believed had caused this shift. Their writings point to factors that Labour could not prevent. However, Hobsbawm and Gamble clarify that the external factors combined do not satisfactorily explain the stagnation. Several leftist writers were concerned with external issues causing the decline, which is interesting as the left in these years is not known for debates about others' roles in their decline but rather their own. The historical understanding of the period seems to differ from reality.

Hobsbawm contributed to the September 1978 publication of *Marxism Today*, about eight months before the General Election, with the article "The Forward March of Labour Halted?". This publication sparked debate in the magazine.<sup>98</sup> In his article, Hobsbawm addresses the development of British capitalism and how it caused Labour to lose support

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<sup>89</sup> Shaw 1994: 1

<sup>90</sup> Shaw 1994: 1

<sup>91</sup> Diamond 2021: 31

<sup>92</sup> Ludlam 2003

<sup>93</sup> Martin 2009: 51

<sup>94</sup> Tony Benn in the *Guardian*, 5 September 1981 as cited in Shaw 1994: 24

<sup>95</sup> Thomas 2005: 87

<sup>96</sup> Davis & McWilliam 2017: 3

<sup>97</sup> Davis & McWilliam 2017: 5

<sup>98</sup> Hobsbawm 1978; Jacques & Mulhern 1981: The contributions were published as a book in 1981 with the same title as Hobsbawm's essay.

among the traditional manual working class<sup>99</sup>; "Solidaristic class struggle ignored, or refused to recognise, the new identities."<sup>100</sup> The workers were less solidaristic and more focused on individualistic issues; their political identities transformed. In addition, Hobsbawm addresses changes in the social structure over the past century concerning women workers, immigration, and the working class. He argues that the new and changed composition of the latter contributed to the current crisis of the left.<sup>101</sup>

Like Hobsbawm, Gamble is reluctant to ascribe only one external factor as the reason for the halt. Gamble expresses his views in "The Decline of the Conservative Party" where he argues that the Conservatives are declining from a historical perspective.<sup>102</sup> Gamble argues that the reason for Thatcher's success in the General Election has its roots in the attack on "the institutions, policies, organisation, and values of social democracy" for the past fifteen years.<sup>103</sup> The post-war consensus is under attack, a condition under which the Conservatives thrive. He further emphasises that Thatcher has used liberalism and the social market to solve 'the crisis'.<sup>104</sup> Gamble claims that it is not these social and economic changes in the society that causes the shift to the right; it is how Thatcher and the Conservatives are using them in their favour.

Both Gamble and Hobsbawm are unwilling to blame the external changes in society entirely, yet both point to some changes that they believe have contributed to Labour's 'halting'. Stuart Hall's famous article "The Great Moving Right Show" was published in the January edition during the election year. In this article, Hall is concerned with the increasing support to the right and explains an "interlocked relationship of the Right to the fortunes and faith of democracy."<sup>105</sup> The emergence of the right, more specifically the radical side of it, is connected to the situation of the left. Seemingly, Hall believes that the decline of Labour was inevitable or, perhaps more correctly, *that the success of the Conservative Party was inevitable*. Hall makes other arguments that point toward other factors which the left can do little about, such as the actions of the Conservatives. Although Hall does not explicitly state that he is blaming external factors, his explanation of the decline is centred around issues that have little to do with the internal issues on the left.

## **The Internal Factors Precipitating the Left's Decline**

In addition to the external factors, there were some internal issues within the British Left that several politicians, activists and academics saw as possible explanations for the decline. These issues were raised in *Marxism Today* in the years following the 1979 General Election. The fragmentation of the Labour Party is taken on in historical accounts about this period in British Politics or the Labour Party and the assessments of the decline by Andrew Gamble and Sue Slipman.<sup>106</sup> Most of the contributors agree that something is missing on the left at that time. However, there were opposing voices in these debates. The discussions in *Marxism Today* on the internal factors which may have cost the Labour Party both an election and general support in Britain were dynamic and not entirely in coherence with significant writings about the period for the left.

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<sup>99</sup> Hobsbawm 1978: 282

<sup>100</sup> Diamond 2021: 77

<sup>101</sup> Hobsbawm 1978: 285

<sup>102</sup> Gamble 1979

<sup>103</sup> Gamble 1979: 9

<sup>104</sup> Gamble 1979: 9

<sup>105</sup> Hall 1979: 20

<sup>106</sup> E.g. BBC 1995; Aikman 2021

Communist and trade unionist Kevin Halpin heavily critiques several trends within his party, which he believes contributed immensely to the election result.<sup>107</sup> It is noteworthy that Halpin does not think one should be too concerned with what the movement should have done, as that is not coherent with Marxist ideology. Nonetheless, he mentions several things that could be improved within the labour movement to make advances. Central to his critique is the lack of solidarity within the trade unions and the inability to “initiate *united* action”.<sup>108</sup> Halpin’s solution to the issues is to “inject Marxist theory”; in other words, he suggests that the issue at hand is the lack of Marxist theory in the labour movement.<sup>109</sup> Halpin sees Marxist theory as a tool to explain the state machine and make advancements against capitalism.<sup>110</sup>

Two months after this publication, Digby Jacks contributed to the debate. Jacks is a communist and trade unionist, akin to Halpin. The claims made in his article are far from the assertions of Halpin. He takes on positive aspects within the movement. This includes how the working population is at its most organised ever, and its potential is more significant than before. Others, such as Hobsbawm and Halpin, believe that there is greater sectionalism within the movement now than before and that this is weakening it.<sup>111</sup> Digby Jacks argues against this, pointing out that this is not a recent trend.<sup>112</sup> He also asks that Hobsbawm’s implication ‘that students, women, cultural minorities assume a greater importance’ should be rejected.<sup>113</sup> This further emphasises his belief that the organised working class is already a functional support to the labour movement. This contrasts with Diamond’s assessment that the crisis was primarily structural. Jacks’ argument opposes that the issues are new and *not* based on the construction and composition of the left and the Labour Party. This disagreement between Jacks and the other contributors and historical accounts about the period reflect disunion on the left.

Jacks was one of the few defending the current status of the left. Another example of those who followed Halpin in raising issues concerning the status quo of the left is the radical social economist Pat Devine. He saw recruiting, or the lack of it, as a major issue. He took up this problem in the January edition of *Marxism Today* in 1980. Devine raises the issue of the lack of recruitment from other social strata when the manual working class is not as established as a leftward group anymore.<sup>114</sup> This contrasts with Jacks’ thought that the working class was, at that moment, not enough support for the movement. Devine calls for a rethinking of which social strata, including the manual working class, should find their place within the labour movement.

Gamble indicated in November 1979 that external factors such as social and economic changes had a considerable impact on the election result. However, in 1980, he argued that “the resolve of the Thatcher government is much more solid [than Heath’s] because clear alternatives are so much less evident.”<sup>115</sup> The socialist academic Sue Slipman joins Gamble in his argument. She looks back at the failure of the left’s former

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<sup>107</sup> Halpin 1979: 63

<sup>108</sup> Halpin 1979: 63

<sup>109</sup> Halpin 1979: 64

<sup>110</sup> Halpin 1979: 64

<sup>111</sup> Hobsbawm 1978: 283; Halpin 1979: 63

<sup>112</sup> Jacks 1979: 124

<sup>113</sup> Jacks 1979: 125

<sup>114</sup> Devine 1980: 15

<sup>115</sup> Gamble 1980: 15

strategy, which was "to 'smash the social contract'<sup>116</sup> for an 'alternative economic strategy'<sup>117</sup>."<sup>118</sup> This plan could make it possible for the left to create a connection between its politics and the immediate struggles in Britain. She concludes that Labour was successful in the first but that Labour is and was unable to provide a legitimate alternative. Building an alternative became a central point in discussing the future of the left in *Marxism Today*. However, Thatcher was left unchallenged at this time as the opposition consisted of a fragmented Labour Party.

## **The Conservative Party's Narrative: Commonsense & Crisis**

According to Hall and Innes, the result of the 1979 General Election can not solely be put on Labour. The Conservative's actions, promises, and ideology also played a part, as it has won them the election. Stuart Hall, in particular, looks at some aspects of their 'campaigning' and how that has led to the catastrophic loss for the left. This outward look is not necessarily associated with the processes on the left in this period, which makes these contributions a gateway to revealing something about the perceived relationship between the left and the Conservatives at this time. Contributions in *Marxism Today* included Thatcher and her party's actions as part of the reason for the left's decline. Rhetoric and narrative were central in the writings ascribing the Conservative Party as responsible for the decline.

Stuart Hall wrote in February 1980 a contribution to *Marxism Today* named "Thatcherism - a new stage?", an article which takes on how the Conservatives are working to establish "a new form of 'commonsense'."<sup>119</sup> They are conveying populist rhetoric by presenting the idea that they are working *with* the people *against* 'the state'. Hall was concerned with Thatcher's populism prior to the election. In January 1979, he wrote about the 'Tory discourse' and how they put 'people' against 'class' and 'union'.<sup>120</sup> While conducting this discourse, they also popularised the ideas of "folk-devil" and welfare 'scavenger'. This rhetoric would benefit the Conservatives and harm the labour movement because Thatcherism opposed the folk-devil, meaning those exploiting the systems by claiming social benefits and services.

According to Hall, the Conservatives did not only construct divisions between the people and the unions and those in need of welfare services, but they also constructed a crisis. He writes about how Thatcherism lowers people's expectations and prepares them for worse times, then states how it will lead them to better times.<sup>121</sup> Hall sees this as a part of why Thatcher is winning support for ideas like cuts in welfare and other individualistic policies. Further, if people believe her narrative, she gets a "long leash".<sup>122</sup> Her policies do not need to be effective, and people will not hold her accountable for

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<sup>116</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021, about the 'Social Contract': "By comparing the advantages of organized government with the disadvantages of the state of nature, they showed why and under what conditions government is useful and ought therefore to be accepted by all reasonable people as a voluntary obligation. These conclusions were then reduced to the form of a social contract, from which it was supposed that all the essential rights and duties of citizens could be logically deduced."

<sup>117</sup> Diamond 2021: 89-90: An Alternative Economic Strategy (AES) had already been proposed in 1973, but it did not pay any attention to "establishing workers' democracy, increasing participation in the governance of the economy". It did not respond to all those issues which it needed to.

<sup>118</sup> Slipman 1980: 27

<sup>119</sup> Hall 1980: 26

<sup>120</sup> Hall 1979: 17

<sup>121</sup> Hall 1980: 27

<sup>122</sup> Hall 1980: 27

mistakes for a long time. Communist and shop steward Bill Innes agrees that a crisis has been constructed. He sees it in the "lads and lasses on the shop floor."<sup>123</sup> They do not experience the crisis as one of capitalism. Therefore, they search for answers within capitalism.<sup>124</sup> This caused workers to vote for the Conservative Party. Other explanations for this shift of trust are based on the failures of the two previous Labour governments.

## Historical Explanations of the Decline: Wilson and Callaghan

In assessing the reasons for the decline of the Labour Party, one instinctive approach is to look at historical explanations of the decline. Several people affiliated with the labour movement recognised that problems within the movement needed sorting to hinder the decline. However, some argued that the irreversible past had contributed to the decline. Multiple contributors in *Marxism Today* blamed Wilson and Callaghan's governments for ruining the Labour Party's and the left's reputation. This approach to the decline of the left is central in more recent explanations, which is significant as the importance of this point does not appear to have diminished in retellings of the past.<sup>125</sup>

Hobsbawm is one of those who argued that previous governments are to be held accountable for the decline. In the article "The Forward March of Labour Halted?", he argues that external factors, such as the development of capitalism and social structure, contributed to the decline and the failures of the Wilson governments. This had changed the composition of the working class, the Labour Party's target group. He writes:

If we are to explain the stagnation or crisis, we have to look at the Labour Party and the labour movement itself. The workers, and growing strata outside the manual workers, were looking to it for a lead and a policy. They didn't get it. They got the Wilson years.<sup>126</sup>

The same thoughts can be found in Pat Devine's "The Labour Party - why the decline?" which is concerned with several periods in the 20th Century and the Labour Party's role in each of them. When describing 'The Mid-1960s to 1979', he reminds the readers that the crisis of British capitalism<sup>127</sup> caused the first Wilson government to adopt policies that were not coherent with the ideology of Labour as they challenged, for example, trade unions.<sup>128</sup> This is why it is argued that the policies of this government, as well as the following Labour governments, caused the halt.

Callaghan's time as prime minister is brought up as an issue in *Marxism Today*. Convenor Jack Adams believes that Callaghan has contributed negatively to the reputation of socialism. He did not implement socialist beliefs properly. The voting masses' latest experience with the Labour Party and their ideology was through him and his shortcomings in government. Consequently, people started to accept Thatcherism.<sup>129</sup> Alan Wilker also blames Callaghan's government for the hostility in the working class towards public and social expenditure, as it "adopted both a public burden model of welfare resulting in cuts in vital social services and allowed the tax threshold to fall."<sup>130</sup> There is some consensus that the most recent Labour governments have broken with the expectations of the

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<sup>123</sup> Ciccone 1980: 17

<sup>124</sup> Ciccone 1980: 18

<sup>125</sup> E.g. Pimlott 1992; Shepherd 2013; Diamond 2021,

<sup>126</sup> Hobsbawm 1978: 285-6

<sup>127</sup> Devine 1980 (p. 14) explains this as the acute need to regenerate the economy, as it was evidently flawed; other countries managed to recover from WW2 but not Britain.

<sup>128</sup> Devine 1980: 14

<sup>129</sup> Ciccone 1980: 20

<sup>130</sup> Wilker 1982: 29

working class and therefore created a bad reputation for themselves and what is associated with socialism.

## **The Effects of the Ideological Issues Concerning the Left**

Major ideological issues affected the left in the years leading up to and following the decline in leftist support. It is difficult to distinguish if the ideological shift resulted from other factors or if it was happening simultaneously. Nonetheless, these issues caused debate in *Marxism Today*. The experience with the previous Labour governments was not particularly favourable for large parts of the population, which affected how the Labour Party, the left, and the ideology of socialism were perceived. In *Marxism Today*, several contributed to assessing what this ideological shift meant for the left. However, the contributions looked at the ideological shift at several levels, which caused the comments to be varied.

Labour Party advisor Corrigan believes that the increasing hostility against the welfare state, nationalism, and the trade union movement caused a boost in support for the Conservative Party.<sup>131</sup> The enmity provided fertile ground for Thatcherism as it appeals to individualism, challenging the collective institutions.<sup>132</sup> Devine writes that while "the Labour Party was moving to the left, the spectrum of opinion among the population as a whole was moving to the right."<sup>133</sup> He understands this ideological shift in the population as a desire for individualism, possibly reacting to the post-war consensus and previous Labour policies.<sup>134</sup> Both sides of the political spectrum shared this desire for autonomy.<sup>135</sup>

Both of these interpretations of the ideological situation in the UK pose a complicated issue for Labour, as a shift towards this type of ideology would break with the principles of the party. Other contributors in *Marxism Today* acknowledge this trend of individualism.<sup>136</sup> In "Welfare State: the Second Front opens" by Phil Lee, it becomes clear that there was a considerable resentment toward social security benefits in the UK population prior to the 1979 General Election; "six out of ten people believed that social security benefits were too generous and too easy to get."<sup>137</sup>

The contributors in *Marxism Today* were not only concerned with the ideological shift in the population as a whole but also the shift in its traditional body of support, the manual working population. Slipman argues that the lack of examination of what the voters want has caused the left to lose support.<sup>138</sup> In the discussion "Where are we now?", member of the Communist Party Executive Committee Bill Innes admits that he sees a crisis mentality in his workers due to Thatcher's rhetoric. Another committee member, Jacky Atkin, had seen it in a colleague, and Jack Adams saw it in the people.<sup>139</sup> 'The crisis' was seen as something that could only be solved by Thatcher and the Conservatives. The people had lost faith in the Labour Party.

The communist historian Royden Harrison believed that there was an ideological issue within the movement; "Marxism has become an Ideology in the strict Marxist sense of the term."<sup>140</sup> He further explains this by stating that Marxism has become "the

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<sup>131</sup> Corrigan 1979: 17

<sup>132</sup> Corrigan 1979: 17

<sup>133</sup> Devine 1980: 16

<sup>134</sup> Devine 1980: 16

<sup>135</sup> Robinson et al. 2017: 282

<sup>136</sup> E.g. Corrigan 1979: 17; Slipman 1980: 27; Bloomfield 1980: 10

<sup>137</sup> Lee 1983: 23

<sup>138</sup> Slipman 1980: 28

<sup>139</sup> Ciccone 1980: 17

<sup>140</sup> Harrison 1979: 190

necessarily false consciousness of the Industrial Revolution of the C20th.”<sup>141</sup> Marxism needs to be rethought as technology and imperialism have changed. A possible interpretation of Harrison’s opinions is that a rethinking could assist the left in navigating in terms of the new features of Britain as the post-war consensus is being abandoned. Harrison’s and others’ contributions in *Marxism Today* identified various possible reasons for and explanations of the general decline of the left in Britain and the devastating loss in the 1979 General Elections; they were part of a vital discussion.

### ***Marxism Today’s Views on The 1979 General Election***

The decline of leftist support in Britain manifested in Labour’s defeat in 1979. The sense of a crisis sparked intellectual conversations in *Marxism Today*. ‘Why is the left in decline?’ was one of the key questions. This question brought several contributors of different sorts to assist in answering, such as historians, activists, communists, socialists, and academics. Two of the most renowned academics who contributed were Hall and Hobsbawm, and they stood for two of the most influential pieces at that time, “The Great Moving Right Show” and “The Forward March of Labour Halted”. As seen through systematically looking at other contributions, these two essays initiated debates and influenced the views in the magazine. Seemingly, some focus on the pair in historical accounts about these discussions is well-reasoned. However, it is central to note that neither Hall nor Hobsbawm was visible in all parts of the discussion about what had caused the decline.

The British Left had to investigate several possible factors to the defeat in the General Election in 1979. Hall and Hobsbawm focused primarily on the external factors that could have affected the result and the general decline of the Labour Party. In these discussions, the other contributors joined them in their arguments. Gamble agrees with the pair on the external. However, he was more explicit about the structures. Inness backs Hall in his argument about the Conservative Party, and Hobsbawm finds ample support in Devine, Adams and Wilker when pointing back to the failures of Wilson and Callaghan.

The discussions about the possible internal issues that contributed to the defeat are dynamic and varied. Hobsbawm, Halpin and Devine are challenged by Digby Jacks on the topic of social strata and what groups the left should aim to appeal to. In addition to this, Gamble and Slipman added a point about how the strategy should be challenged and revised as it was not functional. This is central in the following discussions in the period, as restructuring is a central topic in the discussions about the future of the left. In several historical accounts about the period, the fragmentation of the Labour Party is prominent.<sup>142</sup> The fragmentation led to the debates about the social strata of the voters, which had to be rethought. Also, the future direction of the party needed establishing.

Hall and Hobsbawm were not visible in the debates about ideological issues causing the decline. There were, however, several contributions from others about this topic. Corrigan and Lee were concerned with the increasing hostility against welfare; Devine with individuals; Slipman saw a lack of examination of what the voters wanted; Innes, Atkin, and Adams saw that there was a sense of crisis that the left needed to respond to; Harrison wanted change in the role ideology had in the Communist Party. There were various contributions and much to be said about the topic. At this time, Thatcher was at her weakest, and therefore, this was the time to respond.<sup>143</sup> Notably, the left could not respond rapidly enough because the debate was too complex. Moreover, the left needed to quickly

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<sup>141</sup> Harrison 1979: 190

<sup>142</sup> E.g. Layborn 2002

<sup>143</sup> Gamble 1988: 110



identify what aspects of the policies of Thatcherism would harm the movement and then put an end to it. This is further explored in the second chapter, 'Thatcher's first term, 1979-1983'.

As the left turned to magazines such as *Marxism Today* and other intellectual papers to undergo an intellectual process, they revealed at the same time that much was to be said about the road that had led them to a disastrous election loss. Historical accounts about this process for the Labour Party and the left, such as Diamond and Ludlam, point toward internal issues. However, when reading a more comprehensive range of contributions in the magazine, it becomes evident that many also recognised the impact of external issues such as the successful rhetoric of the Conservative Party. The voices in *Marxism Today*, with exceptions, were generally united on significant issues such as the structural changes and the failures of previous governments. However, the responses to the issues facing the left did not come quickly enough. Thatcher was given the opportunity to implement politics that could harm the Labour Party, the left, and several of those institutions associated with it.

## Thatcher's First Term, 1979-1983

More determinedly than any previous Conservative premier, she aimed to dismantle the welfare state and collective social responsibility, minimizing state direction of the economy, maximizing private enterprise in all fields, 'rolling back' advances in state action since 1945, in practice by utilizing and often strengthening central state mechanisms.

—Pat Thane, *A History of Britain, 1900 to the Present* (2018)

Having lost the 1979 General Election, Labour was in opposition. Margaret Thatcher's new policies pointed out a new direction for the UK, and the left had strong reactions to it. Thatcher was notably more cautious in her first term than later.<sup>144</sup> However, the rhetoric and politics of Thatcherism signalled an abandonment of the post-war consensus and a new route for Britain. The left needed to react to Thatcherism and continue the intellectual investigation of where the left was and what could be done. Thatcher's policies were designed to weaken the institutions and organisations associated with the Labour Party and the left.<sup>145</sup> Concerning the trade unions, Thatcher aimed to remove them from 'the realm of economic governance'.<sup>146</sup> Gamble assessed that "the universal welfare programmes, the extended public sectors and the institutions and policies of corporatist economic management that had grown up piecemeal over many decades became a major battleground."<sup>147</sup> According to Robert Saunders, she "had evolved a critique of Labour as a menace to the very existence of a free society."<sup>148</sup> However, some scholars here argued that the party was no longer able to think for itself.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, *Marxism Today* became a necessary outlet for the leftist writers who wanted to show that they could pose a real alternative. This was a crucial point in the intellectual process as new politics needed to be formed and signalled.

### Public Expenditure: Fighting the Cuts

In her first period, Thatcher launched an attack on several aspects of public expenditure as a part of the monetary cure for inflation.<sup>150</sup> Thatcher had made it evident to the left that she would ensure that 'the welfare scavenger' would struggle.<sup>151</sup> The contributors to *Marxism Today* debated what these policies meant and how the left could fight them. The policies of welfare cuts created a stir on the left. In the first 15 months of Thatcher's time in office, several contributions to *Marxism Today* were concerned with these cuts. One common denominator for the articles is that the left must cooperate in fighting these cuts.<sup>152</sup> There is a call for an immediate response.

There are other agreements in addition to the consensus involving the need for action, such as the need to accept the poor state of the previous welfare services. Bower

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<sup>144</sup> Gamble 1988: 99; Thane 2018: 349

<sup>145</sup> Saunders 2012: 40

<sup>146</sup> Green 2006: 117

<sup>147</sup> Gamble 1988: 49-50

<sup>148</sup> Saunders 2012: 36

<sup>149</sup> Diamond 2021: 31

<sup>150</sup> Gamble 1988: 101

<sup>151</sup> Hall 1980: 27

<sup>152</sup> Priscott 1980: 18; Bower & Sutton 1980: 29; Ashworth & Riley 1980: 28

and Sutton admit that defending the welfare state as it was would be 'fetishising'.<sup>153</sup> Paul Corrigan accepts that people dislike the occasionally humiliating services provided and that the British Left cannot expect people to defend them.<sup>154</sup> His main point is that the left must ensure that the welfare services are more democratic. According to Corrigan, the Communist Party should lead this process. He was a candidate for the Communist Party in 1979, so his suggestion is not surprising. Nonetheless, both articles state the need to examine what can be better and reinvented rather than just blindly defending the faulty existing system.

Another issue concerning the leftist writers in *Marxism Today* is the taxation policies of Thatcherism, a topic which the Labour Party and the Conservative Party have vastly different ideas about. However, this is not what is discussed in the magazine. The authors of the articles addressing taxation are mainly concerned with how these policies have not been implemented. Andrew Gamble assesses in two contributions to *Marxism Today* that the Conservatives have failed to take the measures needed to restore the economy simultaneously as they have failed to keep their election pledges.<sup>155</sup> At the end of Thatcher's first period, the Labour Party politician Chris Pond deduced that "the promised tax cuts had yet to materialise" for the majority of the British population.<sup>156</sup> However, Pond saw some dangers in the proposed politics as they would contribute to increasing inequalities, and therefore the left has to create a credible alternative for the upcoming election.<sup>157</sup>

Not all of the responses to Thatcher's public expenditure were as specific as those above. Among those who looked at it more all-around, we can find the Labour politician John Harrison. The politician does not sugarcoat his assessment of the economic policies implemented by the Tory government for the past three years. He describes their actions as mindless destruction.<sup>158</sup> Harrison's judgement over the first Thatcher years reveals a feeling of injustice. He finds the government vindictive towards the left and the consensus politics built by both parties in the postwar period.

## **Workers and Trade Unions: A Presentiment of Paralysis**

The Conservative Party launched new policies related to the working population, primarily focusing on the trade unions and the pressing issue of unemployment. Naturally, the so-called 'attack' on trade unions hit the left hard. In *Marxism Today*, several contributors addressed these new policies, some focusing on what can or will happen and others calling for action to ensure that the possible catastrophic outcomes do not happen.

The discussion about the possible outcomes of the Conservative's policies concerning trade unions also addresses the already occurring issues caused by Thatcherism. John Harrison wrote in 1982 that the "trade union resistance has been muted, to put it mildly"<sup>159</sup>, a concern previously raised by both Jack Adams and Christian Tyler. Respectively, they were concerned with the deliberate attacks on the trade unions and Tebbit's law.<sup>160</sup> Adams raised his concern just a little over a year after the Conservative

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<sup>153</sup> Bower & Sutton 1980: 28

<sup>154</sup> Corrigan 1979: 15

<sup>155</sup> Gamble 1980: 19; Gamble 1981: 6

<sup>156</sup> Pond 1983: 15

<sup>157</sup> Pond 1983: 17; 19

<sup>158</sup> Harrison 1982: 11

<sup>159</sup> Harrison 1982: 21

<sup>160</sup> Ciccone 1980: 21; Tyler 1982: 24. Tebbit's law is also known as Employment Act 1982. Ch. 46. (GBR). For further reading on Tebbit's Law: Charles Hanson (April 1982). Labour Law, Tebbit Style. Journal of Economic Affairs, 151-155.

government was elected. Tyler's response to Thatcher's trade union attacks came shortly after Tebbit's law was introduced. One example of the limitations the law would cause is how "Unions and workers would lose their immunity from civil court action if they blacked non-union work or refused to work alongside non-union labour."<sup>161</sup> Harrison assesses that it would be a law that would be a further step in muting the resistance, a "political exorcism to rid the party of an incubus."<sup>162</sup> Harrison is looking at the intricate issue that the current unemployment could win back lost ground for Labour, but at the same time, Tebbit's Bill will make it difficult to do so as the resistance would be muted. Harrison predicted discontent within the working class towards the government, but if Tebbit's Bill succeeded, "Thatcher [would] have achieved an important shift in the balance of forces on the industrial front."<sup>163</sup> Other estimates of possible consequences included similar thoughts. Whereas Tyler saw the bill as a destruction of the trade union movement, Mick Costello believes that the primary mission of the law is to make the unions ineffective.<sup>164</sup> Two years prior to Tebbit's Law, Gordon McLennan assessed that the new government would "cripple the fighting capacity of the trade unions."<sup>165</sup> For the left, this prediction seemed to come true.

Despite some viewing the unemployment issues as a possible way for Labour to regain support, it was not all positive as a part of the *possible* voting mass of the Labour Party were those affected by the current unemployment crisis. McLennan was concerned with the treatment of the (young) unemployed people; he observed that the government persuaded these workers to "work for less wages than they would normally work for."<sup>166</sup> This was different from the ideals of the left and the postwar consensus.

Jean Gardiner, the Marxist feminist economist, argues that the rising unemployment issues since 1979 put women in a difficult situation. Traditionally, women are used as 'a flexible reserve army of labour'.<sup>167</sup> Since women move in and out of the workforce and often work part-time, they do not achieve the same "minimum legal rights of full-time workers and have lower levels of unionisation."<sup>168</sup> Further, Gardiner explains how she finds that the Thatcher philosophy attacks women and that the government is probably not aware of its policies' effect on them. According to Gardiner, the unemployment issues and Thatcher's reactions created challenging situations for young people and women. Unemployed and low paid workers are linked to less unionised workers, and the use of women as a reserve army of labour added to this issue for the left. Thatcher's labour politics seemed to aim at harming the grass root of the leftist parties. The Conservatives were launching an attack on a vital section of the left in Britain.

## **The Attacking Nature of Thatcherism**

During Thatcher's first premiership, one could see a break from the politics created in the wake of WW2. The postwar consensus was created under a climate that accepted that it would lean towards a more leftist/Labour type of politics; it was a social-democratic consensus. Some of the writers in *Marxism Today* interpreted the government's policies as a breach of what one had previously agreed on, whereas others, such as economist

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<sup>161</sup> Tyler 1982: 24

<sup>162</sup> Tyler 1982: 23

<sup>163</sup> Harrison 1982: 23

<sup>164</sup> Costello 1982: 42

<sup>165</sup> McLennan 1980: 12

<sup>166</sup> McLennan 1980: 13

<sup>167</sup> Gardiner 1981: 6

<sup>168</sup> Gardiner 1981: 6

John Grahl and academic Ian Gough, saw the new policies as an attack on the labour movement and the ideology of the left.

Gamble argued for the first view. He believes that the Conservatives proposed “a full scale assault”.<sup>169</sup> He further emphasises how shocking this attack is by pointing out that several of Thatcher’s fellow party members were against these policies. Notably, during the infamous reshuffle of September 1981, Thatcher removed several party members that disagreed with her from her cabinet. A couple of years later, in 1983, Hugo Levie wrote an article concerned mainly with the privatisation of Britain.<sup>170</sup> Two years after Gamble’s assessment that the Conservatives were launching an assault, Levie writes that they have successfully attacked the consensus. The results were increased privatisation and worse conditions for the working population.<sup>171</sup> Phil Lee concludes, similarly to Gamble, that Thatcherism embodies a break from the postwar consensus.<sup>172</sup>

However, not everyone saw it as just an attack on what was agreed on, but also an attack on the movement itself. John Grahl believes that the Conservatives are posing a real threat to the labour movement. Their policies harm the working population, and in total, their policies are “doing serious damage both to the productive system and to the organisation of the labour movement within it.”<sup>173</sup> As previously stated, Jack Adams shares this view; he finds that the Thatcherite policies weaken the resistance.<sup>174</sup>

Similarly, several of the writers in *Marxism Today* understand the Thatcher policies as attacks on the ideologies of the left, such as social democracy, socialism, and communism. Ian Gough is concerned with the attack on the very heart of the left, the welfare state. Gough does not see this as necessarily just an attack based on economics, which is how Thatcher argues for it, but also as an attack based on ideology.<sup>175</sup> He experiences that a lot of the policies relating to privatisation of the welfare state are rooted in thoughts about ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’, poor, which lead to efforts to weaken the organised working class. Peter Leonard sees how some aspects of the Thatcher government’s rhetoric, especially concerning ‘welfare-scavengers’, have “penetrated sections of the working class”.<sup>176</sup> This change of thinking in the working class was especially damaging to the Labour Party. In the Roundtable Discussion, Jeff Rodrigues, at that time, an active member of the Communist Party, argues that the 1979-83 Government operated differently from the previous Conservative governments. Whereas the ones before operated “in a principally pragmatic way”, the first Thatcher government’s policies were more ideological.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, Thatcher thrived in the new political climate where the left’s ideals were seen as dangerous for Britain.<sup>178</sup>

## **Thatcher’s Foreign Policies as a Disconcerting Issue for the Left**

In addition to the domestic policies, the Thatcher government had to make several decisions relating to foreign affairs. Particularly significant for Thatcher’s first period was the relationship with the US, defence, and the Falklands war. McLennan addresses several

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<sup>169</sup> Gamble 1981: 9

<sup>170</sup> Levie 1983

<sup>171</sup> Levie 1983: 28, 29

<sup>172</sup> Lee 1982: 22

<sup>173</sup> Grahl 1980: 7, 11

<sup>174</sup> Ciccone 1980: 21

<sup>175</sup> Gough 1980: 8

<sup>176</sup> Leonard 1970: 11

<sup>177</sup> Ciccone 1980: 17

<sup>178</sup> Saunders 2012: 30

aspects of Thatcherite politics, but especially economics and, with that, *foreign affairs*.<sup>179</sup> The Communist Party member is concerned with how the Conservatives work as a campaigner for American military policies.<sup>180</sup> In addition, he finds a misrepresentation of the military policies to the counterpart of the US, the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact powers.<sup>181</sup> Another take on the military policies of Thatcher comes from Mark Harrison. He sees that the defence spending on the national product will most likely increase.<sup>182</sup> The total of these views is a leftist discontent with the focus of the military policies of Thatcher.

During the first Thatcher period, the Falklands war occurred, causing a difficult position for Thatcher where she had to decide. It could have been a potential disaster for Thatcher, but it became a triumph.<sup>183</sup> One of those who commented on Thatcher's decisions was Hobsbawm. His approach to the decision is more nuanced than the other articles addressing the foreign policies of the Conservative Party in this period. Hobsbawm finds that Thatcher had to do something; she could not do nothing.<sup>184</sup> Therefore he accepts that she had to do some intervention. Nonetheless, he disagrees with her actual approach. Luckily for Thatcher, the events of the Falklands war favoured her. Still, the British far-left's contempt for her and her politics increased. In the case of Thatcher's foreign policies from 1979 to 1983, there was little the left could do to hinder her approaches.

## **Desired Responses Expressed in *Marxism Today***

So far, reactions to Thatcher's policies have been mapped out, but it is also important to analyse what responses the authors of *Marxism Today* recommended for the left. These responses fall into three main categories: action, change, and uniting. The latter will be explored in chapter three. However, these categories are linked. An example of this is Priscott and Rodrigues. Both saw the action needed and the uniting of different groupings on the left as linked. Priscott saw that labour movements started planning responses to the upcoming Thatcherite policies right after the General Election, which he wanted all the 'anti-Tory movements' to join.<sup>185</sup> This was a step further in expanding the campaigning previously done in South Yorkshire. Priscott and Rodrigues agree that the cuts need to be campaigned against in the streets.<sup>186</sup>

When Tebbit's Law was passed in 1982, there were strong reactions and a call for action in *Marxism Today*. Christian Tyler was, as mentioned, concerned with the effects the bill could have on the trade union organisation. In his article, he brings up the eight-point strategy of the TUC<sup>187</sup> and how that can be used to neuter the law.<sup>188</sup> In addition, he

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<sup>179</sup> McLennan 1980

<sup>180</sup> McLennan 1980: 12

<sup>181</sup> McLennan 1980: 12

<sup>182</sup> Harrison 1981: 15

<sup>183</sup> Gamble 1988: 111

<sup>184</sup> Hobsbawm 1983: 16

<sup>185</sup> Priscott 1980: 14

<sup>186</sup> Priscott 1980; Rodrigues 1980: 22

<sup>187</sup> Len Murray, TUC General Secretary 1973-1984, as cited in Lang & Dodkins 2011: ch. 3, said the following about the campaign: "we cannot be sure that we can deliver ... Government propaganda has even found credence among many of our members who value what their own unions do for them, but are, paradoxically and illogically, at best apathetic and, at worst, sympathetic to the Government's purpose. We have a major job alerting trade unionists themselves to the real nature of the proposals". Tyler 1982: 28: "Union leaders have declared themselves ready to go to jail; they have warned that their retaliation will be political in the same sense that the legislation is 'political'."

<sup>188</sup> Tyler 1982: 28

brings up how union leaders are prepared to perform civil disobedience and that the retaliation will be political. In other words, Tyler supports the active attacks on the planned law. Mick Costello agrees that active resistance is the way to go in his response to Tyler. Costello argues that the bill can be fought if "workers insist on conducting the struggle for better conditions."<sup>189</sup> He also brings up the paradox that several of the ways they can fight this law have now been made unlawful by it. Consequently, there will be more civil disobedience, Tyler claims.<sup>190</sup>

In addition to action and uniting, some saw that there needed to be a change within the movement to fight Thatcher's policies. Communist Party member Corrigan believed that Thatcher could build support around the attacks on trade unions because of existing problems within the unions.<sup>191</sup> Accordingly, the solution was to restructure the trades union movement to create something that would be difficult for the Conservatives to attack without getting a backlash. The main issue was, according to Corrigan, the anti-democratic elements, and therefore the solution would be to ensure as much democracy as possible.<sup>192</sup> At the end of Thatcher's first period, Levie took on how the current labour movement has to acknowledge that it "does not organise the unwaged and the working class as consumers."<sup>193</sup> The answer is socialisation. All of these takes on the situation that calls for change have one thing in common: the left needs to change within to take on the external issues.

### ***Marxism Today's Views on Thatcher's First Term***

Several contributions published in *Marxism Today* examined and reacted to Thatcher's policies in her first period of office and her principles. There is a sense of a shared experience of the policies and what responses should be implemented for the most part. Several views about public expenditure, working-class issues, and what responses should have been implemented are presented, but none are actively opposed. At most, some views are moderated, such as Pond on taxation policies.<sup>194</sup> In the contributions to the debates about public expenditure and to desired responses, ideas from the investigative debates of the 1979 General Election defeat were brought up again. These ideas were about the composition of the left, and they came as a part of debates about national campaigns.<sup>195</sup>

Grahl, Gough and Adams found that the attacks were aimed at Labour and the left, but Gamble, Levie and Lee saw the new policies primarily as attacks on the post-war consensus. Although these views seem opposite, both fit with the thought that the Conservatives are attacking the ideas and ideology that Labour has been arguing for in the past decades, which is also something that Leonard and Rodrigues agree with.

In the debate about foreign affairs, Hobsbawm's contribution is a moderate version of McLennan and Mark Harrison's explicit critique of the present politics of the Conservative party. Hobsbawm is more mild, and his view is therefore not part of a consensus. However, it is necessary to point out that Hobsbawm's article responds to the Falklands war, an unusual circumstance. Nonetheless, his reaction to Thatcherism in *Marxism Today* stands out not on the grounds of its compelling argument but rather because it is one of the few

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<sup>189</sup> Costello 1982: 43

<sup>190</sup> Costello 1982: 43

<sup>191</sup> Corrigan 1979: 16

<sup>192</sup> Corrigan 1979: 16

<sup>193</sup> Levie 1983: 32

<sup>194</sup> Pond 1983

<sup>195</sup> E.g. Priscott 1980; Bower and Sutton 1980

contributions that disagree with the general consensus of discontent in the magazine. The contributors to the magazine who reacted to Thatcher's ideology and politics were united on the significant issues for the left, such as public expenditure and the trade unions.

The acknowledgement on the left that they have their own issues is striking. An example of this is the struggle to defend the status quo on issues such as welfare services. Corrigan, Bower and Sutton all find that major changes have to happen. Simultaneously, Thatcherite rhetoric is not yet fully implemented. This poses a difficult situation for the left where they are not able to provide an acceptable alternative yet but still have to act before Thatcher implements her ideas. Furthermore, the faults on the left make it challenging to attack the government, which seems to be able to respond to the issues occupying Britain at the moment. Therefore, the left is in a desperate situation to reinvent themselves and investigate what can be done.



## The Future of Leftist Politics

At this pivotal moment for the left and the Labour Party, they had to look to the future. For the time being, they were not able to pose as a good alternative for the voters compared to Thatcher. An intellectual and introspective investigation of what the left could do to prevent a continuation of the decline took place in outlets such as *Marxism Today*. It led to significant changes within the Labour Party. The intellectual stimulus induced a project of modernisation in the 1980s.<sup>196</sup> It accumulated into the 1983 manifesto, which represented a clear shift to the left in the Labour Party.<sup>197</sup> The intellectual processes were, to some degree, heard. The internal changes within the movement provided some hope for the left. However, in 1983, when the Labour Party adopted a more socialist approach, it suffered its worst electoral loss in about half a century.<sup>198</sup> The manifesto has gone down as 'the longest suicide note in history'.<sup>199</sup>

The impact of discussions in the years following the crushing election loss of 1979 caused a significant shift in one of the biggest parties in Britain. The debates about the left's future in *Marxism Today* were primarily concerned with change regarding whom they need to cooperate with, strategy, and ideology. The contributions to these issues reveal that in this time of crisis for the left, there is virtually a unison voice in *Marxism Today* asking for a re-thinking of what the left should be. The left worked together to form an opinion about the future.

## Possible Alliances on the Left

As previously explored, some of the contributors in *Marxism Today* called for 'anti-tory movements', organisations, and the left to unite to fight specific Thatcherite policies such as the cuts in welfare and Tebbit's law.<sup>200</sup> Several saw this as an option when working out a strategy to regain Labour and leftist support. However, there were some different takes regarding who should be included in the alliance.

Many called for a united movement in the debate concerning the cuts proposed by Thatcher's government. Priscott was concerned with the attack on trade unions and social service cuts, and, as previously mentioned, he is one of those who called for a national campaign to fight the cuts. Quite interestingly, he is not asking the left to unite. Priscott is calling for all anti-tory movements to come together.<sup>201</sup> What needs to be done is to combine the struggles of each of these movements into a broader movement. None of the contributions in the discussion concerning the cuts in *Marxism Today* explicitly calls for the British Left to unite. The closest are Ashworth and Riley. They wanted the trade union movements and other community organisations to be brought together with local Labour councils.<sup>202</sup> Bower and Sutton indirectly turn to the left, addressing the problems posed by the Right.<sup>203</sup> They are, similarly to Priscott, advocating for combining struggles into a national campaign to fight said problems. Rodrigues, the last contributor to this debate, makes a more general comment concerning the 'Fightback Campaign' and how it must be

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<sup>196</sup> Diamond 2021: 77

<sup>197</sup> Diamond 2021: 142

<sup>198</sup> Diamond 2021: 137

<sup>199</sup> Mann, 2003

<sup>200</sup> E.g. Priscott 1980; Bower & Sutton 1980; Ashworth & Riley 1980

<sup>201</sup> Priscott 1980: 18

<sup>202</sup> Ashworth & Riley 1980: 28

<sup>203</sup> Bower & Sutton 1980: 29

developed, broadened and more effectively involving community organisations.<sup>204</sup> The debaters called for unity.

The most instinctive group to turn to for Labour and the left is the working population, specifically the organised workers. Several articles in *Marxism Today* reflect this. Even before the election, when one could see an election loss coming, Pete Carter appealed to the working class and its organisations to use its democratic strengths. He wants to use 'the industrial muscle'.<sup>205</sup> Digby Jacks is like-minded. He argues that there should be an alliance but that it should always be working class orientated.<sup>206</sup> He bases his claim on that the organised working-class is central to the broad democratic alliance that Labour has always represented. Hall agrees with Carter and Jacks. In two separate contributions to *Marxism Today*, he mentions the importance of the working class in the movement.<sup>207</sup> Nonetheless, he also argues that there should be a construction of a historical understanding of the class and modern.<sup>208</sup> That is not all. In his first article, Hall is clear that women and people of colour should be included in the movement; there needs to be an expansion of focus.<sup>209</sup> Although Hall argues for a focus on the working class, he also wants to include women and minorities in that group. He expands the perception of what the working class is.

Others agree with Hall on the issue concerning women and the left, such as Jean Gardiner and Jon Bloomfield. Gardiner believes that the left would fail to reach women if they did not get the support of the women's movement, which would be possible, according to her, if the movement made women a more involved group in decision making and strategy development.<sup>210</sup> Further, Gardiner argues that such a change in the left would cause them to be the only credible democratic alternative.<sup>211</sup> Bloomfield also saw that the left had to win the women to win the people. He suggests looking at women activists' wish for women to be directly elected to the national executive and ensuring "at least one women candidate on every parliamentary short-list."<sup>212</sup>

Leonard and McLennan provide other takes on creating an alliance. The former wants an offensive linking trade union battles with community politics<sup>213</sup>, in other words, workers at the centre, and the latter argues for uniting those who are anti-tory and creating an even broader alliance.<sup>214</sup> McLennan was a central member of the Communist Party and held the position of General Secretary from 1975 to 1990. His call for the left to unite has to be seen in the light of his wish to give greater importance to his party. Leonard similarly has an apparent loyalty to the labour movement and, naturally, the workers. The two contributors argued for a direction for the Labour Party that would benefit their cause, which we also find in the other contributors such as Jean Gardiner and the women's movement, from the trade unions Digby Jacks and Pete Carter. Their loyalty paints their proposed paths for the left and Labour, and despite different wishes, they agree that there should be an alliance. The question of strategy for the left and perhaps these alliances was also a topic of concern.

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<sup>204</sup> Rodrigues 1980: 22

<sup>205</sup> Carter 1979: 29

<sup>206</sup> Jacks 1979: 125

<sup>207</sup> Hall 1980: 28; Hall 1982

<sup>208</sup> Hall 1980: 28; Hall 1982: 17

<sup>209</sup> Hall 1980: 28

<sup>210</sup> Gardiner 1981: 11

<sup>211</sup> Gardiner 1981: 11

<sup>212</sup> Bloomfield 1980: 10

<sup>213</sup> Leonard 1979: 13

<sup>214</sup> McLennan 1980: 16

## **Taking on an Offensive: Active & Aggressive**

During Labour's time in opposition to the first Thatcher government, several called for a more offensive approach. A more aggressive and active direction for the left and Labour induced many suggestions. The view that Labour should launch an attack on the Conservative Party came from McLennan. He wanted, as stated previously, an alliance linking all those who are anti-tory. He also saw that the mission of this alliance was to "deepen [the divisions within the Conservative Party] and make greater difficulties for Thatcher in her ranks by stepping up the fight against government policies and winning further millions of people to a position of political opposition to the government."<sup>215</sup> McLennan argues for the movement to be offensive by attacking the new government's policies.

In the debate "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" initiated by Hobsbawm, several contributors believe that action needs to be taken and that the labour movement's actions bear the mark of being idle. Pete Carter is one of those who explicitly takes on precisely this and attacks the whole left-wing for being too defensive, including the communists, trade unions and the labour movement.<sup>216</sup> He believes that the General Secretary of Manufacturing, Science and Finance Ken Gill's claim that the movement is stronger than ever is an excellent example of the ideas that cause the movement to be passive.<sup>217</sup> Kevin Halpin points out that the Labour Party makes advances, but they are not coming quickly enough.<sup>218</sup> Roger Murray shares this view and points out that the movement is not effectively challenging the current political shift.<sup>219</sup> Both Halpin and Murray see a need for change in how the movement is conducted, which is more efficient and more actively challenges the shift.

Another take on this was presented by Priscott in October 1981. He writes about how the Labour Party cannot expect the voters to come back unless they become more offensive; "unless the labour movement turns outwards to champion the widest section of the British people."<sup>220</sup> Whereas McLennan, Carter, Halpin, and Murray call for an offensive directed toward the government, either actively opposing the policies or working more effectively against the change, Priscott argues for a more active approach to reach the people. By putting in action in the areas of the population, such as workplaces and the streets, Priscott believes that the left can achieve a change.

## **The Need for Self-Examination on the Left**

Preceding the election loss of 1979, Hobsbawm called for a radical self-examination to recover the socialist movement. This invitation for introspection on the left was included in the iconic publication in *Marxism Today*, "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" which sparked debate and introversion within the movement. The question of how the left needed to change to recover continued throughout the first period of the Thatcher government. The words authored by Hobsbawm that truly started the intellectual process were:

If the labour and socialist movement is to recover its soul, its dynamism, and its historical initiative, we, as marxists, must do what Marx would certainly have done: to recognise the novel situation in which we find ourselves, to analyse it realistically

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<sup>215</sup> McLennan 1980: 16

<sup>216</sup> Carter 1979: 29

<sup>217</sup> Carter 1979: 29

<sup>218</sup> Halpin 1979: 64

<sup>219</sup> Murray 1979: 93

<sup>220</sup> Priscott 1981: 33

and concretely, to analyse the reasons, historical and otherwise, for the failures, as well as the successes of the labour movement, and to formulate not only what we would want to do, but what can be done.<sup>221</sup>

Some of the ideas in the period called for a combination of efforts. Peter Leonard, as mentioned, wanted an alliance. He also specifies that this alliance should be campaigning for a distinctively socialist programme.<sup>222</sup> Notably, he claims that the programmes were not enough as they previously had failed; Leonard sees a need to attack their ideology and the structure of the services that the Labour Party and the left had fought for to restructure. Only then would the left have something to campaign for that could recover their support.

Priscott, who argued for the Labour Party to turn outwards, states that the starting point would be the realities of the labour movement. The findings would have to be analysed to "understand the real dynamics of change in the trade unions and Labour Party."<sup>223</sup> He briefly exemplifies this examination as he looks at the structure of the party and the contradiction that can be found in "the basic class interests of the millions of workers in the trade union movement and the anti-working-class policies of Labour's right wing and of all previous Labour governments."<sup>224</sup>

Stuart Hall predicted the upcoming election loss in the final year of Thatcher's first period in office. Hall saw it fitting for the left to undertake the radical self-examination proposed by Hobsbawm prior to the General Election in 1979.<sup>225</sup> The call for an introspective view continued through Thatcher's first period as several people on the left wrote about it in *Marxism Today*. Evidently, the necessary introspection did not occur as the 1983 General Election resulted in another devastating loss for the Labour Party.

## **Internal Change as Prerequisite for Resurgence of Support**

Similarly to the thoughts of self-examination and introspection, several contributors in *Marxism Today* saw the need for changes of restructuring and continuation and a new focus within the movement. These thoughts resulted from the introspection called for initially by the renowned Hobsbawm.

One of those addressing restructurings is Hall. While addressing the need for self-examination, Hall states that he saw the ongoing crisis of the working-class movement as structural and long term.<sup>226</sup> According to Hall, the movement has to be turned into a political instrument. On that matter, trade unionist Bernard Dix argues for politicising the unions. He sees it as necessary to involve the union members in the Labour Party.<sup>227</sup> This would restructure not only the leadership of Labour but also the relationship between the party and the trade unions. Bloomfield, similarly to Dix, wants a transformation of the role of each member in decision-making.<sup>228</sup> Moreover, Bloomfield talks about reassessing the influence of all members and affiliated people in the party. These arguments are similar

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<sup>221</sup> Hobsbawm 1978: 286

<sup>222</sup> Leonard 1979: 12

<sup>223</sup> Priscott 1981: 32

<sup>224</sup> Priscott 1981: 32

<sup>225</sup> Hall 1982: 16

<sup>226</sup> Hall 1982: 21

<sup>227</sup> Dix 1980: 24

<sup>228</sup> Bloomfield 1980: 10, 11

to those found in Paul Corrigan's article, which was mainly a reaction to Thatcher's politics about making the trade unions more democratic.<sup>229</sup>

Some contributors in *Marxism Today* argued that aspects of the movement should be continued. Le Cornu addressed the Communist Party specifically and asked for the principles of revolution and socialism to prevail and be followed.<sup>230</sup> Priscott looked at the Labour Party's organised roots in the industry and the labour movement. He pointed out that without it, the British road to socialism would be "an academic exercise with no more value than any of the other rival left-wing strategies toted around by a variety of leftist groupings."<sup>231</sup> Priscott argues for more democracy in trade unions but also that labour should not forget its roots. Those furthest on the left wanted to stick to the traditional values while being pressured to do something new.

For others, change was at the centre of what needed to be done to restart 'the forward march'. Hall wrote in February 1980 that the reconstruction of a popular force on the left would go nowhere "if it is posed simply as a return to the state of things before the deluge."<sup>232</sup> Ian Gough also sees the need to develop the traditional politics of Labour into something more in accord with the democratic movements developed in and against the welfare state. Therefore, he sees the need for a new strategy.<sup>233</sup> Similarly, Leonard finds that the ideological level of the battle had to be turned by the left.<sup>234</sup> The want for change fostered suggestions of a new focus within the labour movement.

## **New Focus for the Left: Building an Alternative**

There were numerous contributions in *Marxism Today* about the new focus of the politics on the left, particularly the Labour Party, should be. However, the contributions could fit into two categories. There is a sense of consensus on what direction the politics of the left should take: firstly focusing on the conjunctural, and secondly, evolving alternative strategies to those who hold power. As previously mentioned, the Labour Party did evolve an alternative economic strategy. However, it did not respond to the issues Britain was facing at the moment, and therefore it did not appeal to the people.<sup>235</sup>

Hall wrote three contributions published in *Marxism Today* about why and how the left should focus on the conjunctural. His first article explains how the Conservative Party defines the conjunctural and how that benefits them.<sup>236</sup> He sees that the opposition needs to move onto this terrain. He continues his argument in the following articles and points out how the left is in crisis partly due to their struggle to transform the popular democratic struggle.<sup>237</sup> Hall continues to emphasise this and states that there is a need to reconstruct class unity. It cannot be constructed based on history, but it must be "recognisably present and modern".<sup>238</sup> Some of the answers to Hall's contributions supported him in his argument about the conjunctural.<sup>239</sup> Carter also sees that to revive the campaigns of labour and the trade union movement, "the vision or the gleam of Communism," had to be linked "with

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<sup>229</sup> Priscott 1980: 18

<sup>230</sup> Le Cornu 1979: 127

<sup>231</sup> Priscott 1980: 18

<sup>232</sup> Hall 1980: 28

<sup>233</sup> Gough 1980: 12

<sup>234</sup> Leonard 1979: 11

<sup>235</sup> Diamond 2021: 89-90

<sup>236</sup> Hall 1979: 20

<sup>237</sup> Hall 1980: 28

<sup>238</sup> Hall 1982: 18

<sup>239</sup> E.g Carter 1979, Newens 1979, Slipman 1980

the day to day struggles."<sup>240</sup> Newens followed by stating that in the times that they are in, which are marked by a sense of crisis, there is a need to link politics to the daily needs of the people. Slipman concludes that with a focus on the needs expressed by the people, the left could win broad political support.<sup>241</sup>

There were a variety of other contributions arguing for a focus on the conjunctural, the immediate needs of the people, including radical socialist economist Pat Devine, member of the Communist Party Jeff Rodrigues, British historian Robin Blackburn, and Alan Wilker. Devine meant that developing movements on the left-wing around policies *for* the people would extend the control of all those involved over the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>242</sup> Rodrigues follows the lines of Hall and claims that this is what the left should have been doing all along: "starting from peoples' experiences."<sup>243</sup> Blackburn and Wilker agree as both see it as the left and labour movement's task to extend the struggles and link its politics to the conjunctural.<sup>244</sup>

Evolving alternative strategies to the current politics of the government was crucial to Labour. If they could not pose as a serious alternative, they would not gain support. There is an apparent concurrence that Labour does not pose as an alternative at this time and therefore needs to evolve to be one. This view is argued for in *Marxism Today*. Wilker points out that the left does not have a strategy, and without that, they cannot counter Thatcherism.<sup>245</sup> Gordon McLennan and Mark Harrison, the former a member of the Communist Party and the latter an economist, agree that Labour does not provide a satisfying economic strategy.<sup>246</sup> This call for a new strategy that can be seen as an alternative to Thatcher's new policies is further argued for at the end of Thatcher's first period by Phil Lee. He writes that the British Left could build a real alternative if they "skilfully [blend] an appeal to reflation and increased economic growth with a genuine appraisal of social goods."<sup>247</sup> Lee's contribution to *Marxism Today* in May 1983 marks the end of a period of analysis and evaluation for the left as a whole and concludes that there is work that needs to be done to regain the support needed.

## ***Marxism Today's* Views on The Future of Leftist Politics**

Efforts were made to determine how the left could recover and gain new territory after 1979. There is a consensus that change has to happen in the debates concerning the road ahead or the possible directions for the left and Labour. Hall and Hobsbawm were more present than in the debates concerning the previous election and the Thatcher policies between 1979 and 1983. Both were active and dominant in all the major debates on what could be done. They represented multiple consensuses on the left about what should be the next steps for the left.

Hobsbawm's "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" was an early call for a more offensive strategy. This is heavily agreed on as there is a consensus that the left has been too passive. This call for a more aggressive approach varies in the proposed targets: McLennan wanted attacks on Thatcherism; Halpin and Murray sought increased efficiency within the party; Priscott wanted a more active approach in recruiting voters. None of

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<sup>240</sup> Carter 1979: 30

<sup>241</sup> Slipman 1980: 29

<sup>242</sup> Devine 1980: 16

<sup>243</sup> Ciccone 1980: 17

<sup>244</sup> Blackburn 1982: 37; Wilker 1982: 31

<sup>245</sup> Wilker 1982: 26

<sup>246</sup> McLennan 1980: 15; Harrison 1981: 17

<sup>247</sup> Lee 1983: 27

these desires was opposed, and the different targets did not eliminate each other. There is a consensus that the passive nature of the left had to be reversed. Similarly, Hobsbawm gained support for his call for self-examination, although various aspects that needed revising were proposed. The historian first proposed a process of (radical) introspection on the left and was followed by Leonard, Priscott and Hall.

Stuart Hall was one of the initiators of the debate on the new focus on the left. In general, there was a consensus that there should be an increased focus on the issues that the people were concerned with at the time. However, the authors seem reluctant to state what exactly these problems are. There is a certain ambiguity. However, similarly to Thatcher, the left finds that they should respond to the current situation. This view was widely accepted and agreed on. A few, particularly McLennan and Harrison, added that there should be an increased focus on creating a new economic alternative. Similarly, in the discussion in *Marxism Today* on the internal contributions to the decline, there was a consensus that there needed to be a change that Hall stood at the forefront for. Le Cornu and Priscott were of the few who felt the need to state the importance of continuing the roots and principles, but they did not oppose all change.

Hall was also central in the debate on which groups should be the primary focus of Labour and the left. He argued that at the heart of the left is the working class, but he saw the need to extend the traditional sense of what the working class was. Hall wanted an inclusion of minorities and women. Carter and Jacks supported the focus on the working class, and Gardiner and Bloomfield agreed with the extension. Others claimed that groups such as the Communist Party or the trade unions should gain more ground. However, there was a general agreement that the focus on the working class should remain, but the group had to be rethought and perhaps expanded. In *Marxism Today*, there were vivid debates about the future of the left. There was much spirit in the debates and a clear consensus about the need for something to happen, a change.

Notably, despite the influence that the far-left had on the Labour Party, there is a lack of specific policy suggestions in the contributions to *Marxism Today* in this period. Many of the contributors are addressing how to respond to the current situation. However, the weight is on what the situation actually is affected by, such as Thatcherism or a decline in Labour support, and not concrete proposals for what could be done.<sup>248</sup> For the most part, they propose general approaches such as uniting, attacking, and building an alternative. Some of the contributors made more specific suggestions, but yet not any specific policy suggestions. Gardiner focused primarily on the involvement of women. Ashworth and Riley were clear about the need for Labour Councils to work together with union movements and other community organisations. However, this is about as specific as it gets. Similarly, certain titles of articles in *Marxism Today* reveal a reluctance to state what exactly can be done: Wilker's "Why we need a social strategy" avoids the question of what the specifics of this strategy should be; Harrison's "What kind of fightback?" redirects the question to focus on the general type of strategy. It is difficult to know if avoiding concrete suggestions is a conscious choice by the left. Nonetheless, simply stating that there needs to be change in certain areas did not necessarily assist in posing the left as a real alternative in areas or ameliorating issues on the left.

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<sup>248</sup> E.g. Lee 1983, Harrison 1981, Hall 1980, Gough 1980, Le Cornu 1979, Bloomfield 1980, Halpin 1979, Murray 1979, Bower & Sutton 1980, Jacks 1979

## Conclusion

The memory of *Marxism Today* is defined by those who write the historical accounts of what role the magazine had and what it contained. Eric Hobsbawm quotes the French historian Pierre Nora in *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, "Memory is life. It is always carried by groups of living people, and therefore it is in permanent evolution."<sup>249</sup> What we remember from the past is decided by the people and those who write the history. For the past years, there has been an increased interest in *Marxism Today*, and it has been singled out as an object of study. Therefore, it is crucial that at this moment in the writing of history that its accounts are accurate. It is now that the initial shaping of the memory of the magazine will occur.

The election loss of 1979 remains a crushing blow for the Labour Party and the British Left in history. Considerable efforts were made to understand the defeat, and the left quickly started working on ways to ensure that it would not happen again. However, when the future Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair was in opposition in 1995, he argued:

The problem of the Labour Party in the 70s and 80s is not complex, it is simple; the society changed and the party didn't. So you had a whole new generation of people with different aspirations and ambitions, a different type of world, and we were still singing the same old songs that people had sung in the 40s and 50s.<sup>250</sup>

Blair may have been right about the Labour Party leadership, but it was not true about the whole labour movement, as this study shows. In the period following the defeat in the 1979 General Election, the Labour Party and the left started an inquisitive journey, which was both introspective and outward-looking. Martin Jacques saw a diverse manifold group of contributors in his years as editor. However, some of the names from the magazine have been overlooked in the history of *Marxism Today*. The names prevalent in the historical accounts, Hobsbawm, Hall, and Gamble, are famous today not simply because of their contributions to *Marxism Today* but also because of their work as academics and writers. Their significance in historical and political debates outside of the magazine is indisputable, but the weight put on these academics in historical accounts of *Marxism Today* is questionable. In this research, it has been established that these figures do not always represent the opinions in the magazine as a whole. As key academics, they are the initiative takers of some debates, but the range of opinion in these debates cannot be conveyed by only looking at articles such as "The Forward March Halted" or "The Great Moving Right Show".

When first assessing what exactly had happened in 1979, Hall and Hobsbawm initiated investigative debates. The facilitator was Martin Jacques and his magazine *Marxism Today*. There was initially much to say about what had happened. The opinions in the magazine were varied, but key arguments pointed to the structure of the left and the historical issues such as the disappointing previous Labour governments of Wilson and Callaghan. While trying to make sense of the decline that the left found itself in, those on the left had to react to Thatcher's policies. The contributors in *Marxism Today* expressed a feeling of anxiety towards the aggressive attitude of Thatcherism, which was interpreted as an attack on either the left or the post-war consensus.

Moreover, these experiences pushed the left to figure out what road they had to take to regain support and fight Thatcher's policies. Efforts were made to find areas of

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<sup>249</sup> Pierre Nora as cited in Hobsbawm 1987: 1

<sup>250</sup> BBC 1995: 1:27 - 1:41



improvement. There was a consensus that *something* had to happen and change to ensure that the Labour Party could be seen as a viable alternative to the Conservative government. Influential thinkers such as Hall and Hobsbawm were active in this intellectual process. However, their and many others' contributions were somewhat vague and did not provide concrete suggestions for policies or the general direction of the movement. It is evident that there was a group of leftist intellectuals and activists who had the potential to assist the Labour Party in regaining support. However, it faced problems of unclarity and internal divisions. Within the Labour Party, there was tension between the most leftist voices and those more moderate. On the left there were ongoing discussions on whether Labour should focus on the working-class voters or include the new minorities and identities that emerged at this time.<sup>251</sup> Reinvention was an important topic, but there was no unison voice on which way to follow.

Despite the efforts in the magazine in 1979-1983, the Labour Party lost the second election. More significantly, this was the point in time where Thatcher had not yet implemented all of her ideas. This was only the beginning. The left had to react and either change or prove that the Labour Party was a credible alternative. The lack of concrete suggestions in the debates likely contributed to this; if the debates are simply ideological, theoretical and idealistic, how can the Labour Party be seen as ready to face the major challenges in Britain at the time? The left was not clueless as their introspective investigations revealed to them that there were significant issues within the movement. When the left did not respond quickly or effectively enough to Thatcher's policies, the Conservatives gained ground to implement the policies that the left saw as damaging to their core interests, such as the working class, public services, and trade unions.

The findings of this thesis contribute to understanding *Marxism Today* as an outlet and discursive space during Thatcher's first premiership. They also reveal aspects of the politics, actions, and ideas of the left, the Labour Party, and the Conservative government. The findings assist in better understanding what happened at this pivotal moment for the left in Britain and what discussions were held in the aftermath of the 1979 General Election. By looking at the contributions to the magazine during the second and third Thatcher governments in addition to the first, it would be possible to investigate these topics more broadly. However, this thesis contributes to the understanding of historical accounts about the period, and whether their focus on figures such as Gamble, Hall, and Hobsbawm is well-reasoned. The findings indicate that the focus on these influential contributors is not always well-reasoned and that there were significant differences in the opinions presented in the magazine. While most of the contributions were concerned with the same topics, such as understanding the decline of support, the nature of Thatcherism, and the road ahead for the left, the ideas presented revealed a broad range of opinions. The arguments in this thesis uncover areas of agreement and disagreement on the left.

At this time, the British Left knew that something needed to change.<sup>252</sup> The final outcome was the 1983 Labour Manifesto, but this was not successful as the Labour Party suffered another defeat at the 1983 General Election. The manifesto was part of a reinvention for the left, focusing on "modernising prospectus to supplant corporatist social democracy"<sup>253</sup>. *Marxism Today* as an influential leftist outlet in this era was a part of the intellectual process leading to it. The magazine remains today as an interesting object of study due to its influence in British politics, its renowned contributors, and the value it is

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<sup>251</sup> Murphy 2020: 291

<sup>252</sup> Diamond 2021: 23-24

<sup>253</sup> Diamond 2021: 47

given through historical accounts as a 'symbol of an era'.<sup>254</sup> As revealed through this research, the contributors were not always in unison about the British Left's serious problems in this period. Moreover, the magazine cannot be treated as one opinion as this thesis has revealed that it does not speak with one voice. Without being conscious of the range of opinions in the magazine at this significant time, one can easily lose valuable information about both sides of the political spectrum in Britain at this crucial time for the left. Not only was *Marxism Today* a vital outlet for the British Left, but it remains a valuable source to understand the ideas and politics of the period better.

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<sup>254</sup> Colm Murphy, "The forgotten rival of Marxism Today: the British Labour Party's New Socialist and the business of political culture in the late twentieth century". (Forthcoming in *English Historical Review*.)

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## Appendix

### The Thesis' Relevance for My Work in the Norwegian Educational System

My personal and academic development for the past year has been immense. For that, I am ever grateful. I believe that the hard work put into my thesis has increased my belief that practice does *not* make perfect. Practice nourishes development. After accepting this I found more joy in my research process. Hopefully, I can transfer this mindset to my future pupils as they work on their projects, where they will inevitably meet resistance and challenges.

Working with a historical thesis has expanded my comprehension of history as an academic practice. This is immensely applicable as my second subject is history. The historical knowledge I gained can be used in teaching situations. Although the thesis appears to be narrow, the historical context (Thatcherism, postwar Britain, and the New Left) are broader topics that can be taught at higher levels in Norwegian Schools.

Through working with primary sources, and especially archives, I have gained substantial knowledge about historical processes. This is relevant for grades 8-13 at different levels of difficulty. As I have been working with an archive, and at all such a detailed thesis, my research skills have assuredly advanced. Through working with a digital archive, it is also clear that my digital competence has developed, which is at the heart of the core curriculum in Norwegian schools.

After 'Fagfornyelsen', the most recent update of Norwegian education principles and curriculums, five basic skills stand as pillars for what the Norwegian youth is supposed to learn in school: reading, writing, numeracy, oral skills and digital skills.<sup>255</sup> Indisputably, my research process has added to several of these skills, which will make me better prepared to facilitate in the classroom to ensure similar development in my pupils.

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<sup>255</sup> Utdanningsdirektoratet. (2020). Core curriculum - values and principles for primary and secondary education. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/prinsipper-for-laring-utvikling-og-danning/grunnleggende-ferdigheter/?lang=eng>



