



GRAAT On-Line issue # 17

Maggie's musical friends, then and now: reactions to Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism in popular music 1979-2013

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During Margaret Thatcher's eleven-year period in office as Prime Minister from 1979-1990 an unprecedented change took place in economic and social policy, which provoked many artistic reactions to it. Many cultural spheres were the scenes of outspoken criticism and demonstrations against the different government reforms initiated by successive Thatcher governments, in the arts, theatre, television and cinema. In this paper we will focus on the different forms of protest articulated in the field of popular music. We will see the different forms this protest took, both as personal attacks aimed directly at the Prime Minister herself and as more or less virulent criticisms of government policy and its impact on British society. We shall discuss the various groups' actions as well as the contents and message behind the lyrics of the songs they performed. While in no way exhaustive, this selection of songs best sums up the feelings expressed by so many artists at the time and after.

Before looking at these elements, it is essential to explain briefly the historical background to the period and the different events that brought such protest about. The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed a major radicalization of British politics and society. On the one hand, the Conservative right that embraced neo-liberal economic ideology and offered radical solutions to what it saw as the major problems dogging Britain, while the Labour left that adopted a far more socialist approach to policy making rather than a social democratic one.

The rise of the far right, particularly the National Front, and the rise in the number of racially motivated attacks led several bands to perform a series of concerts and rallies under the banner Rock Against Racism (RAR) designed to fight racial hatred and violence. With the decline of the National Front various groups turned their attention to combating what they saw as the excesses of Thatcherite policies, and the Rock Against Thatcher movement was born. This was succeeded by the Red Wedge campaign created to persuade young Britons to vote Labour at the 1987 general election.

Urban decline, mass unemployment and renewed racial violence all came to a head in the summer of 1981, when Britain was said to be “burning” and on the verge of “civil war” as riots broke out in Brixton in South London, spreading to many British cities, notably Bristol and Toxteth. Rioters from different ethnic groups and skinheads were looting and fighting both among themselves and with the police in the streets. It was against this background that several groups released singles denouncing racism and the conditions in many deprived areas of the UK, particularly the 2-Tone ska movement.

The coal miners’ strike of 1984-85 gathered the support of several artists who released records and held benefit concerts and events to raise money to help feed the striking miners’ families, while at the same time fostering public awareness about the strike and the reasons behind it. The notion of class solidarity, particularly among the working classes, and the need to “fight back” against the decisions being taken by the Thatcher government became rallying calls.

The Falklands conflict stirred feelings of patriotic pride among many UK citizens, largely thanks to reporting from a large section of the national press. This was countered by songs written and performed by various artists seeking to decry what they saw as imperialism and war mongering among the ruling elite. (Coupled with this, the British government agreed to let the Reagan administration build or use British air force bases to house cruise nuclear missiles there. This led to a rebirth in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Greenham Common women’s peace protest camp.

Government policy on AIDS and the so-called promotion of homosexuality, led gay groups to oppose these on record and stage. This was brought to a head when in 1988, the government amended the Local Government Act, adding among others, the controversial Amendment 28, AKA Section 28 or Clause 28, banning deliberate promotion or teaching of homosexuality.

Finally, it is worth noting that such opposition was not just limited to musical bands, parts of the music industry also offered a strong anti-Thatcher front, in particular the magazine *New Musical Express* (NME) and several record labels, especially Rough Trade.

If we now look at songs targeting Thatcherism and its aftermath, certain songs focus on the adverse effects of government policy on British society and Britons' everyday lives.

In the early 1980s, the reggae band UB40 were apparently placed under surveillance by British intelligence services, who suspected them of being subversives and communist infiltrators, because of their songs "One in Ten and So Here I Am" among others.¹ I would like to focus on a lesser known UB40 song, "Madam Medusa" that appeared on their debut album *Signing Off* released in 1980. The song was written by Ian Campbell, the father of band members Ali and Robin Campbell. Ian Campbell was a former member of the British Communist Party and CND, as well as being a leading figure in the British folk music scene in the 1960s. Though the song was recorded just a few months after Margaret Thatcher's 1979 electoral victory, before the full effects of Thatcherite reforms were felt, its author is clearly launching a savage attack on the policies heralded by the Iron Lady. It demonizes Mrs. Thatcher personally, without actually naming her and offers a truly gruesome and bloodthirsty description of her, her acolytes and policies, accompanied by haunting, echoing background music. The image of the gorgon in the title is reinforced by the nightmarish vision of evil given in the description of Mrs. Thatcher: "From the land of shadows / Comes a dreadful sight / Lady with the marble smile/Spirit of the night." A true sense of evil and violence is incarnated by the Iron Lady who is inflicting pain on the population: "See the scourge of innocence/Swinging in her hand/Hear the silent suffering / That echoes through the

land." This is a world of myth and dark powers in which her figure is seen to rise, like some evil spirit, fed on "hate and greed and lies". The song offers a very grim depiction of the widening social divide in Britain between the "have nots": "Cringing in her shadows / the sick, the, poor, the old", as opposed to the "haves": "Basking in her radiance / Men of blood and gold" The former are the victims of Thatcherism and capitalism, while the latter, from the world of business, finance and banking, referred to as "speculators" who "prance", are the beneficiaries of this rampant capitalism. The song culminates with one last nightmarish image of her gorgon-like features: "Round her vacant features / Guilded serpents dance" and an ultimate source of demonic horror springs forth from her head: "Her tree of evil knowledge / Sprouts a special branch." This may well be an ironic pique at the police department in the UK that deals with political security, the Special Branch, which would most certainly have been involved in the surveillance exercise mentioned above.

"Ghost Town" was released in July 1981 by the Specials, the main driving force behind of the 2-Tone ska record label. It too has a haunting rhythm, almost reminiscent of fun fair ghost train music. This song reached number one in the charts in July 1981 where it remained for three weeks, coinciding with the rioting that broke out in Brixton and Toxteth, Liverpool. It portrays an image of the total decay of urban life, the town in question representing Britain or any of its main cities, where total boredom and violence are all that young Britons have in their lives: "This town is coming like a ghost town / Bands won't play more / Too much fighting on the dance floor" The singers express their frustration and dismay towards this senseless violence: "Why must the youth fight among themselves", before going on to reveal the culprits, the nation's leaders. They lament the way a whole generation has been sacrificed or neglected with no prospect of a job or a future, leading to despair and bitterness: "Government leaving the youth on the shelf / No chance to be part of this country / Can't go on no more / With people getting angry".

This comes just after a seemingly jolly nostalgic passage which recalls, with an obvious bitter irony, a very rosier past: "Do you remember the good old days before the Ghost Town? / We danced and sang and the music played in a de boomtown." This joviality does not last long however, as we return to the initial gloomy,

depressing tone as the song closes, repeating the opening line: "This town is coming like a ghost This town is coming like a ghost town/This town is coming like a ghost town..." fading gradually into the sound of a windswept emptiness, where we can imagine tumbleweed blowing across some wild west ghost town in a western movie.

The band The The released the single "Heartlands" ("This is the 51st State of the USA") in 1986 and shot a video in the London sewer system to accompany it on its release. This choice in itself is an indication of the overlying theme of the song as Britain under Margaret Thatcher has turned into a dark, dirty evil smelling no man's land in a state of decay, filled with fear, as made clear in the opening verse: "Beneath the old iron bridges, across the Victorian parks / And all the frightened people running home before dark / Past the Saturday morning cinema that lies crumbling to the ground / And the piss stinking shopping center in the new side of town / I've come to smell the seasons change and watch the city / 've come to smell the seasons change and watch the city / As the sun goes down again."

With the sun symbolically missing from the sky, Britain seems to be in a permanent state of winter, a point constantly reiterated as the song progresses. People don't dare go out at night or they risk being raped, as illustrated by the case of the old people cited. All culture and prosperity have been destroyed, as symbolized by the derelict cinema and the shining symbols of prosperity built in the 1960s and 1970s, the shopping centres and housing estates, which are now disgusting no-go areas. The chorus lays out just how grim the future is despite people's optimistic expectations. These have been reduced to nothing, and there is absolutely no chance of things ever getting better in this cold, dark place: "Here comes another winter of long shadows and high hopes / Here comes another winter waitin' for utopia / Waitin' for hell to freeze over."

We are in a stagnant and backward looking country where "nothing changes", as the Victorian parks referred to testify. These remind us of Mrs. Thatcher's determination to return to Victorian values of self-help and thrift. Such a desire will culminate in the dismantling of what Mrs. Thatcher referred to dismissively as the Nanny State: "And the hearts are being cut from the welfare state" Attention is diverted from the real issues affecting people like urban decay and violence or

poverty as the media prefer to glorify trivial things like news or gossip about the royal family, such as the birth of princes like those of Charles and Diana, "This is... the land of red buses and blue blooded babies."

As with "Madam Medusa", there is an ever widening gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and have-nots, the former depicted ironically as fortunate "bums" obsessed with their material wealth: "Let the poor drink the milk while the rich eat the honey/Let the bums count their blessings while they count the money." Ignorance and the resulting frustration that could lead to further violence as all hope has been taken from people and nobody cares about them as they no longer exist as individual human beings: "So many people can't express what's on their minds / Nobody knows them and nobody ever will / Until their backs are broken and their dreams are stolen / And they can't get what they want then they're gonna get angry." People no longer have any cultural or social points of reference, as the UK is compared to a geriatric patient suffering from dementia: "But the stains on the heartland, can never be removed / From this country that's sick, sad, and confused."

So, nothing is going to change for the better, it is only going to deteriorate, and it is at this point that the song changes tack: Britain has been reduced from its former leading role and status as everything has been lost, including the national currency that Britons are so jealously proud of. The country has been Americanized to such an extent that the UK is no longer an independent country or even a satellite of America, but has actually been assimilated into the American Republic: "All the bankers gettin' sweaty beneath their white collars / As the pound in our pocket turns into a dollar / This is the 51st state of the U.S.A. / This is the 51st state of the USA / This is the 51st state of the USA".

The Style Council was formed in 1983 by singer/song-writer Paul Weller, and Hammond organist Mick Talbot. Between 1983 and 1988 they produced a number of singles and album tracks bitterly targeting what they saw as the damage to British society caused by Margaret Thatcher's policies. These include "Money Go Round", "The Big Boss Groove", "Walls Come Tumbling Down", "Life at a Top Peoples Health Farm" and "Internationalists". In the single Walls Come Tumbling Down, released in 1985, Weller and Talbot attack Thatcherism with almost religious fervor.

The song starts with a blast of northern soul-style trumpets, which recall those used by Joshua and the Israelites to bring down the walls of Jericho. It is a rallying cry to working-class people to either stand up and unite against the demeaning lives they now lead, symbolized by poorly paid jobs, debt and consumerist values or else remain downtrodden: "Are you going try to make this work? / Or spend your days down in the dirt?" Such conditions have been imposed on them by the forces unleashed by Thatcherism and which hide behind the walls in the title: "The competition is a colour TV / We're on still pause with the video machine / That keep you slaves to the H.P." The song constantly calls on people to defeat their fear and end the tyranny of big business along with the Prime Minister who stands at its head: "Are you gonna be threatened by / The public enemy No. 10? / Those who play the power game / They take the profits / You take the blame? / And they tell you there's no rise in pay." The song ends on a note of optimism, claiming that if the working class do remain united in the face of capitalism, the system *will* fall.

During the 1980s, two particular government actions or decisions galvanized popular opposition, which was organized in several forms. These were the Falklands conflict in 1982 and the national miners' strike that lasted between 1984 and 1985. These two events proved to be turning points for the political fortunes of the Prime Minister. Indeed, according to opinion polls in early 1982 the Prime Minister's public ratings were the lowest registered by any post-war premier. However, the outcome of these two confrontations, along with that of the IRA hunger strikes in 1980, confirmed her almost mythical status as the Iron Lady who stood firm in the face of these three dangerous challenges. This was the view of her supporters, but for her detractors, both the military conflict in the South Atlantic and the industrial strife in Britain's coal pits were perfect examples of the evils of Thatcherism.

For Elvis Costello, the Falklands conflict was the ultimate proof of the premier's imperialism and her callous disrespect for human life. He released two songs based on the events surrounding the conflict, "Shipbuilding" and "Pills and Soap" that reflected on the terrible human losses incurred in the Falklands as well as the horrors of war in general. The latter decries the media hype surrounding the conflict as well as the cynicism of the government. The song "Shipbuilding" is a very

bitter and ironic reflection on the paradox of the Falklands. On the one hand, the war is seen as a blessing for the depressed shipbuilding industry based in North East England, Liverpool, on the Clyde or in Belfast. As demand rose for new vessels to replace those transporting the task force to the islands were sunk, jobs would be created in one of the industries worst hit by Thatcherite economic reforms. The song's opening lines ponder over the moral justification of this rumoured good news, with the promise of jobs that will provide the financial means to afford the little luxuries that they had been deprived of because of mass redundancies: "Is it worth it? / A new winter coat and shoes for the wife / And a bicycle for the boy's birthday / It's just a rumour that was spread around town / By the women and children / Soon we'll be shipbuilding." On the other hand, as a result of the war, many of the young men previously employed in the shipyards may be sent to die on the very same ships that they or their families had built. The song is in fact replete with references to war and its cost in human life highlighting this sad irony as the rumour continues to circulate: "Within weeks they'll be re-opening the shipyards", but at a cost, as telegrams will be sent "notifying the next of kin", in other words to inform families of the death of a loved one. However anyone publicly linking the two events faces disciplinary action: "Somebody said that someone got filled in / For saying that people get killed in / The result of this shipbuilding." Costello weaves these references to war skillfully into the song, and the perfect example comes in the exchange between a shipbuilder and his son. "The boy said 'Dad they're going to take me to task / But I'll be back by Christmas'". While the term to take someone to task usually means to reprimand someone, here it is an allusion to the military task force dispatched by the government to the South Atlantic to reclaim the Falklands. When the boy asserts that he'll be back before Christmas, this invokes the optimistic belief, widely held at the beginning of the Great War that it would soon be brought to a successful conclusion by the end of 1914: "It will all be over by Christmas", however history was to prove this belief or hope so tragically wrong. Returning to Costello's song, though this project is creating jobs, it is twice denounced as a waste of money that could have been better spent on more noble enterprises than killing people halfway across the world: "Diving for dear life / When we could be diving

for pearls.” In the end the author closes on the bitter realization that despite the dilemma faced on the song’s opening lines, there is no alternative for shipbuilders if people want to make a living than to do what they have been trained to do as a trade: “It’s all we’re skilled in / We will be shipbuilding...”² In 1982, following the British victory on the Atlantic islands, the band Crass released an EP featuring the song “How Does It Feel To Be the Mother of 1,000 Dead?”, echoing Costello’s despair at the loss of so many lives.

During the miners’ strike many singers and groups came out in open support of the miner’s cause, including, Jimmy Somerville, Morrissey, The Housemartins, the Flying Pickets, Junior Giscombe and the aptly named Flying Pickets. The popular group Wham!, featuring George Michael, even performed at a miners’ benefit at the Festival Hall in September 1984. The two leading exponents of support for the miners and working class solidarity in general and most outspoken critics of the government were Billy Bragg and Paul Weller.

In February 1985 under the name Council Collective, the Style Council teamed up with several artists: Vaughn Toulouse, lead singer of the by then disbanded group Department S, R&B singer/songwriter Junior Giscombe and former Tamla Motown star Jimmy Ruffin to record the song “Soul Deep”. The song was released to raise awareness of the plight of striking miners and their families and to urge the working class to show solidarity to them. All proceeds from the song were originally intended to be distributed among miners’ wives groups, but its release date in February 1985 coincided with the accidental death of a miner returning to work who was killed by two strikers. It was decided that the profits made from sales of the record would be divided between the groups originally designated and a fund set up for the dead miner’s widow. Despite the controversy surrounding this tragic incident, the song reached number 24 in the charts and £10, 000 was raised.

The song argues that this the strike is a question of survival for the whole working class that concerns all working people; “There’s people fighting for their communities / Don’t say this struggle does not involve you / If you’re from the working class this is your struggle too.” If this solidarity is not re-injected into the cause at hand, then it is a lost one: “If we aren’t united there can only be defeat” yet

despite this cry for collective support for the moment people are not helping their own: "But as for solidarity, I don't see none". So people are called on to take action and reclaim what is theirs: "Let's change that, let's fight back!" Indeed, this struggle is dividing colleagues and communities, but families too, as the dilemma of whether to support the strike or to go back to work to feed their family creates great animosity among people traditionally close to one another: "There's brother against brother / There's fathers against sons."

Just as Elvis Costello denounced the money wasted during the Falklands conflict, so the Council Collective expose what they see as the irony of the cost of pit closures as the money used to shut down pits is being wasted and could be better spent regenerating Britain's traditional economy or keeping open economically viable pits: "If they spent more on life as they do on death / We might find the money to make industry progress." This same point is echoed several verses later on with the line "And the cash it costs to close 'em / Is better spent trying to keep 'em open."

The abject poverty caused among striking families is highlighted, as strikers and their families are "living on the breadline" surviving thanks to food parcels and relief events. At the same time, the complicity and mendacity of the press, which as a whole took the government's side when reporting events, is lambasted "There's mud in the waters—there's lies upon the page" and people are being kept "down" and "dumb". Another stark contrast is made between this tension and poverty among strikers on the front line and the comfort and luxury enjoyed in London; the two are worlds apart from one another: "Up north the temperature's rising / Down south she's wining and dining." The she quoted here is plainly the Prime Minister.

Finally, the group argue that if nothing is done to ensure the miners are not defeated, then it is the death knell of the whole union movement it: "We can't afford to let the government win / It means death to the trade unions." Therefore the final rallying cry is sent out once again for people to fight back.

Billy Bragg's song "Which Side are you on?" was included on the EP *Between the Wars*, released in February 1985. The title song contrasts the militarist, exploitative and elitist world set up under Tory rule with one where peace and social equality

and justice coexist. The former is symbolized by “The iron fist” and the latter by “The helping hand”. Opening with the line “I was a miner, I was a docker, I was a railway man between the wars”, Bragg clearly identifies his allegiance to the working class and the miners in particular, the first trade mentioned on the track. The same allegiance is shown in the closing verse, as the song ends on a pessimistic note: “Sweet moderation / Heart of this nation / Desert us not / We are between the wars” These wars refer perhaps to the various conflicts brought about by the Thatcher government, like race riots, the Falklands and above all, the miners’ strike. The EP also includes the song *It Says Here*, a tirade against the rightwing press, the tabloid press in particular. It condemns the biased and deliberately untrue reporting of events: “It says here, that the unions will never learn / It says here the economy is on the upturn”. In the same way as *The The* did in *Heartlands*, it ironically laments the tendency to focus on trivia rather than real news: “It says here, this year’s prince is born / It says here did you ever wish you were better informed?” It ends on the cynical observation that this is no surprise as it serves the purposes of the elite: “Those who own the papers all own this land!”

“Which Side Are You On” is the main track on the EP.³ Bragg, a solo artist, travelled around the country throughout the strike and played at many gigs and galas, also taking part in group discussions in various mining communities. He thus built up a strong rapport with the miners and backed the National Union of Mineworkers’ leader Arthur Scargill wholeheartedly in his determination to win the strike and overthrow the Thatcher government. This song lists a set of abusive powers the government accorded itself through the 1984 Trade Union Act as well as the actions witnessed during the miner’s strike. It opens with a diatribe against the newly passed legislation, limiting the right to picket: “This government had an idea / And Parliament made it law / It seems it’s now illegal to fight for the union anymore.” It then moves on to the frequently repeated chorus that questions the loyalties of all involved, as well as depicting the social and economic divisions that were becoming so clearly defined in Britain: “So which side are you on boys? / Which side are you on?” The portrait of an oppressive, authoritarian state is then painted, highlighting the restrictions imposed on picketing and the powers put in

place to enforce them: "We set out to join the picket line / For together we cannot fail / We got stopped by police at the county line / They said, "Go home boys or you're going to jail". The hardships faced by striking families are dealt with next, followed a bitter blast against miners returning to work, held guilty of strike-breaking: "It's hard to explain to a crying child / Why her Daddy can't go back / So the family suffer / But it hurts me more / To hear a scab say 'Sod you, Jack'". The song concludes with a strong assertion of confidence in the power of class solidarity and the determination of the strikers to carry on their resistance "It'll take much more than a union law to knock the fight out of the working man."

Direct personal attacks on Margaret Thatcher: if we now look at attacks made directly against Margaret Thatcher in person, it is clear that the Prime Minister attracted a great deal of hatred and animosity. While many artists express their fears and doubts about the head of the government, others describe their own desire for her to die or be killed, or at least seem to revel in the idea of her death.

Offering their own take on an early Bob Dylan hit, "Maggie's Farm", the Specials recorded on their first, eponymous, album, a version which respects to the letter the original Dylan lyrics, revealing the cruelty and greed of the "Maggie" in question as well as that of her family, a reference to the prime minister and her party as they physically abuse their workers: "Well he put's his cigar out in your face just for kicks." and the working class is totally exploited and driven to a state of bondage: "They say 'Sing while you slave' and I just get poor". The main culprit is clearly the Prime Minister who oversees this abuse: "Well she talks to all the servant's about man and God and law / Every-body says that she's the brains behind it all". The only deviation from the tune penned by Dylan appears when the dark power that lurks in the form of the National Guard in the original version is transformed to show the Thatcher government is supported by the forces of fascism: "The National Front stands behind closed doors."

The Beat, another ska band recording on the 2-Tone label, were outspoken in their attacks on Thatcherism and took part in many benefit concerts raising thousands of pounds for striking miners and their families. Their best known contribution was the single released in 1980, "Stand Down Margaret". At the Red

Wedge concerts held all around the country in the months leading up to the 1987 general election, the song was adopted as an anthem by the opponents of Thatcherism. At these gigs it was often played as the closing encore designed to rally those attending and taking part in a campaign, which aimed to encourage young voters to register to vote and vote Labour so as to remove Mrs. Thatcher from office. The song refutes the Tories' promises of a better future, arguing that young people have no real prospects: "I said I see no joy / I see only sorry / I see no chance of your bright new tomorrow." The government is accused of establishing an intolerant, brutal, racist society where there is no place for multiculturalism, only violence: "You tell me how can it work in this all white law / What a short sharp lesson / What a third world war". And the final result of such attitudes and provocation is urban violence and rioting: "Say too much war in the city yeah / Say too much war in the city, whoa / I sing I said I love and unity, the only way."

Each verse criticizing the damage being caused by the government is followed by the chorus repeating the simple message the Beat wish the Prime Minister to hear: "So stand down / Stand down please / Stand down Margaret." And the song gradually fades out repeating this same point.

The group the Larks took up the already popular anti-Thatcher chant and recorded it as a single conveying the same simple desire to see the premier ousted. Its title is taken from popular football culture: "Maggie, Maggie, Maggie, Out! Out! Out!" Adapting the chant repeated in grounds around Britain throughout the 1970s and 1980s, "Oggie, Oggie, Oggie, Oi! Oi! Oi!", the band toured the country during the period 1984-85 performing at miners' benefits. This song was included on the miners' benefit album *Here We Go*, released in 1984. It became a highly popular battle cry both at the time of the strike and at later demonstrations, for example in 1989-90 during the Poll Tax protests.

These songs all called for the removal of Margaret Thatcher and her party from office or berated her actions and policies. But other artists went further in voicing their feelings concerning the Iron Lady. Quite simply, they expressed their desire to see her dead, often talking in the name of the people who they presented as

the victims of Thatcherism. We will look at the two best known examples, both released in the late 1980s, by Morrissey and Elvis Costello.

While the band The Smiths were splitting up in 1988, lead singer Morrissey released his first solo album, *Viva Hate*, which included the highly controversial track, "Margaret on the Guillotine". Morrissey had never hidden his animosity towards the Prime Minister. Using one of the most iconic symbols of revolutionary retribution, namely the guillotine, this track comes across in the form of a dreamlike melody in which the Conservative leader is made aware of just how much the wary singer, along with the majority of "kind people" in Britain, all share one dream, not just any old dream, but a "wonderful" one; that she will climb the gallows and receive the punishment her acts deserve, namely public execution. Mrs. Thatcher has simply left him exhausted and fed up, and so in a very dismissive manner he says: "People like you make me feel so tired" and his wariness leads him to ask one simple question: "When will you die?". This line is repeated four times. This tiredness is then transformed "And people like you make me feel so old inside", so that the premier's death is no longer a question or a dream, but a clear entreaty: "Please die!" However, Morrissey does not stop at merely putting his dream or desire into words; he goes further, willing people on to fulfill this desire, "And people don't shelter this dream, make it real, make the dream real.", and the song fades with the same closing entreaty repeated over and over.

As seen above, Elvis Costello had already put down in song his horror at the loss of so many lives during the Falklands conflict in the song Shipbuilding. In 1989, he brought out a single that summed up his feelings towards the Tory leader in power: "Tramp the Dirt Down". In this song which resembles an Irish folk ballad, Costello denounces the cynicism of the leader, as she kisses the bonny baby she is holding for pure electoral purposes. The fact that she is totally oblivious to the baby as a person is shown by the fact that she continues to squeeze it hard, even though it is in obvious pain and discomfort. This leads the songwriter to express his one dream, namely to ensure he is there to witness and enjoy the premier's death and free to leave his own personal mark on her tomb: "Well I hope I don't die too soon / I pray the lord my soul to save / Oh I'll be a good boy, I'm trying so hard to behave /

Because there's one thing I know, I'd like to live / Long enough to savour / That's when they finally put you in the ground / I'll stand on your grave and tramp the dirt down."

Britain under Margaret Thatcher has been sold out to the highest bidder, namely big business and capitalism, in the most vulgar of fashions. As in so many of the other songs examined, the prospects for ordinary people are not bright: "When England was the whore of the world / Margaret was her madam / And the future looked as bright and as clear as / The black tarmacadam." Even in a song that rejoices in the death of a leader, this is very strong language, accusing the Prime Minister of procuring the country that she herself has corrupted. Finally, and yet again, we are presented with a very gloomy picture of what the future holds for Britain thanks to the Conservative leader.

In a similar vein, socialist folk singer / songwriter John McCullagh wrote the song "I'll Dance on your Grave Mrs. Thatcher". It is reminiscent of Elvis Costello's ballad depicting the betrayal and destruction of the industrial working class by Margaret Thatcher at the time of the miners' strike. While a far less sophisticated tune than Costello's, the effect and message are the same. Even several years after her resignation, a number of songs were recorded expressing the same message, Hefner's "The Day Margaret Thatcher Dies", is a prime example. These extreme expressions of hatred reflect a genuine sentiment of animosity felt in many former mining areas, where people considered that the reforms put in place by the premier before and after the miner's strike destroyed completely their whole community and reason for being. These feelings were expressed at the time of the former Prime Minister's funeral in the form of street parties and dancing and other demonstrations of public joy.

Conclusion

The period under study was one of unprecedented polarization of politics and society, which were mirrored in popular music at the time. For many pop musicians, much of what had gone wrong in the country came to be personalized in the form of the Prime Minister. One could argue that none of their songs achieved major chart

success, with the exception of The Specials' "Ghost Town". Equally, despite the vitriolic and bitter opposition to the Iron Lady expressed in the songs we have studied, Margaret Thatcher won three consecutive elections and remained in power for over eleven years. She was not brought down by any pop song, but in the end she brought about her own downfall, convincing herself that she alone knew better than the people or her party what was right for the country. This was particularly the case with Britain's position in the Europe Community and the Poll Tax. Yet, previously no British political leader had attracted so much attention and opposition to their political ideas or actions. Indeed, as far as the Iron Lady is concerned this opposition took the form of mass protest against certain policy decisions, either as race riots, anti-nuclear peace sit-ins and demonstrations, virtual civil war in Britain's coalfields and hunger strikes and intensified terrorist attacks. This wave of contest was reflected in the recently radicalized and enfranchised popular music industry where several bands, some famous, some less so, expressed their determination to overturn her policies, remove her from office, and in some cases, even to call for her actual physical demise. It is significant that several songs discussed in this paper still resonate with audiences today. For instance, Elvis Costello performed "Tramp the Dirt Down" at the 2013 Glastonbury festival four months after the Iron Lady's death and during his Spectacular Spinning Songbook UK tour and each time it was met with a rousing reception among festival and concert goers, though it was deemed highly tasteless by the Conservative leaning national press. Some songs, such as Maggie's Farm were covered several times, the best known by Rage in The Machine. Others were chanted by revelers celebrating the demise of the former premier both when it was first announced and at the street parties held during her funeral ceremony. We can cite notably the Larks' song, with its chorus slightly modified to "Maggie, Maggie, Maggie, Dead, Dead, Dead!" The overall picture of Thatcherite Britain given by these songs is a dismal one of a country that is decaying and totally divided between rich and poor, where youth, the poor, the elderly and ethnic groups are excluded, and where little prospect for change exist for them, while finance and big business have been handed golden opportunities by the Iron Lady. We can conclude by saying, no politician either in the UK or elsewhere has attracted so much

vehemence among musical icons. One can wonder whether, had Margaret Thatcher not become PM and governed in the way she did, initiating the reforms that she insisted were necessary for the country, the very rich and creative British music scene of the time would have been poorer, lacking such a source of inspiration.

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¹ <http://www.channel4.com/news/margaret-thatcher-pop-music-band-aid-geldof-protest-songs>, accessed 10/02/2014.

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/soldonsong/songlibrary/indepth/shipbuilding.shtml>, accessed 15/03/2014.

³ The song is a cover of a song written in 1931 by Florence Reece, wife of Sam Reece, miners' union leader during the Harlan County strike in Kentucky. It denounces the brutality of the mine owners and the local sheriff's office during the strike. The song was also recorded by Scottish folk singer and writer Dick Gaughan, who Bragg met during the miners' strike.

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