chapter 1

The British Cinema and Thatcherism

Defining the 1980s

Despite the appeal of periodizing the past in terms of decades, it is rare that social and political developments, or indeed cinematic trends, conform to neat ten-year patterns. There is, however, some justification for attributing a degree of basic coherence to Britain of the 1980s. At a political level, this was provided by the premiership of Margaret Thatcher and the related phenomenon of 'Thatcherism'. As the Introduction indicated, a Conservative government was elected to office in May 1979 and Mrs Thatcher continued as Prime Minister right through the decade (finally resigning as party leader in November 1990). While the remnants of the Thatcherite project may have survived her, there is still no doubting that this was the end of an era.

In the case of the British cinema, it is less easy to pinpoint dates although the Oscar-winning success of *Chariots of Fire* in March 1982 undoubtedly signalled what at least popularly became known as a 'renaissance' of British filmmaking. As with previous revivals (in the mid-1930s, during the Second World War, and in the early 1960s), this renaissance was, almost inevitably, destined to prove short-lived. None the less, the British cinema which emerged in the 1980s did contain a number of genuinely novel and distinctive aspects and did, at least temporarily, overcome some of the difficulties which beset British filmmaking in the 1970s. However, if it makes sense to view the 1980s as a relatively coherent period, is it the case that the cinema and the politics of the period were in some ways connected? The answer is almost undoubtedly 'yes' although the connections were not necessarily straightforward. In order to identify some of the links which existed, therefore, it is necessary to begin with a discussion of what is meant by the concept of 'Thatcherism'.

Thatcherism

Thatcherism is not, of course, an uncontested term and it is one which has been the subject of considerable debate. Andrew Gamble has suggested that the term has been used in three main ways: in relation to Margaret Thatcher's political style, to the ideological doctrines of the New Right, and to the policies of the Thatcher government.[1] Gamble himself opts for the idea of Thatcherism as a 'political project', one which he sees as emerging in the wake of the Conservative election defeats of 1974.[2] In particular, the Thatcherite 'project' is regarded as evolving in response to the problems besetting the British economy in the 1970s (and which were in turn related to a more general crisis in the world economy): a low rate of growth, a high level of inflation, and a deterioration in industrial relations, culminating in the so-called 'winter of discontent' of 1978–9 when over one million low-paid public service workers were on strike for nearly three months. The new Conservative government of 1979 was elected on the basis of a commitment to reverse the long-term decline of the British economy and, in attempting to do so, embarked upon a course which is often taken to represent a significant departure in post-war political life.

Since the election of a Labour government in 1945, British politics had been characterized by a degree of 'consensus' in terms of both political approach (an emphasis on consultation and compromise) and political policy (a commitment to a mixed economy, Keynesian economics, full employment, and public welfare provision). Although the precise character of Thatcherite policies changed over the Conservatives' three periods of office, they none the less retained a basic coherence. In line with the precepts of economic liberalism, the new Thatcherite Conservatives were committed to the strengthening of market forces in all areas of society and to 'rolling back' the frontiers of state as a means of securing economic efficiency. In doing so, they have also been seen as being committed to a restructuring of the British economy along more 'flexible', international lines (or what is often characterized as the establishment of a new 'post-Fordist' regime of accumulation).[3] As a result, the Conservatives abandoned many of the policies which had been a feature of the post-war consensus. The main planks of the Thatcherite programme, in this respect, were as follows:

[1] Andrew Gamble, 'The Thatcher Decade in Perspective', in Patrick Dunleavy, Andrew Gamble, and Gillian Peele (eds.), *Developments in British Politics*, 3 (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990), 333–4.

[2] Ibid. 336. Thatcherism, none the less, was never a unitary phenomenon and went through a number of stages. Frank Gaffikin and Mike Morrissey, for example, identify four main 'phases' associated with different economic and political emphases: 1979–82, 1982–7, 1987–9, 1989–90. See *Northern Ireland: The Thatcher Years* (London: Zed Books, 1990), 12–14.

[3] This is an argument found in Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1988) amongst others. For a good account of the transition from a Fordist to post-Fordist regime of accumulation, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) esp. Part 2. For some useful points of reservation regarding the theoretical underpinnings of this debate, see Karel Williams *et al.*, 'The End of Mass Production?', *Economy and Society*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Aug. 1987).

- the prioritization of the control of inflation as a policy objective;
- a reduction of public expenditure;
- a reduction of taxation as a means of restoring 'incentives';
- an abandonment of the commitment to full employment;
- trade union reforms designed to weaken the power of the unions, deregulate the labour market, and make industry more competitive;[4]
- the increasing deregulation of the private sector (especially banking and financial services culminating in the City of London 'Big Bang' of 1986);
- the privatization of publicly owned corporations, the selling of public assets such as housing, and the 'marketization' of the public sector through the imposition of market disciplines and contracting-out of services.[5]

Despite claims that this programme was responsible for an 'economic miracle', its results were decidedly mixed. Following a dramatic rise to 18 per cent in 1980, the rate of inflation did begin to fall, reaching as low as 3.4 per cent in 1986. However, there was a steady rise in inflation for the rest of the 1980s and, at the time of Mrs Thatcher's departure from office, inflation was actually higher, at 10.9 per cent, than when she became Prime Minister. Much the same is true of the figures for economic (GDP) growth. After the recession of 1980–1 (which the government's policies had largely precipitated), there was a period of sustained growth but this too slowed down towards the end of the 1980s and, by 1990, the growth rate was again lower than in 1979. Moreover, by international standards, Britain's record for the period was undistinguished. Howard Vane, for example, compares Britain's economic performance for the period 1979–88 with six other major industrialized countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States) and reveals that four of these had a superior record on economic growth. He also indicates that Britain's rate of growth was no better than for the period 1973–9 and worse than for the periods 1951–64 and 1964–73.[6] It was, therefore, only the figure for economic productivity which

[4] The government's determination to break trade union power was symbolized by its confrontation with the National Union of Mineworkers over pit closures in 1984–5. The NUM strike lasted a year but ended with the miners going back to work without a settlement.

[5] A useful summary and discussion of the Thatcher government's main economic policies may be found in Stephen Edgell and Vic Duke, *A Measure of Thatcherism: A Sociology of Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1991). In the discussion which follows I have also drawn upon *Economic Trends Annual Supplement* (London: HMSO, 1993); Chris Hamnett, Linda McDowell, and Philip Sarre (eds.), *The Changing Social Structure* (London: Sage, 1989); Michael Ball, Fred Gray, and Linda McDowell, *The Transformation of Britain: Contemporary Social and Economic Change* (London: Fontana, 1989); Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Era and its Legacy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993); John Wells, 'Miracles and Myths', *Marxism Today*, May 1989, 22–5; Christopher Huhne, 'From the Horn of Plenty to the Poisoned Chalice', *The Independent on Sunday* (25 Nov. 1990), 10–11; and 'Eleven Years of Thatcherism: Audit of Her Era', *The Independent* (23 Nov. 1990), 4.

[6] 'The Thatcher Years: Macroeconomic Policy and Performance of the UK Economy, 1979–1988', *National Westminster Bank Quarterly Review* (May 1992), 26–43. One explanation for Britain's poor economic performance is the lack of investment. Investment as a proportion of GDP during the 1980s was considerably down on previous decades and again compared unfavourably with international competitors. See Nicholas Costello, Jonathan Michie, and Seumas Milne, *Beyond the Casino Economy* (London: Verso, 1989), 86–7.

showed a, more or less, consistent increase over Mrs Thatcher's period of office and which compared favourably with Britain's industrial competitors.

However, one of the prices to be paid for this growth in productivity was a dramatic rise in unemployment. In the period 1979–82 unemployment more than doubled and unemployment stayed at over 3 million from 1982 until 1986. Although this figure then dropped (helped by some massaging of the statistics), the rate of unemployment was not only significantly higher at the end of Mrs Thatcher's term of office than at its start but also growing again (reaching well over 2 million in 1991). This rise in unemployment was linked, in turn, to a decline in British manufacturing. In the period June 1979–January 1981, manufacturing output fell by 19.6 per cent and 23 per cent of all manufacturing jobs were lost. Manufacturing output did subsequently improve but by 1987 was still no higher than in 1973. Overall, during the period between 1979 and early 1991, manufacturing employment fell by more than 2 million and this was reflected in a deteriorating trade position. In 1983, the balance of trade in manufactured goods went into deficit for the first time and this was not compensated for by trade in services. Thus, by 1989, the overall trade deficit had escalated to almost record heights of £19.6 billion. This did subsequently fall but Britain was still badly in deficit at the end of Mrs Thatcher's period of office and in a worse position than when she had taken over.

Unemployment also had consequences for the Conservatives' ability to control public expenditure. Although public expenditure under Mrs Thatcher's government did fall relative to GDP, from 44 per cent to 39 per cent, it also increased in real terms by 16 per cent. As a result, the government became heavily dependent upon revenues from North Sea oil and privatization in order to finance public spending and to keep down public borrowing. This failure to reduce significantly public expenditure was in part the result of the extra demands which the unemployed put on the state and, despite the various changes to entitlement for benefits which the government made, social security expenditure still grew by 38.4 per cent between 1978 and 1988. However, changes in public expenditure were not uniform and expenditure on housing, for example, declined by 59.9 per cent, thus contributing to the increase in homelessness that was a feature of the late 1980s.[7]

The Conservatives' record on taxation was also a mixed one. There is no doubt that the Tories were successful in lowering rates of direct taxation and that this contributed greatly to their repeated electoral successes. The basic rate of income tax was dropped, in stages, from 33 per cent to 25 per cent and the top rates from 83 per cent to 40 per cent. These cuts in direct taxation, however, were more than offset by increases in indirect taxation which meant that the average tax burden (including income tax, national insurance, VAT, excise duties, and poll tax) actually increased during the Thatcher period (from 35 per cent to

[7] In 1990, local authorities in Great Britain accepted 156,000 households (two-thirds of which contained dependent children) as homeless. This was nearly three times the figure for 1978. See Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 22* (London: HMSO, 1992), 150.

38 per cent of earnings). Indeed, there was only one group who clearly benefited from the Conservatives' tax reforms and this was the very rich. This constituted a reversal of the redistributive attitude which had been a feature of previous post-war governments and contributed to greater inequality in the UK during the 1980s. Thus, between 1979 and the early 1990s, the share of income, after housing costs, of the top fifth of households increased by 23 per cent (and the top tenth by over 60 per cent) while the income of the bottom 10 per cent dropped by 40 per cent.[8] As a result the number of people living in poverty at the end of the 1980s was significantly larger than at the beginning. In 1979, 5 million (or 9 per cent of the population) were living below half-average income. By 1992–3 this had risen to 14.1 million (or 25 per cent of the population).[9]

Indeed, for Bob Jessop *et al.*, the significant feature of Thatcherism was its shift from traditional Conservative 'one nation' policies to what they call a 'two nations' strategy.[10] This, they suggest, created a division between those who were the beneficiaries of the Thatcher years—not only the very rich but also the new 'service class' in the private sector and core workers in the growth industries—and the losers—especially 'peripheral' workers, the long-term unemployed and the new poor. These inequalities were, in turn, linked to other kinds of division. The decline of manufacturing and the rising importance of the service sector accentuated divisions between north and south, insofar as it was the north where manufacturing jobs were most often lost and the south where private sector services were primarily concentrated. As Denis and Ian Derbyshire sum up,

> the decline of the 'smokestack' and second wave industries in the traditional industrial regions of the northeast, northwest, central Scotland, South Wales and West Midlands and the growth of the new high-tech and service sector industries in southern and eastern England . . . widened regional economic differentials, as reflected in unemployment, average income, home ownership and even health statistics.[11]

The restructuring of the labour force along more 'flexible' lines also had consequences for gender divisions, creating a pool of long-term unemployed males while drawing increasing numbers of women into the workforce. As Elizabeth Wilson explains,

[8] Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 24* (London: HMSO, 1994), 77. Although rising inequality was a feature of a number of countries during the 1980s, according to a report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 'the UK was exceptional in the pace and extent of the increase in inequality in the 1980s'. See Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Inquiry into Income and Wealth*, vol. 1, chaired by Sir Peter Barclay (New York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1995), 14.

[9] Department of Social Security, *Households Below Average Income: A Statistical Analysis, 1979–1993/4* (London: HMSO, 1996), 155. Half the average income is normally taken as the unofficial poverty line.

[10] See Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley, and Tom Ling, *Thatcherism*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988) and Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, and Simon Bromley, 'Farewell to Thatcherism? Neo-Liberalism and "New Times"', *New Left Review*, no. 179 (Jan./Feb. 1990), 81–102.

[11] J. Denis Derbyshire and Ian Derbyshire, *Politics in Britain: From Callaghan to Thatcher* (Chambers, 1988), 182. See also Doreen Massey, 'A New Class of Geography', *Marxism Today* (May 1988), 12–17.

the decline of the manufacturing sector, the increase of part-time work in the service sector, and changes in technology and in consumption patterns . . . combined . . . to create a situation in which more and more women became wage workers, yet as an increasingly vulnerable part of the workforce.[12]

Thus, in 1990, women represented over 43 per cent of the labour force. However, 76 per cent of these were in part-time work and, as such, were more likely to face low pay, diminished employment rights, and limited opportunities for advancement.[13] Ethnic minorities also suffered a disproportionate share of low-paid jobs and unemployment. Thus, in 1991, unemployment rates for Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Black-Africans were nearly three times, and for Black-Caribbeans twice, the average UK rate.[14] In the case of Caribbean men aged between 18 and 19, the unemployment rate was a staggering 43.5 per cent.[15]

Social Neo-Conservatism

This widening of economic inequalities and social divisions inevitably had consequences for another aspect of the Thatcherite project. For as numerous commentators have observed, Thatcherism was not simply fuelled by economic neo-liberalism but also by a more traditional brand of social neo-conservatism. As Margaret Thatcher explained in the wake of her initial election: 'The mission of this government is much more than the promotion of economic progress. It is to renew the spirit and solidarity of the nation.'[16] Thatcherism, in this respect, may be seen not simply to be responding to the economic travails of the 1970s but also the perceived breakdown in social authority and standards which the 'permissiveness' of the 1960s had set in motion and which had carried over into the 1970s. As a result, it sought to harness, as Stuart Hall suggests, the neo-liberal economic precepts of 'self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism' with the organic conservative themes of 'tradition, family and nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order'.[17] As such, Thatcherism was only committed to the rolling back of the state in the interests of market freedom; otherwise it was quite prepared to strengthen state power, and restrict freedoms, in the interests of national regeneration, social order, and discipline. It was these 'politico-legal' aspects of Thatcherism which Stuart Hall sought to account for

[12] Elizabeth Wilson, 'Thatcherism and Women: After Seven Years', in Ralph Miliband, Leo Panitch, and John Saville (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1987* (London: Merlin Press, 1987), 208.

[13] Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 24* (London: HMSO, 1994), 59. Linda McDowell argues that because of the concentration of women's jobs in the service sector, and the numbers of women working on a part-time basis, women's earnings were on average about two-thirds those of men. See 'In Work', in Michael Ball *et al.*, *The Transformation of Britain*, 159–60.

[14] Ceri Peach, 'Introduction', in Ceri Peach (ed.), *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census Vol. 2 The Ethnic Minority Populations of Great Britain* (London: HMSO, 1996), 17.

[15] Peach, 'Black-Caribbeans: Class, Gender and Geography', in Peach (ed.), *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census, Vol. 2*, 34.

[16] Speech in Cambridge, 6 June 1979 quoted in *The Independent* (23 Nov. 1990), 4.

[17] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 48 and 2.

with his concept of 'authoritarian populism'.[18] For Hall, Thatcherism was able to feed upon genuine popular discontents with the state of Britain (economic decline, state bureaucracy, increasing crime) and mobilize support for right-wing, or 'authoritarian', solutions to them.

These political and ideological aspects of Thatcherism were manifest in a number of ways:

- a commitment to a 'strong' defence policy (partly fuelled by an intense anti-Soviet rhetoric), involving a real increase in public spending on defence, investment in new nuclear missiles (such as Trident) and a strong identification with US foreign policy (which included allowing the Americans to site Cruise missiles at Greenham Common and Molesworth and to use British bases for their air attack on Libya in 1986);
- an accompanying obsession with 'official secrecy' and determination to use the Official Secrets Act against various targets such as the civil servants Sarah Tisdall (who passed documents to *The Guardian* concerning the installation of nuclear bases) and Clive Ponting (who leaked documents concerning the sinking of the General Belgrano, during the Falklands war, to Labour MP Tam Dyell), the BBC's *Secret Society* (1987) series (which included a programme on Zircon, a satellite surveillance system developed by the Ministry of Defence), and the ex-MI5 officer Peter Wright's book, *Spycatcher* (1987);
- a programme of spending on law and order (the biggest increase in public expenditure during the period), increases in police and judicial powers under the Criminal Justice Acts of 1982 and 1988, the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984, and the Public Order Act of 1986, changes to policing methods (including national co-ordination), and an increased use of political surveillance;[19]
- a tough line on 'terrorism', including refusing to grant 'political' status to republican prisoners in Northern Ireland or to bow to hunger strikers;[20]
- a tightening of the control of immigration through the British Nationality Act of 1981 (which, by dividing UK and Commonwealth citizenship into

[18] Ibid., esp. chap. 8.

[19] Colin Leys suggests the Thatcher government was responsible for an acceleration of changes in the following areas: the bureaucratization of the police and elimination of popular control, a shift from 'community policing' to 'fire-brigade policing', the development of police technology, the expansion of secret police surveillance of political opposition, and the militarization of policing. See *Politics In Britain: From Labourism to Thatcherism* (London: Verso, 1989), 356–7. The national coordination, and politicization of the police, was particularly evident during the coal dispute when the National Reporting Centre was used to orchestrate and direct police operations at coalfields.

[20] For a history of the 1981 hunger strike in Long Kesh (The Maze) prison, in which ten prisoners (beginning with Bobby Sands) died, see David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the Irish Hunger Strike* (London: Grafton Books, 1987). Beresford sees Margaret Thatcher's refusal to make concessions to the prisoners as an early example of 'the politics of confrontation' that would later be pursued in relation to Argentina during the Falklands war and the National Union of Mineworkers during the coal dispute (p. 428). However, despite this 'victory' for the Thatcher government, the polarization and instability in the north of Ireland that it created led, in the longer term, to a more politically pragmatic approach to the conflict. Thus, in 1985, Mrs Thatcher signed the Hillsborough, or Anglo-Irish, agreement, which, by setting up an Intergovernmental Conference involving the Republic of Ireland, brought the Conservatives into conflict with their 'natural allies', the Ulster Unionists.

three categories, restricted both nationality and immigration rights) and the Immigration Act of 1988 (which reduced the rights of those who had settled in the UK to bring their dependants into the country);[21]

- a reduction in local democracy, including the abolition of the Greater London and other metropolitan councils;[22]
- an abandonment of the 'arms-length' principle in dealings with public bodies (such as the BBC and the Arts Council) combined with an increasing use of political appointees to non-governmental agencies (such as health boards and development agencies);
- a rhetoric of familialism and anti-permissiveness and an increased intolerance of sexual difference, as manifest in the notorious Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act which prohibited local authorities from the intentional promotion of homosexuality.[23]

However, as with economic policy, the actual results were mixed. Thus, despite the commitment to fighting crime, the amount of recorded crime actually rose by 60 per cent during the Thatcher years.[24] In this respect, there was a certain tension between the economic and the politico-legal aspects of Thatcherism, and the ideological rhetoric of Thatcherism was often at odds with its economic effects. Thus, despite the Thatcher regime's appeal to order, unity, and social cohesion, it was evident that Thatcherite economic policies were contributing to an increase in social divisions and conflicts. This became most apparent in what Ian Taylor has described as a 'quite unprecedented series of urban riots' that occurred during the Thatcher years. Writing in 1987, he observes:

> A country which throughout the entire post-war period to 1979 has experienced a total of about three discrete sets of urban disturbances, (the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots of 1958, the Mods and Rockers confrontations of 1962–4 and the Vietnam demonstrations of 1968–70) has since witnessed at least a dozen major riots in a period of only seven years: beginning in St Paul's, Bristol, one year into the first Thatcher Government, further major insurrections and/or riots have occurred in Brixton (April 1981), in Toxteth and Moss Side (July 1981), St Paul's again (January 1982), Notting Hill Gate (April 1982), Toxteth (April 1982 and July 1982), St Paul's once more (June 1983), Handsworth, Birmingham (9–10 September 1985); Brixton (23 September 1985) and Tottenham (October 1985).[25]

[21] Although Home Office Minister Timothy Renton argued that the Immigration Act of 1988 was necessary to avoid 'mass immigration on a vast scale', immigration was already in decline and only 47,800 were accepted for settlement in the UK in 1986 (of which the vast bulk were relatives or dependents). See Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 24* (London: HMSO, 1994), 29.

[22] Peter Riddell estimates that no less than fifty separate acts were passed during the Thatcher years aimed at reducing the independence of local authorities. See *The Thatcher Era*, 177.

[23] Michele Barrett describes 'familialism' as an 'ideology of family life' which extends beyond the realities of actual families in *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (London: Verso/New Left Books, 1980), 206. Thus, it was the 'family', along with the 'individual', that was often invoked as the key social and economic unit in the rhetoric of Thatcherism. Thatcherism is often seen, in this respect, to have involved an assault on 'intermediary' institutions such as local authorities and public corporations that stood between the state and individuals and their families. It is this attack on 'civil society' that underpins Margaret Thatcher's notorious claim, in an interview for *Woman's Own*, that: 'There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families.' Quoted in Riddell, *The Thatcher Era*, 171.

[24] Ibid. 234. Ian Taylor argues that this increase in crime was distinctive to the UK and was not paralleled in North America where crime rates in the US and Canada were falling. See 'Law and Order, Moral Order: The Changing Rhetorics of the Thatcher Government', in Ralph Miliband *et al.* (eds.), *The Socialist Register 1987*, 303.

Although the Conservative government was reluctant to accept that such disturbances were linked to either unemployment or the rundown of the inner cities, it was evident, as the Scarman Report on the 1981 riots recognized, that the disorders could not be understood outside of 'the context of complex political, social and economic factors which together create a predisposition towards violent protest'.[26] For Scarman, these factors included unemployment, poor housing, discrimination and, especially amongst young blacks, 'a sense of frustration and deprivation'.[27]

This tension between rhetoric and reality was also in evidence in the Thatcher government's discourses surrounding the family and sexuality. Thus, despite the emphasis upon the family and 'family values' the rate of divorce continued to increase and a record number of 192,000 petitions for divorce were filed in 1990.[28] The number of births outside of marriage also increased dramatically (rising from 12 per cent of all births in 1981 to 23 per cent in 1987).[29] Moreover, as a result of the increasing numbers of people living alone, in single-parent families or without children, the conventional nuclear family, involving a married couple with dependent children, represented a declining proportion of households (only 25 per cent in 1991).[30] Many of these households, moreover, consisted of 'reconstituted' families (involving previously married partners or children from different marriages) and failed to correspond to the 'normal family' model of a working father and non-working mother. If these factors are taken into account, the 'normal family' probably accounted for less than 10 per cent of all households.[31] Indeed, as in the case of crime, it can be seen how Thatcherite economic policies actually contributed to the undermining of the

[25] Ian Taylor, 'Law and Order, Moral Order: The Changing Rhetorics of the Thatcher Government', 304. The ending of Margaret Thatcher's period of prime ministerial office was also characterized by major social disturbances in response to plans for the introduction of the controversial community charge (or 'poll tax') in Scotland in April 1989 and in England and Wales in April 1990. The introduction of the tax led to nationwide protests, including serious rioting in London on 31 March 1990.

[26] Lord Scarman, *The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders 10–12 April 1981: Report of an Inquiry by the Rt Honourable The Lord Scarman OBE* (London: Pelican Books, 1982, orig. 1981), para 8.7, p. 195. For a general discussion of the issues raised by the disturbances, see John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Contemporary Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

[27] *The Scarman Report*, para 2.23, p. 29.

[28] Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 23* (London: HMSO, 1993), 30. Ironically, the *Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984* made divorce easier by permitting couples to file for divorce after their first wedding anniversary.

[29] David Willetts, 'The Family', in Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *The Thatcher Effect* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 262.

[30] Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 26* (London: HMSO, 1996), 51.

[31] See Jon Bernardes's breakdown of census figures for the family in 'In Search of "The Family"—Analysis of the 1981 United Kingdom Census: A Research Note', *Sociological Review*, vol. 34, no. 4 (Nov. 1986), 832. Given the decline in numbers of married couples with dependent children between 1981 and 1991 (a drop of six per cent) and the increase in working wives, Bernardes's figures for the 'normal family' will have actually decreased during the decade.

very 'family values' that the government claimed to represent. The encouragement of 'enterprise' and 'flexible' labour markets, as has been seen, not only led to high rates of male unemployment that deprived families of the traditional male bread-winner but also propelled increasing numbers of women into the labour force (including about 60 per cent of married women).[32] Thus, far from women being returned to the home, women's work became a crucial element in the restructuring of the economy. As Angela Coyle suggests, the use of women as cheap, flexible labour put women workers at 'the forefront of a Government strategy' to dismantle 'the regulation and control of employment' and 'free' the employer/employee relationship.[33] In the same way, strong rhetoric concerning the family, did not protect women from the effects of public expenditure cuts. As Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacey put it, 'the severe cut-backs in welfare benefits and services' (including cuts in housing benefits and the freezing of child benefit) that the Thatcher governments implemented 'had a profoundly negative effect on women overall, particularly in their long-established roles as carers, nurturers, and homemakers', helping to relegate increasing numbers of families, especially single-parent families, to poverty.[34]

Moreover, although the Thatcher government adopted a strong moral tone, it was, in fact, reluctant to intervene legislatively in areas of 'moral' concern. As Elizabeth Wilson points out, legislation concerning moral issues such as divorce, the death penalty, homosexuality, and abortion has traditionally been treated as a 'matter of conscience' and has often come about through a private member's bill and a free vote.[35] Thus, despite the government's 'law and order' stance (and Margaret Thatcher's own personal support for restoration), the reintroduction of the death penalty was rejected on three occasions (in 1979, 1983, and 1988) by a free vote in the House of Commons. Likewise, the efforts of Liberal MP, David Alton, to amend the 1967 Abortion Act (by reducing the permitted period for terminations to 18 weeks) also proved unsuccessful. An amendment to the 1990 Human Fertilization and Embryology Act, setting a new limit of 24 weeks, was subsequently supported by the government but this was already conventional medical practice and, politically, commanded the kind of 'consensus' that the Conservative government would not normally have sought. Maureen McNeil also suggests that, while the Thatcher government clearly disassociated themselves from the sexual 'permissiveness' of the 1960s, it did not do so though 'an explicit stand', or the implementation of clear policies,

[32] Willetts, 'The Family' in Kavanagh and Seldon (eds.), *The Thatcher Effect*, 264. This growth of women in the workforce was to lead the government—the government of the 'family'—to introduce separate taxation for married women in 1990.

[33] Angela Coyle, 'Going Private: The Implications of Privatization for Women's Work', *Feminist Review*, no. 21 (Winter 1985), 6–7. Elizabeth Wilson points out, however, that the policies of the Conservative government did not affect women uniformly and, just as inequalities increased generally under Thatcherism, so the gaps between 'better off women and those at the bottom of the employment hierarchy' also became greater. See 'Thatcherism and Women: After Seven Years', 206.

[34] Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacey, 'Feminism, Marxism and Thatcherism', in Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury, and Jackie Stacey (eds.), *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 26.

[35] 'Thatcherism and Women: After Seven Years', 227.

but simply by refusing 'to articulate the discourse of sexuality'. Thus, despite its 'strong moralistic image', she argues that the Thatcher regime, unlike the Reagan administration, was hesitant 'to enter the discourse of the sexual since . . . such engagement might have proliferated, rather than eliminated, that which it wished to destroy'.[36] This, in fact, turned out to be the case in the government's involvement in the notorious Clause 28 of the Local Government Bill (which prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality'). Like other 'moral' issues this was initially an initiative of backbenchers and failed to secure government support. When it subsequently did so, this was as much the result of the government's determination to bring Labour local councils to heel as a concerted assault on lesbian and gay rights and led to effects that were entirely contrary to those that had been intended. As Jackie Stacey argues:

> Rather than silencing and marginalizing lesbians and gays, the introduction of Section 28 set in motion an unprecedented proliferation of activities which put homosexuality firmly on the agenda in Britain in 1988–9. The terms of the public debate may have been set by the right, but the widespread resistance to the Section and its implications brought about greater visibility, a strengthened lesbian and gay community and a politicized national and international of lesbian and gay activists.[37]

Evidence of such overt resistance to the Thatcher government's policies not just by lesbians and gays but trade unionists, peace campaigners and anti-nuclear groups, supporters of local government, students, anti-poll tax campaigners, and so on inevitably raise questions about the ideological successes of Thatcherism. For a while, for Stuart Hall, Thatcherism was both populist and 'hegemonic' in character, Thatcherism did not in the end secure either full hegemony or, in empirical terms, clear popular support. The winning of the Falklands/Malvinas war in 1982 certainly rescued the Tories from the massive unpopularity of their early years of office (when, according to opinion polls, Mrs Thatcher was the most unpopular Prime Minister since polling began) and seemed to encourage the temporary expression of the kind of 'national-popular' sentiments that Thatcherism sought to orchestrate. However, as Raymond Williams argued, the Falklands affair relied upon 'a certain artificial, frenetic, from-the-top, imagery of the nation' and did not suggest any deep-seated growth of 'Thatcherite consciousness'.[38] So, although the 'Falklands factor' undoubtedly helped to win the Conservatives a second term of office in June 1983, their share of the vote was none the less down.

[36] Maureen McNeil, 'Making and Not Making the Difference: The Gender Politics of Thatcherism', in Sarah Franklin *et al.* (eds.), *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies*, 233. Her argument, in this respect, draws on Foucault's critique of the 'repressive hypothesis' concerning discourses of sexuality and his recognition of how prohibitive discourses may incite other discourses of sex. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (London: Allen Lane, 1978).

[37] Stacey, 'Promoting normality: Section 28 and the regulation of sexuality', in Sarah Franklin *et al.* (eds.), *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies*, 302. Once the Local Government Act was passed, Clause 28 became Section 28.

[38] Raymond Williams, 'Problems of the Coming Period', *New Left Review*, no. 140 (July–Aug. 1983), 9–10.

It was, indeed, one of the paradoxes of the Thatcher years that while the Conservatives, under Mrs Thatcher, were elected three times and embarked upon a radical economic and social programme, they do not appear to have at any time commanded majority political support. Thus, in the 1979 election, the Tories' share of the vote was only 44 per cent while in the following two, in 1983 and 1987, it was even less at 42 per cent. Moreover, the evidence from opinion polls and social surveys also suggests that the electoral successes of the Thatcher government were not accompanied by any major shifts in public attitudes. Thus, while Conservative policies towards trade unions were undoubtedly popular, there was no similar support for the government's efforts to reduce welfare provision.[39] It has therefore been suggested that pragmatism and economic calculation on the part of voters were more responsible for keeping the Conservatives in power than ideological commitment.[40] This seems to have been particularly so of skilled manual workers whose defection from Labour to Conservative was crucial in maintaining the Thatcher government in power. Thus, while the majority of the semi-skilled and unskilled working class continued to support Labour in the 1983 and 1987 elections, the majority of skilled workers—or C2s—voted Conservative.[41]

Support for Thatcher was also overwhelmingly in the south of England. As David McCrone points out, 'less than 10 per cent of Conservative MPs elected in 1979 and 1983 came from Scottish and Welsh seats, the smallest proportion since the 1920s, and only 16 per cent from the north of England, the smallest proportion for over a hundred years'.[42] These discrepancies were even more marked following the 1987 election when Scotland returned only ten Conservative MPs and Wales only eight (out of a total of 358). In Scotland, there was little acceptance of the Thatcher government's break with consensual, social-democratic government and, as McCrone explains, 'the attack on state institutions—the nationalised industries, the education system, local government, the public sector generally, even the church, institutions which carried much of Scotland's identity—was easily perceived as an attack on "Scotland" itself'.[43] Thus, for all of its rhetoric of 'national unity', the nationalism of the Thatcher government

[39] See, for example, the essays by Ivor Crewe 'Has the Electorate Become Thatcherite?', in Robert Skidelsky (ed.), *Thatcherism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) and 'Values: The Crusade That Failed', in Dennis Kavanagh and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *The Thatcher Effect*, 239–50. The survey data provided by the annual reports of *British Social Attitudes* also suggest how resistant popular attitudes have been to Thatcherite nostrums. Indeed, Frances Cairncross goes as far as to suggest that Mrs Thatcher's electoral 'success was in spite of, rather than because of, her economic philosophy' in *British Social Attitudes: the 9th Report* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing, 1992), 47–8.

[40] See, for example, Stephen Hill, 'Britain: The Dominant Ideology Thesis after a Decade', in Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner (eds.), *Dominant Ideologies* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990). Joel Krieger also argues that Thatcherism depended on an 'arithmetic politics' characterized by 'particularistic appeals' to electorally significant sections of the population. See *Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 86.

[41] See Massey, 'Heartlands of Defeat', *Marxism Today* (July 1987), 23. Also Peter Jenkins, *Mrs Thatcher's Revolution: The Ending of the Socialist Era* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), 317–18.

[42] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 173.

[43] Ibid. 172.

was less British (or unionist) than (southern) English and pivoted, moreover, upon a particularly narrow and exclusivist version of 'national' identity. As Andrew Gamble explains, the Conservatives learnt that they no longer had 'to project themselves as the party of the Union in order to win elections'. The appeal of 'the Conservative Nation', in this respect, was 'directed much more towards England, and towards certain regions of England, the old metropolitan heartland of the Empire'.[44]

This growth of a narrow English nationalism was also apparent in the government's 'populist' response to 'race' and immigration in which 'Englishness' was characteristically associated with 'whiteness'.[45] Indeed, Mrs Thatcher's rise to political success was undoubtedly assisted by her willingness to make the politics of race respectable.[46] It could also be seen in the Thatcher government's relationship with Europe. The Thatcher government was always a half-hearted member of the European Community, committed only to a deregulated 'free' European market but not to greater political or economic union which it regarded as a threat to national sovereignty. However, Europe was an issue that divided Conservatives and matters came to a head over plans for increased political and monetary union (including a single European currency and a central European bank). Following the Rome summit of October 1990, at which Mrs Thatcher had stood out against plans for European integration, the Deputy Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe, resigned, thus setting in motion the events that were to lead to Thatcher's own resignation as PM not long afterwards. In a sense, the seriousness of the split amongst Conservatives over Europe revealed some of the fragility of the alliance between free economic thinking and nationalist ideas that characterized the Thatcher years. For, at an economic level, the Thatcherite project was clearly to internationalize the economy and integrate it into a global system (in a way, moreover, that severely circumscribed the ability of national government to exercise control over the 'national economy'). Yet, at a political level, the government remained firmly attached to 'Little England' notions of national sovereignty and identity that increasingly stood at odds with the realities of globalizing economic and cultural forces.

What, however, helped to keep the Tories in power during the 1980s, despite the divisions within their ranks and their relative unpopularity, was the divided nature of the political opposition that they faced. In 1981, a number of Labour MPs, concerned at the apparent drift of the main opposition party towards the left, broke away to form the more 'centrist' Social Democratic Party, or SDP.

[44] Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State*, 214.

[45] The association of English/British identity with 'whiteness' is explored by Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

[46] On television in January 1978, Mrs Thatcher claimed that 'people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and . . . that if there is any fear that it might be swamped, people are going to be really rather hostile to those coming in'. See Melanie McFadyean and Margaret Renn, *Thatcher's Reign* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1984), 85. Andrew Gamble describes this as 'one of her most successful political interventions before she became Prime Minister', reporting how the Conservative party's rating in the polls rose by nine points. See Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State*, 136–7 and 250.

Although never able to 'break the mould' of British politics as initially claimed, the new party (in electoral alliance with the Liberals) did none the less do sufficiently well, especially in the south of England where the Labour vote was weak, to split the opposition and ensure that no one party was then able to mount an effective challenge to the Conservatives during the 1980s. Thus, in the first election following the formation of the SDP in 1983, more electors voted against the Conservatives than for and the Tories' share of the vote fell. However, thanks to opposition splits and the 'first past the post' electoral system, the number of Conservative seats in parliament still managed to rise.

However, if claims for the ideological success of the Thatcher government have undoubtedly been overstated, it would also be wrong to dismiss the ideological impact of Thatcherism altogether. The policies of the Thatcher government left few areas of social life untouched and if the majority of the population did not actively support the changes which these policies wrought they did not remain unaffected by them and were often required to accommodate to them. As Stuart Hall suggests, the institutional reforms which the Thatcher government implemented were able to bring about changes in conduct without necessarily winning over 'hearts and minds'.[47] Moreover, if Thatcherism did not always succeed in mobilizing popular assent for its policies it did undoubtedly succeed in presenting itself as the most viable political option. Labour's failure at the polls, in this regard, was not simply the result of a split opposition but also an inability to offer a credible alternative remedy for Britain's economic difficulties. As Colin Leys puts it, 'for an ideology to be hegemonic, it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary that it has no serious rival'.[48]

Thus, in an effort to improve their electoral prospects, Labour, following their initial swing to the left, were forced to move rightwards, adopting many policies similar to those of the Conservatives and reversing their initial hostility to such measures as privatization and the sale of council houses (which had proved an undoubted vote-winner for the Conservatives).[49] Thus, if the Conservatives began their first term of office by departing from the old 'social-democratic consensus' they had, by the end of the 1980s, forged something of a new 'consensus' amongst political parties around the acceptable limits of economic and political action. This convergence of political policies then became even greater when John Major replaced Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1990 and John Smith, followed by Tony Blair, succeeded Neil Kinnock to the Labour party leadership (and, in the case of Blair, to ultimate electoral victory).

[47] Stuart Hall, 'Thatcherism Today', *New Statesman and Society* (26 Nov. 1993), 14–16. Hall uses the example of higher education where, despite a continuing commitment to old social democratic values, academics learnt to adapt to new entrepreneurial and managerial imperatives.

[48] Colin Leys, 'Still a Question of Hegemony', *New Left Review*, no. 181 (May/June, 1990), 127.

[49] Whereas the majority of council tenants consistently voted Labour, the majority of home-owners, amongst both the working and middle classes, voted Conservative. See Massey, 'Heartlands of Defeat', 23.

British Cinema and Thatcherism

However, if Thatcherism may be seen to have dominated the politics of the 1980s, the study of Thatcherism has not had much to say about the cinema. In terms of the history and analysis of the politics of the period, the role of cinema has not been regarded as important and most studies of Thatcherism have ignored it. Thus, in a well-known collection of essays on the effects of the Thatcher government on British social life there is no mention of the British cinema despite chapters devoted to both the mass media and the arts.[50] While this may reflect an assumption, on the part of the authors, that the British cinema is no longer a 'mass medium' nor an 'art', it more probably indicates just how minor an impact Thatcherism is assumed to have had upon British filmmaking (and, by corollary, how marginal the study of British cinema is to an understanding of Thatcherism).

However, from the perspective of studies of the British cinema, the relationship between the politics and the cinema of the 1980s does not appear so negligible. Indeed, it is the links with Thatcherism that are often taken to be one of the most significant aspects of the cinema of the period. This relationship has largely been thought of in terms of the ideas, and ideologies, which the films of the period suggest. However, while in the case of Hollywood cinema of the 1980s, it is often argued that a rightward turn is detectable this is not so evident with British cinema of this period.[51] Arthur Marwick lists what he regards as the most important films of the 1980s and concludes that 'it cannot be said that these films conform to one particular ideology, certainly not that of Thatcherism'.[52] Kenneth MacKinnon explicitly compares British and American films of the 1980s but is also reluctant to identify an explicitly Thatcherite cinema.[53] So, while the rightward turn of American cinema in the 1980s has been associated with a revival of morally conservative, entrepreneurial, and militaristic themes, it is difficult to identify an equivalent trend in British cinema.

Thus, unlike Hollywood, there is little evidence of a significant grouping of 'backlash' movies that sought to roll back the gains of feminism by debunking career women or attempting to return women to the home. *The Good Father* (Mike Newell, 1986) does make common cause with a conservative movement towards the 're-assertion' of the paternal 'rights' of divorced fathers and links this with a degree of criticism of 1960s radicalism, the women's movement,

[50] Kavanagh and Seldon (eds.), *The Thatcher Effect*, chaps. 22 and 23.

[51] See Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), and Andrew Britton, 'Blissing Out: The Politics of Reaganite Entertainment', *Movie*, nos. 31/32 (Winter 1986). Britton uses the term 'Reaganite entertainment' to refer to 'a general movemment of reaction and conservative reassurance in the contemporary Hollywood cinema' (p. 2).

[52] Arthur Marwick, *Culture in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 153.

[53] Kenneth MacKinnon, *The Politics of Popular Representation: Reagan, Thatcher, AIDS and the Movies* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992).

and lesbianism. However, the logic of the film's attack is not fully worked through and the ending involves a degree of 'compromise' whereby Roger (Jim Broadbent) wins exclusive custody of his son in the courts but, shocked by the judge's ruling that his son should never stay with his mother (who is living with another woman), works out his own informal arrangements for joint custody. Roger also distances himself from Bill (Anthony Hopkins), the divorced father who had encouraged Roger (as a way of vicariously working out his own anger) to give his wife a 'tug on the lead' by fighting her in the courts. Bill himself is revealed as a deeply flawed character who has an ambivalent relationship with his own son (there is a fantasy scene in which he is seen strangling him) and shows himself incapable of sustaining a relationship with either his wife or his girlfriend. At the film's end, he is on his own, 'imprisoned' in his newly fenced backyard. In this way, the film tempers the criticism of the women characters by criticizing the cynical and deceitful manner in which Roger is encouraged to gain custody of his son (not just by Bill but by a self-seeking, money-making barrister typical of the new commercial culture) and by bringing out how Bill's war against 'castrating' women has its roots in his own psychological inadequacies.

A similar ambivalence is also evident in films that address the growth of an 'enterprise culture'. Adam Barker, writing in 1989, suggested that *How To Get Ahead in Advertising* (Bruce Robinson, 1989) and *Dealers* (Colin Bucksey, 1989) marked a new development for British cinema in which filmmakers began 'to take seriously the social formations which have emerged from a newly created culture of commerce'.[54] However, neither of these could be regarded as straightforwardly endorsing this new culture. Tracing the obsession of advertising executive Dennis Bagley (Richard E. Grant) with finding a new way of selling pimple cream (and his subsequent development of a malignant boil), *How To Get Ahead* mobilizes a fairly well-worn critique of the idiocies of advertising and the emptiness of commercial culture. The film ends with Bagley, his head now replaced by the boil (which has assumed his facial characteristics), rushing through the countryside ('England's clean and pleasant land') on his horse while preaching his creed of limitless consumerism to the accompaniment of 'Jerusalem' on the soundtrack. As he clambers onto a plinth on the top of a hill and holds his arms aloft in a traditional Christ-like pose, the demented mix of fundamentalist religion, nationalism, and boundless entrepreneurialism ('I'll give them anything, and everything they want') that the film associates with Thatcherism is clearly apparent.

The critique of the new commercial culture in *Dealers* is more muted but has elements of overlap. Set in the City, the film deals with the yuppie lifestyles of financial traders and the ups and downs of the 'casino economy'. However, at the film's end, the film's risk-taking young trader Daniel Pascoe (Paul McGann)

[54] Adam Barker, 'Business as Usual? British Cinema in an Enterprise Culture', *Monthly Film Bulletin* (Aug. 1989), 228. These were hardly the first films to comment on the enterprise culture—as films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) and *Empire State* (1987) would indicate—but they were unusual, as Barker suggests, in being set almost exclusively in the world of business.

leaves the bank, followed by his fellow trader and girlfriend Anna (Rebecca De Mornay). Like Bagley's wife, Julia (Rachel Ward), in *How To Get Ahead* who leaves her husband because she wants something 'that can't be bought', so Anna, and by implication the film, question whether she and Daniel have 'got it all' (a book on Keith Richards entitled 'Emotional Rescue' is clearly visible behind the characters in the final scene in the bank). Admittedly, the film's attack on the new entrepreneurial culture is less than wholehearted given the extent to which the film is itself seduced by the glamour and wealth of the world it condemns. However, unlike Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987), to which it is indebted, or Caryl Churchill's play *Serious Money* (1987), set at the time of the Big Bang in 1986, the film is so lacking in substance that it is effectively prevented from investing the world of financial trading with any degree of real complexity or fascination.

In terms of a resurgence of militarism, probably the only overtly militaristic film of the period was *Who Dares Wins* (Ian Sharp, 1982), made in the wake of the siege of the Iranian embassy in 1980, which demonizes the anti-nuclear movement as a front for internationally financed terrorism and celebrates the military prowess of the SAS (Special Air Services). However, there was no film made celebrating the Falklands/Malvinas war (despite Margaret Thatcher's wish for one) and those films that did touch on the topic—such as *For Queen and Country* (Martin Stellman, 1988) and *Resurrected* (Paul Greengrass, 1989)—did so from a critical perspective. Both of these films concentrate on the experiences of the returning soldier. In the case of *For Queen and Country*, the black soldier Reuben (Denzel Washington), who has served in both the Falklands and Northern Ireland, returns 'home' to a depressed council estate in south London beset by poverty, racial divisions, and heavy-handed policing. He also discovers that, despite his military service, he is no longer eligible, under the 1981 British Nationality Act, for British citizenship (having been born in St Lucia).

In *Resurrected*, the central character Kevin Deakin (David Thewlis) went missing during the advance on Port Stanley and has been presumed dead. Based on the case of the Scots Guardsman Philip Williams, the film explores the reactions to his subsequent return to Britain when he is discovered, seven weeks later, with amnesia. The actual 'truth' of the matter is left ambiguous but what the film dissects is the anguish, ostracism, and eventual violence (at the hands of his regiment) which Deakin suffers because he is unable to live up to the role of 'national hero' which the media, his home community, and the army has bestowed upon him. This is underlined in the film's final scene in which a television set in the military hospital to which Kevin has been admitted (following his beating) shows the return home to his wife of Second World War hero, Douglas Bader (Kenneth More) in the 1950s war movie *Reach for the Sky* (1956). The camera moves off the television set, and across a ward of wounded soldiers to reveal Kevin lying dejected in bed, the victim not only of a squalid and unpleasant war (which was far from the 'game of cricket' referred to by Bader's wife on the television) but also the 'patriotism' and false expectations of those who had supported the war 'back home'. However, it was a film that was not

about war at all—*Chariots of Fire*—which is often seen to have most embodied the Falklands spirit and, in doing so, to have given one of the most eloquent expressions to Thatcherite values. Given the importance of the film during this period, it is worth examining, in rather more detail, just how far this was actually the case.

Chariots of Fire: A Thatcherite Film?

'If there is one moment at which the idea of a "British film renaissance" took shape, it is that Oscar night, 23rd March 1982,' writes Nick Roddick.[55] The Oscar night to which he refers is, of course, the now infamous occasion on which *Chariots of Fire* won four Oscars (including for 'Best Picture') and Colin Welland, accepting the award for 'Best Original Screenplay', declared that 'the British are coming!' Whatever was intended by the remark (and Welland has subsequently claimed he was misinterpreted), there is no doubt that his confident claim was destined to assume a more general significance. Shortly after the Oscars ceremony, on 2 April 1982, the Argentinians invaded the Falklands/Malvinas islands and, on 5 April, the Thatcher government dispatched a naval task force from Portsmouth which successfully retook the islands in June. There can be little doubt that the Falklands victory revived the political fortunes of the Thatcher government (as Hugo Young reports, 'the prime minister's rating in the opinion polls, which stood at rock bottom in late 1981, soared to 51 per cent in June 1982') and that the 'Falklands factor' played a major role in securing the Conservatives a second term of office.[56] Mrs Thatcher herself identified the Falklands victory with a new national spirit. 'We have ceased to be a nation in retreat' she told Cheltenham Tories in July 1982. 'We have instead a new-found confidence, born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true 8,000 miles away.'[57]

In a sense, the coincidental timing of military victory in the Falklands and Oscar-winning success in Los Angeles seemed to link the two events together and, following its re-release, *Chariots* showed successfully across Britain during the entire Falklands episode. It is this connection which is so vividly suggested in Alan Parker's polemical 'documentary' on British cinema, *A Turnip-head's Guide to the British Cinema* in which shots of the runners and cheering crowds at the Olympics in the film are intercut with actual footage of similar crowds welcoming home the Falklands task force (along with images of social disturbance) to the accompaniment of the *Chariots* theme tune by Vangelis.[58] Indeed, in the film itself, a newspaper hoarding announcing 'Our boys are home' is

[55] 'The British Revival', in Gilbert Adair and Nick Roddick, *A Night At The Pictures: Ten Decades of British Film* (Bromley: Columbus Books, 1985), 76.

[56] Hugo Young, *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Pan Books, 1990), 280.

[57] Quoted in ibid. 281.

[58] *A Turnip-head's Guide to the British Cinema* (Wr./dir. Alan Parker, Thames Television (12 Mar. 1986)).

clearly visible when the runners return to England, seemingly anticipating the way in which the tabloids were to celebrate the return of 'our boys' from the Falklands. Hugo Young also reports that David Puttnam, the producer of *Chariots*, was a subsequent guest of the Prime Minister's at Chequers and that there was 'much talk in the Thatcher circle about the desirability of something similar being put on to celluloid to celebrate the Falklands victory'.[59]

This was possibly a rather curious fate for a film which had struggled to find financial backing and which, according to Welland, told the story of a 'couple of fellows who put their fingers up to the world'.[60] The film, set in the wake of the First World War, is also aware of the high cost of war—the Master of Caius (Lindsay Anderson) pays tribute at the freshman's dinner to the Cambridge men who had 'died for England'—and the war itself is linked, by the Duke of Sutherland (Peter Egan), to 'guilty national pride'. As this would suggest, *Chariots of Fire* is a rather more complex piece of work than its reputation often suggests and, if it became identified with refurbished national sentiment and a Thatcherite outlook, this was undoubtedly related to the special circumstances in which it was received. There are, nevertheless, a number of elements within the film which facilitated this particular response.

For, clearly, *Chariots* is a film which celebrates British success and which, in doing so, evokes a number of the 'traditional' values similar to those that Thatcherism was itself seeking to revive. The focus of the film is, of course, sport and it is sporting success and the values traditionally associated with sport which are its main subject of celebration. The original script had apparently begun with an explicit reference to what was perceived as the break-up of the Olympic ideal in the face of business and political interests (the US had, in fact, boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan).[61] In choosing to return to 1924, therefore, the film is evidently seeking to resurrect what it regards as the original Olympic spirit of competitive sportsmanship and the ideals which this represents.

In this respect, the film may be linked to a certain 'return of the hero' which also characterized American cinema in the 1980s. As various writers have noted, the 'new Hollywood' of the late 1960s and early 1970s gave rise to a number of films characterized by loose, episodic plots, alienated or 'unmotivated' heroes, and pessimistic resolutions.[62] From the mid-1970s onwards, however, there was an increasing return to much more linear narratives involving goal-oriented action and positive heroes. In some respects, *Chariots* may also be seen to represent a reaction to the breakdown of traditional models of British filmmaking that occurred in the 1960s and to involve a return to a more conventional kind

[59] *One of Us*, 277. In addition to Mrs Thatcher's admiration for the film, it was also reported that it was one of President Reagan's favourite films of 1981. See *Screen International* (10 Apr. 1982), 7.

[60] Quoted in Anon. 'Chariots Begins At Home', *AIP & Co.*, no. 35 (Nov./Dec., 1981), 12.

[61] 'These are sour days in Olympic history. The bureaucracies of big business and nation states have finally demanded more of the original slender ideal than it can possibly bear and it's fatally beginning to crack' is quoted in 'Chariots Begins at Home', 11.

[62] See, for example, Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Pathos of Failure. American Films in the 1970s: Notes on the Unmotivated Hero', *Monogram*, 6 (1975), 13–19.

of British cinema. It is significant, in this respect, that the trailer for *Chariots* self-consciously promoted it as 'a British film about British heroes' and linked it to an earlier tradition of 'wonderful' British films.[63]

Thus, despite some play with temporal relations, *Chariots* employs a relatively straightforward narrative structure, organized around the desire for sporting victory on the part of its central characters: the runners Harold Abrahams (Ben Cross) and Eric Liddell (Ian Charleson). Inevitably, this emphasis upon male sporting success also has implications for the film's portrait of gender roles. It is no accident that the film begins with the words, from Ecclesiastes, 'Let us now praise famous men', for it is men who occupy the active roles and whose desires structure the film's forward movement. The roles performed by the women characters, in contrast, are narratively subordinate and peripheral. Thus, Jennie Liddell (Cheryl Campbell) functions largely as a—temporary—obstacle to her brother's pursuit of sporting glory while Abrahams's girlfriend Sybil Gordon (Alice Krige) provides patient support for the sporting activity to which she is required to take second place (hence, there is a significant scene in which the embrace of Abrahams and Sybil is interrupted by the coach Sam Mussabini (Ian Holm) who literally comes between the couple in the frame). Indeed, such is the marginality of women to the main business of the film that the film's emphasis upon male bonding, images of physical prowess and looking verges, as Neale suggests, on the homo-erotic.[64] As has been noted, it has been common in discussion of the American cinema of the 1980s to associate the return of the hero with a reaction to the challenges of feminism and a desire to return women to their 'proper' place. Although male anxieties about changing female roles are not overtly dramatized in *Chariots*, its celebration of a social world which is unashamedly masculine and, in which, there is very little room for women certainly suggests a certain longing for a more traditional division of labour between the sexes.

However, if the heroism of *Chariots of Fire* is linked to sporting achievement and traditional versions of masculinity, it is also linked to the theme of nationality as well. As Anthony D. Smith suggests, in his discussion of 'golden ages', the hero is 'never solitary' but a vessel for national virtues and qualities.[65] To this extent, criticism of the film's distortion of historical fact (including, for example, identifying Abrahams as breaking the record for the Caius college dash, exaggerating his battle against anti-Semitism—when he subsequently converted to Catholicism—as well as his commitment to a professional ethic of sporting) may miss the point. For, as Smith argues, the actual 'historicity' of heroes is less significant than their thematization of national qualities.[66] The

[63] See Sheila Johnston, 'Charioteers and Ploughmen', in Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick (eds.), *British Cinema Now* (London: BFI, 1985), 103.

[64] Steve Neale, '"Chariots of Fire", Images of Men', *Screen* vol. 23 nos. 3/4 (Sept./Oct. 1982), 47–53. Neale goes on to argue, however, that the film's narrative resolution is dependent upon a repression of the male homosexual desire which has, at least implicitly, been suggested during the course of the film and that this confirms the film's status as a conservative film.

[65] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 195.

[66] Ibid. 200.

film's licence with history, in this respect, not only permits a clearer delineation of dramatic conflicts (as in the fictionalized encounter between Liddell and the Prince of Wales (David Yelland)) but also a sharpening of the issues at stake in the film's celebration of 'national' virtues.

It is therefore to be expected that, in the film, athletics and sporting achievement are identified with a traditional 'English' education and with traditional English virtues. Thus, the Master of Trinity (John Gielgud) explicitly links athletics with 'the education of an Englishman' and the capacity not only to 'create character . . . (and) . . . foster courage, honesty, and leadership' but also encourage a 'spirit of loyalty, comradeship and mutual responsibility'. Although the film may take its distance from the character who says this (due to his snobbishness and bigotry), it none the less endorses (perhaps, more than the character himself) the values to which his speech lays claim. However, while sporting endeavour provides a loose allegory of national effort and achievement it also does so in a way that is quite complex. This is the result of the different models of sporting hero which the film portrays and the varied religious and ethnic allegiances which they embody.

For although the characters share a desire for sporting success, they do not all run for the same reasons. Harold Abrahams regards himself as at odds with the establishment and runs, as he puts it, as a 'weapon' against being Jewish. Eric Liddell runs for the glory of God while the aristocratic Lord Lindsay (Nigel Havers) runs because he enjoys it (as he explains to Sybil, 'the whole thing's fun'). The film, in this respect, may be seen to offer somewhat different versions of the 'manly ideal': what Paul Hoch has referred to as the 'playboy' and the 'puritan'.[67] Lindsay clearly represents the 'playboy' hero linked to a gentlemanly ethic of gallantry, leisure, and enjoyment (one of the film's most memorable scenes consisting of Lindsay practising hurdling by jumping over full glasses of champagne). Abrahams and Liddell are, by contrast, 'puritans' characterized by self-discipline and a commitment to work and duty over pleasure. However, although it is the 'puritans' who secure victory, the success of Liddell is none the less dependent upon the intervention of the 'playboy' whose gallantry in withdrawing from the 400 metres allows him to compete.

The main characters are also distinguished by their religious and ethnic affiliations. Indeed, for a film which is reputedly so nationalist, it is surprising how conscious it is of the complexities of national allegiance. Hence, Abrahams is identified not only as a Jew but one of Lithuanian extraction. His coach, Mussabini (Ian Holm), is part Italian and part Arab and possesses a Geordie accent. Eric Liddell was born in China but is fiercely proud of his Scottishness, announcing in his first scene in the film: 'I am and will be while I breathe—a Scot!' In this respect, Abrahams, Mussabini, and Liddell are all 'outsiders' who stand apart from the English establishment by virtue of their social status, religious affiliations, and ethnic backgrounds. In order for these characters to

[67] Paul Hoch, *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), 118–20.

function as 'national heroes', therefore, the film seeks to overcome these differences and forge an image of 'national' unity out of the multiple identities which it reveals. The film, in this respect, may usefully be regarded as 'mythical' in impulse. This is not simply, as Ed Carter suggests, because the film deviates so dramatically from actual history but also because of the way in which it seeks to resolve the social tensions and contradictions that its different characters represent.[68]

It does so, primarily, through an attempted integration of the film's outsiders into the 'national' community represented by the Olympic team. In contrast to the more accentuated individualism of American cinema, the heroic values which the film celebrates are allied with team effort and the *esprit de corps* to which Aubrey Montague (Nicholas Farrell) refers at the film's start. Former competitors Abrahams and Liddell end up running under the 'same flag' and Lord Lindsay's sacrifice on behalf of Liddell, in effect, cements an alliance across class and nationality (as well as fusing different versions of masculinity). However, although this may be linked, as one writer puts it, to a view of the 'nation' in which 'difference constitutes rather than fragments national unity', it also involves a certain suppression of differences as well.[69]

This may be seen in the film's treatment of Eric Liddell. For although the timely intervention of Lord Lindsay permits him to run for both God and country, this is less a resolution of a conflict than an evasion of it. Indeed, Liddell's religious fervour continues to remain at odds with national duty as the sequence intercutting scenes from the Olympics with his sermon to the Paris congregation attests, relying, as it does, on a text from Isaiah: 'All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.' Indeed, insofar as neither Abrahams or Montagu enjoy success while running on a Sunday, the film itself appears to show some sympathy towards Liddell's sabbatarianism. Liddell's Scottishness also remains problematic. For while a number of commentators have noted the apparent disappearance of Liddell's Scottishness as an issue, there is a sense in which the very version of 'Scottishness' which the film constructs makes it difficult for it to be incorporated into the film's final celebration of 'national' characteristics. This is most evident in the film's use of images of nature. For although this has been seen as reinforcing the mythic and transhistorical character of the film's story, it is also apparent that it is in the Scottish scenes in which this imagery is most pronounced (and Liddell's declaration of his love of Scotland is clearly identified with his father's 'wee home in the glen' and with the rural Highlands where we first see him run). Even the scenes set in the Scottish capital, Edinburgh, are linked to nature (Liddell and Jenny converse on a hill above the city) and although we are informed that Liddell runs for Edinburgh University (a university almost as old as Cambridge) it is never actually shown or offered as a marker of Scottishness

[68] Ed Carter, '*Chariots of Fire*: Traditional Values/False History', *Jump Cut*, no. 28 (1988), 15.

[69] Tana Wollen, 'Over Our Shoulders: Nostalgic Screen Fictions for the 1980s', in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds.), *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 181.

PLATE 1. Forging an image of 'national' unity: *Chariots of Fire*

in the way that Cambridge is associated with Englishness. To this extent, the film's use of imagery reproduces a romantic conception of Scotland in terms of the rural and the 'primitive' and the qualities of Liddell himself become linked to these terms: he is a sporting 'natural' (seen training in the glens) who runs 'like a wild animal' and also a 'primitive' whose religious fundamentalism defies the urbanity and reasonableness of the English upper classes. Thus, when he finally wins for 'country' at the film's end, the film is obliged to suppress the 'otherness' of the 'Scottishness' with which he has previously been associated and effectively convert him into a symbol of Englishness. Thus, while the newspaper hoarding informs us that it is Abrahams who is 'the toast of England', it is, in fact, Liddell whom we have seen held aloft by his English team-mates at the Olympic stadium and cheered by the English crowds at the railway station.

So if the conclusion of *Chariots of Fire* involves a eulogy to the nation, it is—as it is in the Thatcherite version of the nation—primarily England and Englishness which it celebrates. This is, perhaps, clearest in the film's use of the memorial service which is shown at the film's beginning and end and which is used to frame the Olympics story. Although a commemoration of Abrahams in particular, it involves a tribute to his fellows as well ('all these men were honoured in their generation and were a glory in their days'). What is of note, however, is that this is clearly a 'Christian and Anglo-Saxon' Church of England

service. So while Liddell was a Scottish Presbyterian and Abrahams was a Jew (and therefore, as the porter at Caius points out, unlikely to join the chapel choir) they have, by the film's conclusion, been effectively appropriated by both a religion and an establishment to which neither initially belonged. The film's 'solution' to the national and religious differences which it has identified, therefore, is to subsume them within a dominant version of 'Englishness'. It is not surprising then that the service should conclude with a rendition of William Blake's *Jerusalem* (from which the film's title is taken) and an invocation of the strong sense of English patriotism which this carries with it.[70] It is also notable that this is invested with a degree of solemnity and seriousness at odds with the more ironic attitude towards Englishness (and its 'constructed' character) implied by the use of Gilbert and Sullivan (and their lines that 'despite of all temptations to belong to other nations, he remains an Englishman').

The ideological resolution which the film provides, in this respect, not only represents the incorporation of its outsiders into the establishment but also a fusion of the old and the new. This may be seen in relation to Abrahams in particular. For although the film invokes traditional sporting values, it also, through Abrahams, subjects them to a degree of criticism. Thus, when the Masters rebuke Abrahams for his use of a professional coach, he remains unrepentant and criticizes their values as 'archaic'. 'I believe in the pursuit of excellence', he declares, 'and I'll carry the future with me.' In a sense Abrahams's rebellion against the establishment is not simply related to his Jewishness but also his willingness to break with an ethic of gentlemanly amateurism and adopt a more professional approach to his sport. In this respect, while the film appeals to traditional values it also seeks to invest them with a more entrepreneurial (or, as the Master of Caius would have it, tradesmanslike) spirit. It is, perhaps, in this way that the film links most directly with Thatcherite ideology. For, as has already been noted, it was a central characteristic of Thatcherism that it combined economic neo-liberalism with social neo-conservatism. As such, Thatcherism assumed a certain Janus-faced quality: ideologically looking backwards to past imperial glories and 'traditional' values but economically looking forward and attempting to restructure the British economy along more competitive lines. Indeed, it is this mix of tradition and modernity within Thatcherism which Stuart Hall sought to account for in his use of the phrase 'regressive modernization'.[71] Something of a similar combination may be seen to be provided by the heroes of *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell's traditional religious fervour and aversion to compromise (the 'language of the devil' according to his father) not only has links with the social and moral conservatism of Mrs Thatcher but also her faith in 'conviction politics'. Similarly, Harold Abrahams's aggressive individualism and philosophy of self-help suggests

[70] Sophia B. Blaydes notes how Blake's anti-industrial and utopian poem 'became associated with nationalistic causes' during the First World War after it had been set to music by Sir Hubert Parry. See 'Blake's "Jerusalem" and Popular Culture: *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* and *Chariots of Fire*', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. xi, no. 4 (1983), 212.

[71] Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 2.

something of the entrepreneurial values of Thatcherism while his conflict with a complacent aristocratic establishment contains more than an echo of Mrs Thatcher's own rise from a petty bourgeois background (she was a shopkeeper's daughter) and her battles with the traditional Tory grandees.

The modernizing project of *Chariots*, however, only goes so far. It does not stretch, for example, as far as the well-drilled 'Fordist' approach to athletics employed by the Americans whom we observe in training. It is also less than fully meritocratic and occurs on a terrain which remains that of (aristocratic) social privilege. It is notable, for example, that the lower-class professional Mussabini remains an outsider at the film's end. Thus, he is unable to join the Olympic crowd and, in a telling scene, learns of Abrahams's victory from the distance of his hotel room. As a result, at the very moment the Union Jack is raised and the British national anthem is played, the film's focus is on the character who has made the victory possible but is none the less excluded from the society to which it brings glory. He also remains impervious to the claims of national pride and, in a drunken celebration with Abrahams following the race, declares his conviction that the win was a personal one for himself and Abrahams (a claim that derives some added force by the way in which Abrahams—'the toast of England'—remains apart from his team and the waiting crowd on his return from Paris).

The other character who makes victory possible is, of course, the aristocratic playboy Lord Lindsay. While his standing aside may represent a certain giving way of the old aristocratic order to a new, more meritocratic one, it also encourages affection for the ethic which he represents. He emerges as a much more sympathetic character than either Abrahams and Liddell whose goals, rather than personalities, we are encouraged to admire. The film, in this respect, displays a singular ambivalence to the aristocratic traditions which it displays. On the one hand, particularly as represented by the Masters, the establishment is berated for its archaism and hypocrisy. On the other hand, it is admired for the strength of its traditions and the elegance it maintains (and, despite their conflicts with Abrahams, the Masters, as the film shows, have no difficulty at all as claiming his victory as theirs). A significant factor, in this respect, is the film's use of visual style.

For at the very moments the film overtly criticizes the establishment, it also appears to relish the visual pomp and splendour with which it is associated. This may be seen in the sequence in which Abrahams makes his most outspoken criticism of the establishment's anti-Semitism. This begins in his rooms at Cambridge where he discusses with Montagu his father's relatively humble origins. As the conversation continues there is a cut to a Cambridge chapel. 'Here I am setting up shop in the finest university in the land', Abrahams declares, 'but the old man forgot one thing—this England of his is Christian and Anglo-Saxon and so are her corridors of power and those who stalk them guard them with jealousy and venom.' However, at the same time as Abrahams makes this speech, the camera encourages us to relish the splendour of the buildings, as it moves slowly down from a view of the ceiling to where the two men are

standing. As the men leave the chapel, the camera captures them in long shot and, as they move off, pans to the right and then moves slightly upwards to take in more of the surrounding architecture. So while the film may be highlighting the permanence and grandeur (as well as the power) of the tradition to which Abrahams sees himself opposed it is, at the same time, making use of the setting to provide the audience with a visually pleasing spectacle.

This is also the case in the scene involving Abrahams's confrontation with the Masters in which Abrahams's objections to the Masters' 'archaic' values is none the less presented in a manner that renders the physical benefits of their privilege attractive. Thus, when Abrahams stands up to make his speech he is seen surrounded by the accoutrements of the Masters' lifestyle: the portraits, candles, and dinnerware.[72] The camera then pulls back to reveal more of the table, bringing Abrahams's central positioning within the frame to an end and emphasizing further the environment in which he is located. At this point, Abrahams concludes his remarks by announcing his claim to the future. However, the camera does not follow Abrahams but holds on the Masters as he departs from the frame. It is for reasons such as these that one critic was to claim that *Chariots* was 'a film whose subtext contradicts its text'.[73] Ostensibly critical of an archaic establishment, it is a film which none the less presents it, in the words of Monagu, as a 'sumptuous affair'. Thus, while the film shares with Thatcherism a certain nostalgia for English 'greatness', it also reveals a certain tension between the culture of individual enterprise, on the one hand, and a cultural fascination with the aristocratic *ancien régime*, on the other.

Conclusion: British Cinema and Anti-Thatcherism

Chariots of Fire was one of a number of 1980s films, such as the heritage films and films of empire (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) that looked to an aristocratic past. Although, as will be seen, these incorporated a number of conservative elements, they were also ideologically ambivalent and were, in some ways, critical (from a liberal-humanist perspective) of the nationalist and commercial values associated with Thatcherism. Indeed, what is often argued as most distinctive about British cinema in the 1980s is not its support for Thatcherite ideas but rather its distance from, and even overt criticism of, Thatcherism and its effects. Hence, Lester Friedman argues that what united the bulk of British directors during the 1980s was 'their revulsion, to one degree or other, for the ideology of Thatcherism' while Leonard Quart claims that the 'film renaissance'

[72] In his discussion of 1990s heritage films, Paul Dave notes how aristocratic 'heritage time', which is 'spatializing, pre-modern and classificatory', is opposed by 'the progressive time of plot and the experience of an indefinite future' which is associated 'with the middle class'. This is also a good description of the tension manifest in *Chariots of Fire*. See 'The Bourgeois Paradigm and Heritage Cinema', in *New Left Review*, no. 224 (July/Aug. 1997), 117.

[73] Stuart Byron, *Village Voice* (21 Oct. 1981), 50, quoted in Ed Carter, 'Chariots of Fire', 14.

of this period was 'one of the more positive by-products of the Thatcher ethos, though in an almost totally oppositional and critical manner'.[74] There is, however, a danger that this reading of the British cinema of the period is too quick to homogenize the films concerned and to attribute a political significance to them.[75] Not all British films of the period are obviously linked to Thatcherism and not all can be seen as straightforwardly critical of the Thatcher regime. However, it is undoubtedly the case that it is much easier to identify an anti-Thatcherite cinema than a pro-Thatcherite one.

There seem to be a number of reasons why this was so. It has already been argued that Thatcherism, as a project, did not command popular ideological appeal and managed to secure economic and institutional change without necessarily winning over 'hearts and minds'. In this respect, many of the ideological themes of Thatcherism did not achieve the currency or effectivity within British society that its supporters wished and so failed to exert a significant influence upon filmmakers. This is particularly evident in the case of the social and moral themes associated with the New Right which have conventionally been taken as informing a series of Hollywood films in the 1980s.[76] For while it has been common to link the emergence of the 'New Rights' in Britain and the US, there were also significant differences between them. As Lynne Segal suggests, Thatcherism was both 'ambivalent' and 'less than successful' in its battle against 'permissiveness' and, as a result, was '*unlike* the moral right in the USA, supported by Reaganism, which (was) directly anti-feminist, explicitly against abortion and equal rights for women, as well as anti-gay'.[77] As such, Britain did not experience quite the same kind of 'backlash' (against feminism and women's rights) that occurred in the US nor the emergence of a similar kind of 'backlash' movie.

The extent of hostility to Thatcherism, during the 1980s, has also been noted. In this respect, the British filmmaking community was clearly associated with some of the social groups least sympathetic to the Thatcherite vision. Although the professional middle class voted for the Thatcher government in substantial numbers, there were significant sections within the middle class who did not, especially amongst the university-educated and the intelligentsia.[78] Indeed, for Martin Holmes, a supporter of the Thatcher project, one of the 'limits of Thatcherism' was precisely its failure to win over 'centrist intellectual opinion'

[74] See Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993), pp. xix and 17.

[75] This is particularly evident in the Friedman collection, *British Cinema and Thatcherism*, where even the most unlikely of 'British' films (e.g. *Altered States*, *Insignificance*) are interpreted in relation to Thatcherism.

[76] See, for example, Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992) and Elizabeth G. Traube, *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender and Generation in 1980s Hollywood Movies* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992).

[77] Segal, 'The Heat in the Kitchen', in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983), 213.

[78] Massey, 'Heartlands of Defeat', 18.

which he associates in particular with the universities, the arts, and the BBC.[79] In this, he agrees with Sir Peter Hall, the then director of the National Theatre, who claimed, in 1988, that 'well over 90 per cent of the people in the performing arts, education and the creative world' were 'against' Mrs Thatcher.[80] The opposition to the Thatcher government displayed by the educational and arts communities arose, in turn, from their specific dislike of the government's apparent philistinism, and hostility to public provision for the arts, as well as a more general liberal-left, 'intellectually centrist' disdain for the socially and culturally divisive consequences of Thatcherite economic policies. In this respect, the filmmaking community in Britain, with its links to the other arts (especially theatre) and public-service television, formed part of a grouping which could be expected to be out of sympathy with Thatcherite ideas. And, while it is not possible to 'read off' the ideological dispositions of film texts from the social and political attitudes of their makers, many of the films of the period were, none the less, quite self-consciously informed by the anti-Thatcherite sentiments of their producers, directors, and writers.

Finally, it may be argued that one of the key factors encouraging the emergence of an anti-Thatcherite cinema was the impact of Mrs Thatcher's policies upon the industry itself. For while discussion of the relationship between Thatcherism and the British cinema has characteristically focused on ideological outlook, much less attention has been paid to the more direct consequences of the Thatcher government's policies upon the film industry itself. As the following chapter indicates, the most immediate impact of Thatcherism on the cinema was the extension of its economic policies to the conduct of the film industry. These had seriously damaging consequences for the economic viability of the British cinema which became increasingly dependent upon television, and Channel 4 in particular. Given the public service remit of Channel 4 and its commitment to relatively low-budget contemporary British filmmaking, it provided both the cultural space, and the economic basis, for many of the films most critical of Thatcherism to emerge. In this way, the economic policies of the Thatcher government, when applied to the film industry, actually helped to stimulate the production of films which, at an ideological level, were typically hostile to Thatcherite beliefs. It is to these policies that I will now turn.

[79] Martin Holmes, *Thatcherism: Scope and Limits* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), chap. 8. The Conservative government clashed with the BBC over a number of issues including the transmission of an episode of the *Real Lives* series, 'At the Edge of the Union', dealing with Northern Ireland politicians Martin McGuinness (of Sinn Fein) and Gregory Campbell (of the Democratic Unionist Party) in 1985, and the reporting of the US bombing of Libya in 1986. For an overview of these events and the general threat to the impartiality and 'public service' status of the BBC, see Steven Barnett and Andrew Curry, *The Battle For the BBC* (London: Aurum Press, 1994).

[80] Quoted in Hugo Young, *One of Us*, 411.

chapter 2

Film Policy and Industrial Change

Thatcherism and the Film Industry

On 15 June 1990 more than twenty representatives of the UK film industry arrived at No. 10 Downing Street to attend a seminar on the future of the industry, chaired by Mrs Thatcher herself. The seminar had been arranged in response to approaches from Sir Richard Attenborough, the then chairman of both the British Film Institute and British Screen Advisory Council as well as a successful producer and director, and he was evidently pleased with the outcome. '[T]he government is demonstrating that films are back on the agenda', he commented afterwards, 'and the Prime Minister is responsible. She's not only committed; she has demonstrated her interest.'[1] This was, perhaps, a surprising remark. There had been little evidence of the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for the film industry during her previous years of office and the record of her government with respect to film was not impressive. Only the previous year, UK feature film production had dropped to thirty films, the lowest figure since 1981 and the second lowest since 1914, and, according to the then Chief Executive of the Producers Association, it was 'a matter of fact' that a series of government policy decisions had 'brought the UK film and television production industry to its knees'.[2] It was all the more ironic, therefore, that Mrs Thatcher's departure from office should have followed on so soon after in November. Without Mrs Thatcher's personal interest, the momentum for change slowed and many of the proposals which had emerged from the Downing Street seminar were delayed, amended, or rejected. Thus, nearly one year later, in May 1991, the trade newspaper *Screen International* felt sufficiently let down to run an uncharacteristically robust editorial, denouncing the government's continuing lack of commitment to the British film industry and commenting sourly that 'there is barely a promise made by this government that is not reneged upon shortly afterwards'.[3]

[1] Quoted in 'An Active Agenda', *Screen International* (23–9 June 1990), 8.

[2] John Woodward, 'Cinema 1989–90—Production Focus', *Film and Television Yearbook 1991* (London: British Film Institute, 1990), 25

[3] 'One Ahead, Two Back', *Screen International* (17–23 May 1991), 9.