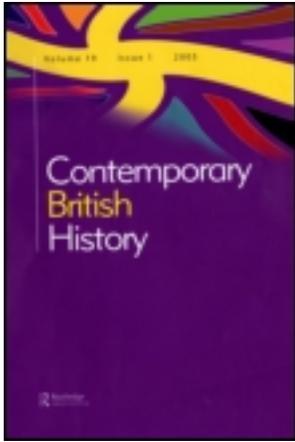


This article was downloaded by: [University College Dublin]

On: 17 October 2012, At: 09:19

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Contemporary British History

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcbh20>

### Shot By Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of 'Consensus'

Matthew Worley

Version of record first published: 01 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: Matthew Worley (2012): Shot By Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of 'Consensus', Contemporary British History, 26:3, 333-354

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2012.703013>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Shot By Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of 'Consensus'

Matthew Worley

*This article examines the ways in which political organisations of the far left and far right responded to punk-informed youth culture in Britain during the late 1970s. It examines how both tried to understand punk within their own ideological framework, particularly in relation to the perceived socio-economic and political crises of the late 1970s, before then endeavouring to appropriate—or use—punk for their own ends. Ultimately, however, the article suggests that while punk may indeed be seen as a cultural response to the breakdown of what some have described as the post-war 'consensus' in the 1970s, the far left and far right's focus on cultural expression cut across the basic foundations on which they had been built. Consequently, neither left nor right proved able to provide an effective political conduit through which the disaffections expressed by punk could be channelled.*

*Keywords: Punk; Consensus; Youth; Fascism; Communism*

In the summer of 1977, the Young Communist League (YCL) issued an open letter to the Sex Pistols through the pages of its newspaper, *Challenge*. This proposed that the YCL and the 'punks', whom the Sex Pistols were understood to represent as pioneers of a then burgeoning youth culture, 'get together . . . bands . . . fanzines . . . followers . . . to fight for our rights'. The letter registered admiration for the Sex Pistols' uncompromising approach and agreed with what it understood to be punk's socio-political diagnosis: 'For the kids in Britain today the situation STINKS'. However, the YCL argued that the time was right to coordinate a more effective response to the seemingly limited prospects afforded to young people in a period of rising unemployment and simmering social tension. As things stood, the Sex Pistols had only

---

Matthew Worley is a Professor of Modern History at the University of Reading. He has published widely on British political history, particularly in relation to the labour movement and the communist movement. He is currently researching the links between youth culture and politics in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. Correspondence to: Matthew Worley, Department of History, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading, RG6 6AA, UK. Email: m.worley@reading.ac.uk

‘fought back through one channel . . . the music industry’; they had ‘neglected to use where [their] real strength lies . . . on the streets . . . in the council estates of the inner-city areas and new towns . . . with the kids!’ By working together, the YCL reasoned, communists and punks could better resist those establishment forces that served to repress British youth. ‘What about it?!’, the YCL asked, in an awkward and—it must be said—rather un-Leninist fashion.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the Sex Pistols were ever made aware of the YCL’s offer is not known. What is clear, is that the YCL was just one of many political organisations with members keen to tap into the latent rebellion apparently given vent by punk in the mid-1970s.<sup>2</sup> Most visibly, perhaps, the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) served as an integral part of the Rock Against Racism (RAR) campaign that emerged parallel to punk, combining to organise a series of carnivals with the SWP-initiated Anti-Nazi League (ANL) to mobilise young people in opposition to the far-right National Front (NF). For some in the SWP, punk was a healthy expression of young working-class anger born from the inequities of capitalism. ‘Living in crumbling cities, bored and broke can make you pretty vacant and violent’, Roger Huddle wrote in the party’s *International Discussion Bulletin*; ‘punk expresses that.’<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Labour Party Young Socialists, which by the mid-1970s was dominated by Trotskyists based around the *Militant* newspaper, resolved in early 1978 to approve punk’s anti-establishment stance and to acknowledge its projection of genuine working-class frustration.<sup>4</sup> The International Marxist Group (IMG), too, claimed members who saw in punk a ‘tendency [ . . . ] towards a primitive socialist protest’ that was ‘rooted in the white working class’ and reflective of ‘Britain in capitalist crisis.’<sup>5</sup>

As we shall see, such views did not go unchallenged. Nor was it just those on the left who recognised in punk signs of a politicised youth movement. Members of the NF and the neo-Nazi British Movement (BM) also claimed punk as a signal towards their own brand of revolution. Given this, punk—as a musical form and a wider youth culture—became a contested site of political engagement in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Alongside debates as to punk’s political meaning, punk bands regularly played benefit gigs for causes that ranged from RAR and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to concerts in support of striking workers and prisoners’ rights organisations. From the outset, punk used political signifiers—swastikas, images of Marx, the anarchy symbol—to provoke reaction and evoke the sense of socio-economic crisis that pervaded the British media at the time.<sup>6</sup> Even more dramatically, punk gigs were often disrupted by competing political factions. Sham 69 concerts in London became a rallying point for BM and NF supporters in the late 1970s, while the leftist allegiances of bands such as Crisis and the Gang of Four ensured that their gigs regularly succumbed to outbreaks of political violence. The anarchist band Crass likewise found themselves playing host to confrontations between members of the BM/NF and SWP, the most vicious of which took place at London’s Conway Hall on 8 September 1979 during a benefit gig organised in support of activists involved in the ‘persons unknown’ conspiracy trial.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the anarcho-punk scene inspired by Crass served as a nexus for a range of political movements that included anarchism, feminism, anti-militarism, animal rights activism and the early 1980s Stop the City

campaigns that fed into the anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.<sup>8</sup>

Such interplay between politics, popular music and youth culture raises a number of interesting questions, especially when placed in the context of the severe economic and political dislocations of the period. Punk, by late 1976, was seen to reflect a breakdown in the post-war 'consensus'; it was typically portrayed as a product of crisis that in its music, rhetoric, attitude and style embodied Britain's deteriorating economic and moral standing.<sup>9</sup> For Caroline Coon, one of the first champions of punk in the music press, it was only 'natural' that a group of 'deprived London street kids' such as the Sex Pistols would produce music 'with a startlingly anti-establishment bias'. Similarly, punk's detractors in the mainstream media recognised within it a reaction to unemployment, poor education and failed urban planning.<sup>10</sup> But to what extent did punk and its various cultural offshoots (the skinhead revival, anarcho-punk, post-punk, 2-tone) represent either a genuine or conscious form of cultural revolt? This, in turn, leads us back to the thesis proposed by John Clarke, Stuart Hall and others associated with the Birmingham University Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS): that aspects of youth culture can be read as sites of resistance to prevailing socio-economic structures, class relations and cultural hegemony.<sup>11</sup> Punk may have been quickly codified and commodified over the course of 1977, but did the initial resentments and challenges proffered by the Sex Pistols and bands such as The Clash represent a politicised youth culture that continued to resonate and have an impetus beyond the media clamour? If so, what exactly was punk revolting against, in what ways, and to what end?

This article examines an issue that relates closely to such questions; namely, the contentious relationship that developed between punk and political organisations on the far left and far right of British politics during the late 1970s. Such a topic has to date received only scant attention. Most significantly, John Street reflected on the utilitarian and often superficial ways in which the NF and certain leftist groups responded to punk in his seminal analysis of the politics of popular music.<sup>12</sup> There are, too, a growing number of studies relating to RAR and the far-right 'white power' music scene.<sup>13</sup> It is intended here, however, to widen the scope a little: to ask what attracted members of the YCL, SWP, NF, BM and others to punk; to consider how they engaged with it; and to outline the response of those involved with punk to the overtures made from the political margins. More generally, it argues that the emergence of punk and the increased visibility of parties to the left and right of the political mainstream were connected with and indicative of Britain's crumbling political 'consensus' over the 1970s, but concludes that the cultural turn undertaken within both political extremes served also to undermine the ideological certainties—in terms of class, nationality or race—that had previously provided each of them with a platform.

### **Waiting for the Communist Call**

The socialist left in Britain was a vibrant but fractious place to be in the late 1970s and early 1980s. On the one hand, capitalism appeared to be in crisis. Inflationary

pressures inherited from the 1960s had led to a rise in unemployment and industrial conflict that combined to inaugurate a prolonged period of socio-economic and political unrest. Such tensions were exacerbated by the 1973 oil crisis, leading eventually to Jim Callaghan's Labour government abandoning its commitment to Keynesian economics and appealing to the International Monetary Fund in an attempt to secure the pound and curtail the growing concerns as to Britain's stability. Come the winter of 1978–79, of course, and a further wave of industrial protest served as a prelude to a recession that saw Margaret Thatcher's first Conservative government preside over record levels of unemployment and a spate of inner-city riots born from socio-economic and racial tensions that had long-simmered across the UK. Britain, as Richard Clutterbuck put it in 1978, appeared to be 'in agony': at war on the picket lines, scarred by mainland IRA bombings, and—on certain inner-city streets—confronted by a buoyant NF keen to ferment racial violence.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, the British left tended to interpret such events as the convulsions of a fading imperial power struggling to cope with a global capitalist crisis. The so-called 'consensus', it seemed, was beginning to crumble.

On the other hand, the left was fragmented and, for the most part, detached from the wider British labour movement. Although the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) remained the largest party to the left of Labour into the 1970s, it was in steep decline. Cultural changes and the diminishing status of the Soviet Union as a potent revolutionary symbol had served to undermine the party's position, leading to a protracted fall in membership and wider influence.<sup>15</sup> Partly as a consequence of this, a range of rival leftist organisations and tendencies had begun to compete with the CPGB following the ruptures occasioned by the emergence of the New Left after 1956. Not only did a number of Trotskyist groups rise to some prominence amidst the cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s, among them the International Socialists (from 1977 the SWP), the IMG, the Socialist Labour League (from 1973 the Workers' Revolutionary Party, WRP), and the Revolutionary Socialist League (that provided the Militant tendency inside the Labour Party), but various social movements focusing on issues of gender, race and sexuality likewise emerged to reset the political agenda. More esoterically, numerous subjects and cross-party groupings, Maoists and anarchists, formed and splintered as the left flitted between internecine warfare and broad-based campaigns designed to channel public protest towards a 'progressive' (or revolutionary) end.<sup>16</sup>

All of these groups were numerically small; none could boast the proletarian credentials of the diminishing CPGB, let alone a wider labour movement whose leadership many on the left accused of having become an entrenched part of the capitalist machine.<sup>17</sup> This, in turn, allowed for new sources of inspiration to compete with Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky as guides to the revolution. Where Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara had served as poster boys for the 1960s student protests, so the likes of Althusser, Barthes, Benjamin, Gramsci, Mao and Marcuse began to shape the intellectual discussions of Britain's leftist milieu over the 1970s. New 'sites' of struggle

were demarcated; culture, language, youth, race, gender, sexuality and the media became terrains of engagement; the personal became political.

It was in just such a context that punk came onto the radar of Britain's leftist organisations in late 1976. The CPGB had for some time been engaged in a debate as to whether youth cultures were simply the commercialised products of capital or, as the party's Martin Jacques suggested, a formative site of the class struggle.<sup>18</sup> For Paul Bradshaw, the editor of *Challenge* in 1976, youth cultural styles and popular music were mediums that could sometimes 'embody' rebellion. Indeed, Bradshaw drew on the research of the CCCS to predict in June 1976 that 'new forms of culture, especially through music, [will] develop and give expression to the problems facing youth'.<sup>19</sup> Punk, therefore, emerged to meet Jacques and Bradshaw's brief with perfect synchronicity. Here, it seemed to Bradshaw, was a youth movement comprising 'working-class kids to the core [...] tired of having no voice to shout about unemployment and other rubbish we're being fed'.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, the YCL lent its support to punk from the beginning of 1977, initiating 'new wave forums' to debate punk's radical potential, redesigning *Challenge* to replicate the cut-and-paste style of punk fanzines, and providing space to review punk records and interview punk bands within its media.

A similar response was evident within the SWP. Although the party leadership retained its primary focus on industrial protest, the SWP's largely non-proletarian composition and emphasis on rank-and-file organisation ensured that it developed links to grass-roots struggles beyond the organised labour movement. This became most evident not only in its mobilising local and nationwide resistance to the NF in the mid-to-late 1970s, but also with regard to the unemployed (the 'Right to Work' campaign) and the student movement from which it had first gained sustenance. Given this, the party included among its ranks those such as David Widgery and Roger Huddle, both co-founders (with Red Saunders) of RAR, who understood popular culture as a medium through which people 'find their pleasure, entertainment and celebration' alongside 'their sexual identity, their political courage and their strength to change'.<sup>21</sup> Punk, therefore, was read as a cultural response to the on-going socio-economic crisis that had engendered industrial protest and exacerbated racial tensions in Britain. In the words of Garry Bushell, writing for *Socialist Worker* in December 1976, punk's aggression reflected the anger of a generation who had graduated from school only to serve their time on street corners and the dole. It was working-class rebellion, he argued, a 'violent reaction to a society collapsing around them' that the SWP needed to channel 'into a real revolutionary movement'.<sup>22</sup>

The revolutionary potential that some on the left perceived in punk took a variety of forms. First, as should already be clear, punk was recognised to be an expression of revolt; as importantly, it was first read as an expression of *working-class* revolt. Now, the shortcomings of too overt a class reading of punk have long been demonstrated.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, punk's urbanity and rhetoric of rebellion lent it an oppositional edge that *was* often expressed in socio-economic terms.<sup>24</sup> There was, moreover, a significant strand of punk that proudly proclaimed its working-class identity, leading to certain

bands—most notably the Angelic Upstarts and Sham 69—being fêted for their supposed honesty and class credibility.<sup>25</sup>

Second, the left welcomed and, to a notable extent, directed punk's commitment to anti-racism. There had, initially, been some concern that the apparently unfocused nature of punk's ire would eventually drift rightwards towards the NF or BM.<sup>26</sup> Most obviously, punk's early use of the swastika raised alarm and both the Sex Pistols and The Clash were reprimanded by leftist groups and student committees convinced that songs such as 'No Future' (the original title for 'God Save the Queen') and 'White Riot' were fascist.<sup>27</sup> For enthusiasts on the left, therefore, it became essential to align punk to the anti-racist cause, picking up and propagating anti-racist comments from the likes of Johnny Rotten and Joe Strummer, and cultivating affinities between punk and elements of black youth culture. Thus, RAR quickly organised gigs that presented punk and reggae bands on the same bill, championed punk in its magazine (*Temporary Hoarding*), and ensured that punk bands dominated the carnivals organised in association with the ANL.<sup>28</sup>

Third, punk was soon recognised to have created a welcome opportunity for women to form bands and express their opinions.<sup>29</sup> Again, there had initially been some concern that punk harboured misogynistic tendencies.<sup>30</sup> However, the high profile of women within the early punk fraternity (Vivienne Westwood, Jordan, Siouxsie Sioux) was complemented by bands such as Siouxsie and the Banshees, The Slits, X-Ray Spex, The Raincoats, Au Pairs, Delta 5, Ludus and Poison Girls emerging to challenge the masculine conventions of popular music. Punk, Lynne Hutchinson argued, represented a new attitude in music that women could relate to; it allowed women to contest perceived notions of sexuality and offered a space for women to perform and articulate an overtly feminist viewpoint.<sup>31</sup>

Fourth, punk's rhetoric of autonomy fed into wider debates on the left as to the potential for cultural revolt within a capitalist system. For some, the Sex Pistols had instigated a direct challenge to the music industry and the media that sustained it; the band represented a deliberate act of provocation and demystification. Simultaneously, however, the self-financed release of Buzzcocks' *Spiral Scratch* ep (1977) on the band's own New Hormones label offered an alternative approach for countless bands to produce, print and promote their own records. This, in many ways, replicated what CPGB-aligned musicians such as Henry Cow had begun to argue for: a 'democratisation' of music that allowed artists to control the process of production and to circumnavigate the music industry in pursuit of greater freedom of expression.<sup>32</sup> Bands such as the Desperate Bicycle and Scritti Politti, whose self-released eps *Challenge* deemed as 'important' as any records by the Sex Pistols or The Clash, revealed details of the costs of production and argued that 'the record industry will keep on churning out so-called anti-establishment lyrics quite happily until you start attacking the pricing structure of records or attacking their profits. And that's really where to start. We need a continued attack.'<sup>33</sup> Not dissimilarly, the proliferation of home-made punk fanzines was recognised to serve a similar function in relation to the music press.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, many on the left appreciated—and tried to inform—punk’s willingness to question the lyrical and structural norms of popular music. Punk’s disregard for musical proficiency and claims to realism were seen to break down the barriers that traditionally separated musicians and their audience. In punk, the audience were encouraged to get involved; to form their own groups, to interact with the bands during and after gigs, to make films, write fanzines and dress distinctively. By 1978, moreover, several groups inspired by punk’s spirit of revolt endeavoured to better focus its political point and purpose. Lyrically, issues relating to contemporary events, sexual politics, the commercialisation of leisure under capital and the tyranny of imperialism came to the fore. In some instances, questions of hegemony and reification were introduced into songs, LPs and interviews; a few bands even boasted members with open political affiliations.<sup>35</sup> As importantly, punk and post-punk bands sought to subvert rock’s form, splicing together different musical styles, rejecting traditional song structures, and discarding such recognised clichés of rock ‘n’ roll as guitar solos or on-stage macho posturing. The idea was to challenge the audience’s preconceptions while simultaneously dissolving the power structures that divided the performer and spectator.

Of course, there were many on the left who saw punk as a passing fad that brought no positive value to the broader struggle for socialism. Just as traditionalists in the CPGB bemoaned the cultural emphasis of those seeking to reform the party, so the SWP’s Tony Cliff was forced to intervene following a conference resolution that objected to the *Socialist Worker* becoming a ‘punk paper’. The letter pages of *Challenge*, *Militant*, *Socialist Worker* and *Young Socialist* also revealed divergent views as to punk’s political meaning and potential, while the Socialist Festival of Music organised by the CPGB-related Music for Socialism in the summer of 1977 was reportedly dominated by an acrimonious debate as to punk’s progressive or reactionary tendencies.<sup>36</sup>

The left’s traditional response to popular culture—including rock and pop music—had been to dismiss it either as irrelevant or little more than a product of American cultural imperialism.<sup>37</sup> In somewhat more sophisticated terms, the arguments of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer were applied to determine the ‘meaning’ of popular culture against its mode of production. Taken to its extreme, however, such reasoning could declare punk but another example of pop music serving as a ‘pacification agent of the young proletariat’, its rebellion but a simulated substitute for the real ‘revolutionary becoming of the proletariat’.<sup>38</sup> For Julian Leach and others in the WRP, punk was ‘tailor made’ for the interests of capital; a ‘breeding ground for fascism’ that served less as a soporific and more as a deliberate plot designed to provide an ‘excuse for the growing police state whose ready target is the revolutionary working class’.<sup>39</sup> Not dissimilarly, the Maoist musicians of the People’s Liberation Music felt able to dismiss punk as ‘fascist’ simply by looking at the cover of The Clash’s eponymous debut LP, released in April 1977. Not only was it stamped with the logo of a global capitalist monopoly (CBS), but its sleeve featured a symbol of imperialism (the Union Jack on Paul Simonon’s shirt pocket) and propaganda for state forces in its back-cover image of policemen charging at rioters in Notting Hill.<sup>40</sup>

Despite such critiques, most leftist commentaries on punk and youth culture rejected their being read as a commercial conspiracy to redirect young people away from the class struggle. Even the WRP had softened its analysis by mid-1978, inviting bands such as X-Ray Spex and Chelsea to play at its 'Jobs for Youth' events and providing space in *Young Socialist* for record reviews and reports on the Angelic Upstarts, The Ruts and Sham 69.<sup>41</sup> Rather, the relationship between culture, commerce, consumption and politics was broadly recognised to be a complex and interactive process, into which political meaning could be inserted and from which cultural forms could be utilised for progressive or revolutionary ends.<sup>42</sup> The success of RAR, moreover, revived the idea of popular music serving as a medium for mass mobilisation and diverted much of the left's discussion towards the ways by which it could recruit and direct those politicised in punk's wake.<sup>43</sup> For many on the organised left, therefore, attention shifted away from the political meanings contained within punk as a musical form, process and youth culture, and towards the extent and nature of a band's or musician's political commitment. So, for example, whereas the Tom Robinson Band was applauded for their willingness to align with an array of 'progressive' causes and write suitably 'conscious' lyrics, so many other bands became subject to (ideological) criticism or deemed unworthy of serious interest.<sup>44</sup> If the left recognised punk as providing a cultural outlet for dissent, then its apparently temporal nature and contradictory impulses meant that it offered a somewhat unreliable means of propagating socialism.

### Hitler's in the Charts Again

The 1970s saw British fascism emerge from the doldrums in which it had laboured since Sir Oswald Mosley's hey-day in the 1930s. The principal vehicle for this was the NF, which formed in 1967 and grew steadily thereafter as questions of immigration and national identity found their way to the centre of the mainstream political agenda. NF marches became more frequent and larger in scale as the decade drew on, while its paper sellers became a common sight on street corners, at football matches and even outside the school gate in certain inner-city areas. This, in turn, provoked opposition from local community groups and the left, leading ultimately to instances of violent disorder that ranged from small-scale skirmishes between rival activists to the bloody battles of Lewisham (1977) and Southall (1979).<sup>45</sup>

Not surprisingly, the NF's growth related to the mood of crisis that hung over Britain in the 1970s. Loss of empire, entry into Europe and mounting economic problems ensured that far-right appeals to patriotism and national revival had a resonance. Immigration provided a simplistic and prejudicial explanation for rising unemployment and related social issues, while the assertive militancy of the trade union movement fanned fears of incipient communism and lent credence to the idea that political power was no longer the preserve of parliament. In addition, disillusionment with the Labour government and a growing sense by which the non-Labour left was associated with students and middle-class intellectuals served to open

up a political space for the NF among what had previously been Labour's core working-class vote. Young people, in particular, became a target for NF recruitment in the mid-to-late 1970s, leading to the formation of the Young National Front (YNF) in 1977.

There was competition. As with the left, the far right had a tradition of factionalism that ensured rival organisations formed in and around the NF's slipstream. So, for example, the National Party was founded in 1976 by John Kingsley Read following a schism in the NF leadership, while the BM continued to propagate a more openly neo-Nazi political brand that prioritised street-level confrontation over any kind of electoral strategy. Other smaller groupings existed (League of Saint George, Column 88), before the NF's disappointing general election performance in 1979 led to a round of splits and divisions that threw up the New National Front (NNF), the British Democratic Party, the Constitutional Movement and, in 1982, the British National Party. The immediate beneficiary of all this was the BM, whose membership rose to an estimated 3000 in 1982, though the NF also retained strong local bases of support in the 1980s.<sup>46</sup>

With regard to youth culture and popular music, the far right's official position was typically conservative. In simple terms, 'classic' art forms were associated with 'classic civilisations'; that is, culture was seen to reflect the strength and vitality of a nation or race. For far-right leaders such as the NF's John Tyndall, this meant a veneration of non-modernist art forms rooted in the European or British past. Pop music, by contrast, was seen to be an 'alien' and degenerate cultural form that served only to distort Britain's true identity.<sup>47</sup> In the words of Colin Jordan, the founder of the BM, rock and pop were a 'manifestation of the jungle'; a 'musical counterpart' to the broader 'Afro-Asian influx' that had facilitated Britain's 'national decline'. Punks, meanwhile, were simply 'freaks' who shared nothing with 'real and radical racialism'.<sup>48</sup>

Despite this, there were those on the far right who saw potential in punk's cultural assault. Most immediately, punk's adoption of the swastika drew predictable attention. Early in 1977, the *British Patriot* carried an anonymous article suggesting that: 'With the now notorious cropped-hair punk rockers making the headlines dressed as they are with Iron Crosses and Swastikas on their armbands, the hippies and the long hairs of yesteryear are fighting a rearguard scuttle'. Punk was a sign of white youngsters becoming aware of their own identity, the writer suggested, going so far as to conclude that pubs advertising 'punk nights' were effectively issuing a 'discrete colour bar'.<sup>49</sup> Newspapers, too, reported that the NF had been alerted by punk's use of the Nazi symbol and so sought to recruit from among punk audiences. According to Mark Perry, who edited the first British punk fanzine, *Sniffin' Glue*, the NF even invited him along to one of their London meetings.<sup>50</sup>

Not dissimilarly, as John Street has noted, the far right picked up on aspects of punk's language and imagery to reinforce—or signpost—opinions already held within the racist milieu.<sup>51</sup> This tended towards the superficial. A song title, group name or picture sleeve that made reference to race, nation, violence, fascism or anti-communism was often enough to warrant a favourable mention in the YNF's *Bulldog*

magazine. As a result, even avowed anti-fascists such as The Clash, Stiff Little Fingers, the Angelic Upstarts, The Ruts and The Specials found their way onto the NF's recommended play list. But the very fact that punk engaged with such issues as class, national identity, racial tensions, state oppression and street-level violence ensured that it shared common interests with members (and potential members) of Britain's far right. Punk's fascination with the history, aesthetics and iconography of fascism was often ambiguous enough for tendentious claims to be made, as with The Skids' *Days of Europa* (1979) LP, which came wrapped in images drawn from the 1936 Olympic games, or the Nazi signifiers that decorated the early records of Joy Division and Throbbing Gristle.<sup>52</sup>

Because of this, some on the far right saw in punk's disaffection a rejection of formal politics that opened a way to recruitment. As noted above, the NF—along with the BM—had begun to focus its attention on working-class youth by the mid-1970s, propagating the far-right message at football matches and towards those looking for an 'alternative to the hum-drum life of the liberal society'.<sup>53</sup> With punk, which seemed to politicise popular music, a further point of contact emerged. Punk's aggression, rebelliousness and claims to working-class authenticity appealed to just those that the NF and BM wished to mobilise. For Chris 'Chubby' Henderson, who already spent much of his youth scrapping on and around the terraces of Chelsea's Stamford Bridge, punk provided the perfect soundtrack to his politics and lifestyle. 'The lads fought on a Saturday afternoon, and the new punk bands sang about it later in their raw unrefined lyrics', he remembered; 'now the boys would smash up a pub to the sound of The Clash or Generation X instead of the Four Tops'.<sup>54</sup> As a result, Henderson and others active on the far right began to adopt certain bands as their own, bringing their politics with them and rejecting leftist attempts to channel punk's revolt towards more 'progressive' ends.

The presence of young right-wing activists at punk gigs soon encouraged NF and BM organisers to forge more substantial links to youth culture. Racist and nationalist interventions at gigs were regularly reported in *Bulldog*, while members were encouraged to write to the music press and distribute NF/BM literature inside and outside gigs.<sup>55</sup> In Leeds, Eddy Morrison launched the *Punk Front* magazine in 1978, before helping to develop the Rock Against Communism (RAC) campaign organised from within the YNF as a counter to RAR.<sup>56</sup> 'For years, white British youths have had to put up with left-wing filth in rock music', the YNF's Joe Pearce wrote in 1979. 'They have had to put up with the anti-NF lies in the music press. They have had commie organisations like Rock Against Racism trying to brainwash them. But now there is an anti-commie backlash!'<sup>57</sup> Such a 'backlash' proved, initially at least, of limited success; a handful of minor punk bands (The Dentists, The Ventz and White Boss) rallied to the NF cause and an inaugural concert was held at London's Conway Hall on 18 August 1979 in front of about 150–300 people. From this, however, the idea of 'white power' music would slowly grow. The re-emergence of Skrewdriver—an early punk band from Blackpool led by Ian Stuart—reinvigorated RAC in the early 1980s, leading

the NF to establish White Noise Records in 1983 and thereby pave the way for the Blood & Honour franchise that developed international links over the 1980s.<sup>58</sup>

The far right also sought to tap into the various subcultural revivals that mutated out of punk in the later 1970s.<sup>59</sup> Most obviously, both the BM and NF recruited from among the young skinheads who re-emerged from around mid-1977. Oi!, a hard-edged punk style defined by its working-class rhetoric and links to skinhead culture, was recognised by *Bulldog* as ‘music of the ghetto. Its energy expresses the frustrations of white youths. Its lyrics describe the reality of life on the dole . . . It is about fighting the government, about fighting the whole system. It is the music of white rebellion.’<sup>60</sup> In fact, the primary focus of Oi! centred on the experience of being a young working-class male.<sup>61</sup> Bands such as the Cockney Rejects, the 4-Skins, Infa Riot, The Business and the Last Resort sang of football violence, youth culture, petty crime, unemployment and police harassment. But Oi!’s oft-repeated references to class identity and social inequality, combined with its unabashed patriotism and suspicion of middle-class socialism, ensured that it won plaudits from the far right just as easily as it raised suspicions on the left.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, 2-tone bands such as Madness and Bad Manners found their gigs home to significant numbers of young BM and NF members. Indeed, 2-tone’s amalgam of punk and ska provided a connecting point between skinhead culture past and present; a heady brew that often manifested itself in violent confrontation between those who recognised its cross-cultural lineage (several 2-tone bands comprised black and white members) and others keen to make connections to a more racially distinct form of politics.<sup>63</sup>

Despite such efforts, far-right attempts to use punk as a means of validating or reinforcing a set of racist or nationalistic political values proved of limited effect. Not only were very few bands willing to align themselves with organisations or campaigns located on the far right, but the connections that were made between punk and either fascism or extreme nationalism were largely superficial. A handful of punk/Oi!/2-tone band members and associates registered far-right pasts and evidently formed part of a social milieu in which NF and BM politics were present. More generally, it may be argued that the far right came to see punk and its related offshoots as providing a site—rather than a medium—of political engagement, seeking to lay claim to the social spaces in which the culture was present (gigs, the street, shops). In so doing, the politics of the BM and NF competed with—and were often eclipsed by—the more pertinent concerns of (male) youth, such as football rivalries, cultural style or local affinity. But, even if far-right politics helped inform the identity of some within the punk and skinhead subculture, then the vast majority resisted and rejected the substance of the fascist message. ‘White power’ music may have had its roots in punk, but Skrewdriver were very much the runt of a far more diverse and complex litter.<sup>64</sup>

### **Bakunin Would Have Loved It**

There is no doubt that the politics of the far left and far right fed into and helped inform British punk and post-punk culture over the mid-to-late 1970s and early

1980s. Numerous punk and post-punk bands aligned themselves with and supported RAR, through which many young music fans came into contact with an array of leftist political causes. Alongside the heavily politicised content of *Temporary Hoarding*, the songs and interviews of several punk-inspired bands related closely to issues then prevalent on the left; punk fanzines often combined musical features with musings on anything from anarchy and consumerism to sexual politics and apartheid; and the approach of punk-informed record labels (Action Group, Refill, Rough Trade, St. Pancras) was often self-consciously political.<sup>65</sup> Simultaneously, fascism remained a constant source of fascination within punk, both as a warning from history that seemingly chimed with the times and as the ultimate taboo to which even the slightest reference passed as an act of transgression. Arguably, however, the NF and BM's decision to disrupt—or to colonise—punk and 2-tone gigs also brought a very real fascist presence to the edge of mainstream youth culture. As a result, punk records, fanzines, gigs and interviews became more than mere cultural ephemera; they served as sites of political discussion, exploration, conflict and exchange.

Yet, the relationship between organised political groupings and punk was fraught with multiple tensions. Punk, be it defined in musical, stylistic or commodified terms, proved too diverse and incoherent a cultural form to be harnessed to any distinct political ideology. Punk resonated because it captured a mood; it gave vent to frustrations of both socio-economic and existential origin at the precise moment when Britain itself was passing through a period of crisis, uncertainty and change. Of course, punk's appeal stemmed also from its being visually and aurally exciting (not to mention wilfully puerile at times). But, its real power was born from the frisson caused by its contradictions; by its clash of subcultural styles, its conflicting political symbolism, its fusion of cultural innovation and popularism, its collective individualism and creative negation.

Punk did boast political roots. As is well known, Malcolm McLaren (the manager of the Sex Pistols) and Jamie Reid (who designed the Sex Pistols' artwork) were heavily influenced by the ideas and approach of radical political groups such as the Lettrists, Situationists and King Mob. Their subsequent use of political symbols and slogans, not to mention the Sex Pistols' statement of intent, 'Anarchy in the UK', deliberately invited a politicised reading of the band's actions and purpose.<sup>66</sup> But if punk was inherently political, in that it critically engaged with the world of which it was part and served as a means to express anger and opinion, then it tended to resist being aligned either politically or ideologically. So, for example, Johnny Rotten could state categorically that he found NF politics 'ridiculous and inhumane', but that did not thereby translate into support for the revolutionary left, who Rotten criticised for being 'too separated from reality' and whose approach to working people 'comes across as a condescending attitude which isn't appreciated'.<sup>67</sup> The Clash, too, whose mission statement of being 'anti-fascist... anti-violence... anti-racist and... pro-creative' led many on the left to regard the band as providing punk with a social conscience, rejected the SWP's overtures of more formal collaboration. While regularly denouncing the NF and lending support to RAR, the band's Joe Strummer also

complained of the SWP ‘coming up and saying “come and join us”. But they can fuck off, the wankers, that’s just dogma. I don’t want no dogma.’<sup>68</sup>

Punk, then, began to articulate a kind of politicised anti-politics. This, Mark Perry explained to *Temporary Hoarding*, related to a suspicion of organisations and a sense by which the ideologies of both the left and right served only to negate the individual. Punk was about thinking and doing things for yourself, Perry argued.<sup>69</sup> More intellectually, Howard Devoto—as lead singer and lyricist with Magazine—retained an existential disregard for ideological and political certainties that led a socialist friend of the time to comment: ‘when the barricades go up you’ll be shot by both sides’. In the song of the same name, Devoto celebrated the non-aligned individual who is lost in the crowd and somehow ‘outside of everything’.<sup>70</sup> But punk’s rejection of organised politics also drew from a more intuitive disregard for institutions and authority. According to members of both the Angelic Upstarts and The Ruts, their politics—and support for RAR—were based on principle and ‘gut reaction’; it did not mean that either band subscribed to a political label. Or, to quote The Ruts’ Malcolm Owen: ‘None of us are Socialist Workers [ . . . ] we just don’t like racists’.<sup>71</sup>

As this suggests, many punk and, later, 2-tone, Oi! and post-punk bands were willing to declare their opposition to racism and the politics of the NF and BM but remained suspicious of the motivations and objectives of leftist groups seeking to channel such protest into more formal support. This was occasionally born out of confusion. Jimmy Pursey, the lead singer with Sham 69, struggled to cope with the demands made of him by both his audience and the political organisations that sometimes staged or frequented his gigs.<sup>72</sup> Pursey knew little about the political ideologies that competed to claim his band as their own; his ‘politics’ were based primarily on uniting working-class ‘kids’ to vent their frustrations at the various establishment forces (teachers, politicians, policemen, social workers, etc.) deemed to be controlling their lives. As a result, Pursey turned up at events organised by just about every acronym on the far left, while also trying to harness the influence of a significant NF/BM contingent who regularly attended Sham’s London gigs. The result, not surprisingly, was criticism from the left for not doing more to expel rightist elements from his audience and entourage, and from the right for lending support to RAR and appearing at leftist gigs. So the story goes, Pursey received a death threat prior to his appearance at the ANL/RAR carnival in April 1978, following which the regular outbreaks of violence at the band’s gigs in the capital led him to propose a gig strike by all punk musicians and, ultimately, to refuse to play live again following a BM invasion of Sham’s ‘last stand’ at The Rainbow in July 1979.

A more rounded critique of the political left and right was proposed by Crass. Crass brought to punk an agenda and a worldview informed by a radical politics that predated and transcended the supposed ‘year zero’ of 1976. They adopted anarchy not simply as a provocative symbol of personal self-determination, but as the basis for an alternative society capable of sustaining itself outside the mainstream. The band lived collectively, refused all cooperation with the music industry on anything other than their own terms, printed and distributed numerous incendiary pamphlets outlining their points of view

and lent their support to a range of radical causes. The band's defining statement insisted that 'there is no authority but yourself', a position that fed into a far broader analysis of the various systems, ideologies and institutions that maintained political and socio-economic power in Britain and beyond. For Crass, therefore, as well as for associated bands such as Poison Girls, Conflict and Flux of Pink Indians, 'both right and left-wing states employ force to maintain power; people are reduced to simple tools servicing the machinery of the state and as such are expected to live and, if need be, die for that state'. By extension, they rejected the 'power politics' of the CPGB and SWP as well as those of the NF and BM, going so far as to denounce RAR for trying to claim punk for the organised left and issuing a single, 'Bloody Revolutions', that accused the socialist revolutionaries of the same 'false logic' that had led to the Holocaust. 'The seizure of power', Crass argued, was all 'your revolution's for'.<sup>73</sup>

As for the Oi! bands with links to the skinhead culture so often blamed for right-wing violence, their politics were primarily articulated in class terms. Indeed, the series of debates and conferences organised by Garry Bushell in 1981, who by this time was finding his overtly class-based (or 'workerist') socialism at odds with the prevailing line of the SWP, defined Oi! as 'pro-working class', avowedly anti-Tory, and committed to fighting police harassment and unemployment. Those present proposed to unite all working-class kids in common cause and recognised that 'black and white kids have got more in common with each other than they have got against each other'.<sup>74</sup> Given such analysis, the far left was rejected as much for class as political reasons. Thus, 'Suburban Rebels' by The Business based its lyrics on a poem by Garry Johnson, dismissing the left as the middle-class 'sons and daughters of well-off bankers'; that is, students who played at being revolutionaries while knowing little about the social inequalities of which they complained. Simultaneously, most Oi! bands wanted nothing to do with either the NF or the BM. Some—including the Cockney Rejects—literally beat the fascist presence out of their audience.<sup>75</sup> Others sought to accommodate fascist elements in an attempt to forge some kind of working-class unity. Or, as the 4-skins' Tom McCourt put it, 'we are the politics of the street [ . . . ] we don't want any seig heiling. If there is any, we always try to cut it out. Equally, we don't want any lefties waving their red books'.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, however, such an approach began to unravel when in July 1981 an Oi! gig at the Hambrough Tavern in Southall was attacked by local Asian youths wary of a large skinhead presence coming into an area renowned for the violence that accompanied the NF's election campaign of 1979. The result was wide-scale media coverage portraying Oi! as the soundtrack of choice for Nazi skinheads committed to racial violence, a misnomer that retains common currency today.

As should be clear, punk contained within it a diverse range of political impulses, references and trajectories. Its emergence and subsequent development was very much entwined with the political and socio-economic context in which its protagonists and audience came of age. Punk reflected the world of which it was part while also railing against it. Its impetus was one of negation; a critique of prevailing cultural, political and social mores. It asked questions and expressed both disillusionment and discontent; it did not provide answers other than 'do it yourself'. As a result, attempts

by both the far left and the far right to codify punk's politics, either in relation to a particular social issue or towards a specific ideology, could inform punk's development but prove difficult to sustain. To define or align punk was to stifle it and thereby disarm the dialectic that had initially provided its resonance.

### Conclusion: Conservatives and Communists, They're All the Bleedin' Same

By the early 1980s, the enthusiasm and hopes pinned on punk by activists within the far left and far right had somewhat diminished. The election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979 paved the way for a major readjustment of British politics, breaking the mould of the post-war period under the hammer of monetarism and what Stuart Hall labelled 'authoritarian populism'.<sup>77</sup> Among the victims of this were the NF, whose forward march was blocked—in part—by the Conservatives' hardened rhetoric on immigration and law and order. But the left suffered too. Labour's practical socialism had already run into difficulties as it grappled with the economic problems of the late 1960s and mid-to-late 1970s. Labour's failure to manage the crisis, combined with the perceived limitations of its collectivist vision, helped forge the context in which punk emerged. In response, Britain's revolutionary groups battled to adapt to the changing times, imagining themselves as heirs to Labour while simultaneously struggling to navigate the changing political landscape ushered in by the Thatcher administration.

Amidst all this, punk's legacy was picked over and usually found wanting. The punk graphics disappeared from the pages of *Challenge*; the SWP's support for RAR was wound down following the NF's electoral failure, while those arguing that the *Socialist Worker* had become too preoccupied with youth culture succeeded in refocusing its agenda in line with the changing priorities of the party. Even the advent of 2-tone and the riotous summer of 1981 was seemingly checked by the emergence of New Romanticism and New Pop, both of which the left tended to see as either frivolous or self-defeating.<sup>78</sup> The result, despite RAR's claim to have contributed to the NF's collapse, was a sense of disillusionment recorded in a series of articles over the early 1980s.<sup>79</sup> While musicians who propagated a political message were still covered and coveted on the left, the notion that a musical style or youth culture could form the basis for wider political mobilisation was seriously checked.

On the far right, the failure to claim either punk or Oi! wholly for itself led eventually to the development of a distinctly racist musical movement around bands such as Skrewdriver and Brutal Attack.<sup>80</sup> Though *Bulldog's* RAC chart continued to include songs by non-racist and anti-fascist bands into 1983–84, an emphasis was placed on promoting groups that emerged from within the ultra-nationalist movement. At the same time, others on the far right reasserted their belief that popular music was 'degenerate' and, as the NF splintered into warring factions, so its implosion was partly blamed on attempts to appeal to youth cultures through music such as punk. In one exchange, the NF rump was accused by Tyndall's NNF of representing 'the gays, the punks and the racial Trotskyists'.<sup>81</sup>

Punk, then, was initially understood by sections of the far left and the far right as an expression of youthful—primarily working-class—revolt. In both cases, such a reading was instigated below the level of party leadership, thereby revealing a generational shift in the composition and perspective of Britain's revolutionary cadre. It reflected, too, a cultural turn in their respective politics. For the left, in particular, it was part of a significant move away from its traditional attachment to class and towards a more subjectivist or identity-based politics.<sup>82</sup> For the left and right, it affirmed culture as a site of political struggle, with both accusing mainstream popular culture of diverting attention away from the 'real' inequities of society. Punk, it seemed, offered a challenge to this, using youth culture and music to open up a space through which to voice dissent or dissatisfaction. Where the left saw music as a medium for protest, a mouthpiece to propagate 'progressive' ideas and register opposition to the various inequities of capitalism, the right applied a more spatial approach, seeking to claim ownership of the bands, venues and localities in which youth culture was given expression. This, in turn, blurred into—but was more typically eclipsed by—less politically acute tensions based around subcultural allegiance (punks versus teds, skins versus punks, etc.), football rivalries and the type of turf warfare that had long been characteristic of youth groups and local gangs. Ultimately, however, neither the right nor the left proved able to incorporate the concerns raised by punk into their own ideological framework. The difficulties of claiming popular music or youth culture as the basis for a political movement are legion.<sup>83</sup> With regard to punk, it *did* provide an outlet for a form of protest, and it *did* bring political discourse into the mainstream of British culture, some of which was informed by existing political groupings. But, this was done in a reflexive and not necessarily consistent fashion. Punk questioned, reported and rejected far more than it defined or directed. As a result, attempts to give punk a coherent ideological form, either from within or without, proved contentious. For the far left and far right, the harnessing of youth culture to their respective causes may have brought a brief return in terms of profile and influence among a certain milieu, but it served also to cut across, fracture and undermine the socio-economic or racial certainties that had previously anchored their conceptions of socialism and nationalism. Rather than secure lasting support, such a focus helped reaffirm notions of individualism and cultural experimentation that lent themselves more to political fragmentation or disengagement than to activism mediated through traditional political forms (parties, elections, meetings, etc.). Punk's anger, far more often than not, was aimed at organisations, institutions and authority in general, and that included self-appointed vanguards recruiting from the fringes of Britain's polity.

## Notes

[1] 'Open Letter to the Sex Pistols', *Challenge*, August/September 1977, 11.

[2] Punk is open to a variety of definitions. It is here defined in its British context and relating to people and cultural practices inspired or informed by the Sex Pistols from 1976. Such a

definition recognises that punk was quick to splinter into multiple sub-sects that often conflicted with each other, but posits that punk tended to place itself in opposition to the *status quo*, disregarded symbols of authority and hierarchy, purported to provide a voice for the disenfranchised and disaffected, and extolled the virtues of self-sufficiency and autonomy (do-it-yourself). This, in turn, suggests punk may best be understood as a cultural process of critical engagement rather than a specific musical or sartorial style. As a term, it is used to encompass the initial punk 'movement' of 1976–77 and those who retained an open affinity to it through to the 1980s; the subcultural revivals that formed out of punk's trashing of pop's past (skinheads, new mod, 2-tone); the anarcho-punks that gathered around the Crass collective; and the post-punk milieu that understood punk to have opened up cultural spaces of both musical and intellectual innovation.

- [3] Roger Huddle, 'Punk Rock: Reactionary, Revolutionary, or Both', *International Discussion Bulletin*, November 1977, 22–3.
- [4] *The Times*, 16 January 1980; *Young Socialist*, 1 April 1978.
- [5] Paul Marris, 'Punktual Product of the Crisis', *Socialist Challenge*, 4 August 1977, 15.
- [6] Among the many surveys of the period, see Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*; Harrison, *Finding a Role*; Whitehead, *The Writing on the Wall*. For the construction of the crisis, see Hay, 'Chronicles of a Death Foretold'; Hay, 'Narrating Crisis'.
- [7] 'Crass—"Heavy Mob" Invade', *The Leveller*, October 1979, 6; Crass/Poison Girls, 'Statement'.
- [8] Cross, 'The Hippies Now Wear Black'; Worley, 'One Nation Under the Bomb'.
- [9] Dick Hebdige makes much of this in his *Subculture*, 87. For a warning against seeing the media construct of crisis as necessarily accurate, see Moran, "'Stand Up and be Counted'".
- [10] Caroline Coon, 'Sex Pistols: Rotten to the Core', *Melody Maker*, 27 November 1976, 34–5; *The Sun*, 15 October 1976; *Daily Mirror*, 6 December 1976; *The Guardian*, 4 June 1977.
- [11] Clarke, et al., 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class', 9–74.
- [12] Street, *Rebel Rock*, 51–62.
- [13] For just a selection, see Widgery, *Beating Time*; Goodyer, *Crisis Music*; Renton, *When We Touched the Sky*. For skinheads and the far right, see Cotter, 'Sounds of Hate'; Brown, 'Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics'. Lowles and Silver, *White Noise*. For a broader discussion of punk and racism, see Sabin, 'I Won't Let the Dago By', 199–218.
- [14] Clutterbuck, *Britain in Agony*.
- [15] Andrews, *End Games and New Times*. CPGB membership ebbed and flowed following the Second World War, but fell steadily from the mid-1960s. Having stood at 34,281 in 1964, it numbered just 12,711 in 1985.
- [16] For an overview, see Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*; Tomlinson, *Left, Right*.
- [17] According to Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, 151, 205, the SWP numbered approximately 4000 in 1980; the WRP some 3000; and the IMG just 650 in 1976. Militant, meanwhile, numbered approximately 1000 members in 1975, rising to nearly 2000 in 1979 and over 4000 in 1983. In terms of composition, Callaghan (*Far Left in British Politics*, 98) records that in 1972, 26% of the International Socialists' membership were listed as manual workers.
- [18] This began with Martin Jacques, 'Trends in Youth Culture: Some Aspects', *Marxism Today*, September 1973, 268–80, and continued through until April 1975.
- [19] Bradshaw, 'Trends in Youth Culture in the 1970s'.
- [20] *Challenge*, February/March 1977, 14. See also Steve Munby, 'Bored and Angry: The Politics of Youth Unemployment', *Marxism Today*, June 1978, 183–91.
- [21] Widgery, *Beating Time*, 56. Huddle, Widgery and Saunders launched RAR 'as a gut reaction by socialists and music fans to the unbelievable hypocrisy of musicians who made their money out

- of black music and then turn against black people' (*Socialist Worker*, 2 October 1976). The main impetus for RAR came from racist remarks made by Eric Clapton and the references to fascism made by David Bowie in 1976.
- [22] Garry Bushell, 'Sex Pistols: Whose Finger on the Trigger?' *Socialist Worker*, 18 December 1976, 11. See also Roger Huddle, 'Punk Rock Rules?' *Socialist Worker*, 11 December 1976, 5.
- [23] Simon Frith, 'The Punk Bohemians', *New Society*, 8 March 1978, 535–6; Frith and Horne, *Art into Pop*, 123–61; Simonelli, 'Anarchy, Pop and Violence'.
- [24] For example, Caroline Coon, 'Sex Pistols', *Melody Maker*, 27 November 1976; Steve Walsh, 'The Very Angry Clash', *Sniffin' Glue*, 4 October 1976. Likewise, songs by The Clash and the Sex Pistols' working-class backgrounds soon led to punk being hailed as 'dole queue rock', as in David Marsh, 'Dole Queue Rock', *New Society*, 20 January 1977, 112–14.
- [25] *Challenge*, April/May 1978; *Red Rebel*, January/February 1979; *Young Socialist*, 24 June, 22 July and 19 August 1978.
- [26] See Nigel Fountain's 'Warning Note' in *Socialist Worker*, 18 December 1976, 11; Phil Hardy and Dave Laing, 'Who Says the Kids are Alright?' *The Leveller*, December 1977, 17–18.
- [27] Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 243.
- [28] I. Wright, 'New Wave', *Challenge*, February/March 1977, 14; Roger Huddle, 'Hard Rain', *Socialist Review*, July/August 1978, 12–13; Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill, 'The Revolution is not for Music. Music is for the Revolution', *Socialist Worker*, 29 April 1978, 5. For the CPGB's more uncertain relationship with RAR, see Smith, 'Are the Kids United'.
- [29] Lynne Hutchinson, 'Women in Punk', *Challenge*, April 1978 (Women's Special), 5; Lindsay Cooper, 'Rock Around the Cock', *The Leveller*, October 1978, 10–12; 'Women in Rock' issue of *The Leveller*, August 1981, 7–20; Sue Steward, 'Sound Barriers', *Marxism Today*, May 1982, 36–7. For an overview, see Reddington, *The Lost Women of Rock Music*.
- [30] Bushell, 'Sex Pistols', 11; Hardy and Laing, 'Who Says the Kids are Alright?' 17–8; Dave Laing, 'Interpreting Punk Rock', *Marxism Today*, April 1978, 126; 'Notes', *Socialist Worker*, 14 October 1978, 5.
- [31] Hutchinson, 'Women in Punk', 5.
- [32] CP/YCL/21/1, Minutes of the [CPGB] Arts and Leisure Committee, 11 November 1976 (Labour History Archive and Study Centre [LHASC], Manchester).
- [33] *Challenge*, April/May 1978, 5; *Challenge*, September/October 1978, 7; Matthew Lynn, 'Music and Capitalism', *Challenge*, August 1979, 13.
- [34] Anthony Wall, 'Punk', *Comment*, 5 March 1977, 72–4; Laing, 'Interpreting Punk Rock', 124; Triggs, 'Scissors and Glue'.
- [35] For example, Scritti Politti, *Skank Bloc Bologna* ep (St Pancras, 1978); Scritti Politti, 'Hegemony', on *4 A-Sides* ep (Rough Trade, 1979); Gang of Four, *Entertainment* (EMI, 1979); Pop Group, 'She is Beyond Good and Evil' (Y, 1978). With regard political affiliation, Scritti's Green Gartside served on the editorial board of *Challenge* in the late 1970s; Tony Friel of The Fall (Tony Friel) was in the YCL and Crisis contained members of the SWP and IMG. In Leeds, meanwhile, the politics and approach of the Gang of Four, The Mekons and others was informed by leftist, feminist and radical tutors at the university. See Reynolds, *Rip it Up*, 110–28, 198–223.
- [36] Waite, 'Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll (and Communism)', 210–24; 242/2/1/3, Steve Jefferys, 'The Politics Behind the Row on the Paper' (Modern Record Centre, Warwick); John Hoyland, 'How Do Music and Socialism Connect?', *Comment*, 11 June 1977, 200–2.
- [37] See, for example, John Boyd, 'Trends in Youth Culture', *Marxism Today*, December 1973, 375–8.
- [38] Wise, 'The End of Music', 63–102. This was originally published as a pamphlet in 1978 and circulated around anarchist groups in Leeds. Its original title was 'Punk, Reggae; A Critique'.

- [39] See the articles in *The News Line*, 3 December 1976; and *Young Socialist*, 11 and 18 December 1976, 1 January and 5 March 1977, 7 January 1978, 4 August 1979.
- [40] Ian Walker, 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On', *The Leveller*, July/August 1977, 18–20; 'Who is Cornelius Cardew?', *NME*, 10 September 1977, 11–12; Simon Frith, 'Beyond the Dole Queue: The Politics of Punk', *Village Voice*, 24 October 1977, 77–9.
- [41] *Young Socialist*, 24 June, 22 July, 12 and 19 August 1978, 29 July 1979.
- [42] Bob Lentell, 'Youth in Contemporary Capitalism', *Marxism Today*, January 1978, 6–15; Paul Thompson, 'Youth Politics and Youth Culture', *Revolutionary Socialism*, Spring 1978, 11–15; Laing, 'Interpreting Punk Rock', 123–8. Laing later developed his analysis of punk in his book, *One Chord Wonders*.
- [43] John Hoyland and Mike Flood, 'You Can Lead a Horse to Water', *Socialist Review*, June 1978, 16–17; Mike Garner, 'Our Music? Their Music', *Socialist Review*, December 1978/January 1979, 34–5.
- [44] Lucy Toothpaste, 'Wouldn't You Like To Rip Him To Shreds', *Temporary Hoarding*, Summer 1978; Terry Allcock, 'The Sham in Sham 69', *Socialist Worker*, 25 November 1978, 10; Noel Halifax, 'Second Wave: A Punk Mortem', *Socialist Review*, April 1982, 35.
- [45] Walker, *The National Front*; Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*.
- [46] *Ibid.*; Hill and Bell, *The Other Face of Terror*.
- [47] Woodbridge, 'Purifying the Nation', 129–44; *Spearhead*, April and May 1981.
- [48] Colin Jordan, 'Letter', *British Patriot*, May/June 1977, 3.
- [49] A. Critic, 'Rock and Reich', *British Patriot*, January/February 1977, 3–4.
- [50] John Blake, 'Rock's Swastika Revolution', *Evening News*, 7 May 1977; Mick Farren, 'Fascism in the UK '77!', *NME*, 22 January 1977, 20–1.
- [51] Street, *Rebel Rock*, 51–6.
- [52] *Bulldog*, 16 (1979), 21 (1981), 29 (1982). See, for examples of fascist imagery/references, the cover of Joy Division's *Ideal for Living* ep (Enigma, 1978) and the logo for Throbbing Gristle's Industrial Records.
- [53] *British News*, March 1978.
- [54] Ward and Henderson, *Who Wants It?*, 60–2.
- [55] *British News*, November 1978; *Bulldog*, 19, 20 (1980), 21, 22 (1981).
- [56] Letter from Eddy Morrison to the editor of *Sounds*, 1 April 1977 [my thanks to Jon Savage for providing me with a copy of this letter]; *British News*, September 1978, 6–7; *Bulldog*, 14 (1979), 3.
- [57] 'Rock Against Communism', supplement, *Bulldog*, 19 (1979).
- [58] *British News*, September 1978 and September 1979; David Brazil, 'Spittin' Hate at the Future of Rock 'n' Roll', *The Leveller*, October 1979, 18–19; Vivien Goldman, 'Seeing Red', *Melody Maker*, 25 August 1979, 9; Lowles and Silver, *White Noise*, 9–27.
- [59] 'Punk, Mods, Skins and Teds—All Unite to Fight the Reds!', *Bulldog*, 18 (1980), 3.
- [60] *Bulldog*, 24 (1981), 3.
- [61] Johnson, *The Story of Oi!*; 'The Story of Oi!', *Punk Lives*, Nos. 9 & 10, 1983; Bushell, *Hoolies*, 143–79.
- [62] Halifax, 'Second Wave', 35; Joanna Rollo, 'Sounds Familiar', *Socialist Worker*, 18 July 1981, 4; Marek Kohn, 'Hip Little Englanders', *Marxism Today*, November 1983, 37–8.
- [63] *Bulldog*, 18, 20 (1980), 22 (1981).
- [64] Marshall, *Spirit of '69*, 62–119.
- [65] See fanzine extracts in Davis, *Punk*. Also, for examples of political comment, see 'zines such as *Kill Your Pet Puppy*, *Toxic Graffiti* and *Vague*.

- [66] See Reid in Savage, *The England's Dreaming Tapes*, 442; Letter from Malcolm McLaren to *Evening News*, 11 May 1977, 10; Lydon et al., *Rotten*, 96.
- [67] *Temporary Hoarding*, 2 (1977).
- [68] Mark Farrar, 'Is it More than Rock 'n' Roll?', *The Leveller*, July/August 1977, 17.
- [69] *Temporary Hoarding*, 5 (1978).
- [70] Paul Morley and Ian Penman, 'Devoto', *NME*, 2 December 1978, 37; Nick Kent, 'Devoto: The Complete Fatalist', *NME*, 28 April 1979, 28–9.
- [71] Paul Du Noyer, 'Taking Tyne-Age Wasteland', *NME*, 21 April 1979, 25; Steve Clarke, 'The Rise of The Ruts', *NME*, 14 July 1979, 7–8.
- [72] See the interview with Pursey in *Temporary Hoarding*, 6 (1978).
- [73] Rimbaud, 'The Last of the Hippies', 2–12; Crass, 'Bloody Revolutions' (Crass Records, 1980); also, 'White Punks on Hope', on *Stations of the Crass* (Crass Records, 1979).
- [74] Garry Bushell, 'The New Breed: A Teenage Warning', *Sounds*, 1 November 1980, 31–2; 'Oi—The Debate', *Sounds*, 24 January 1981, 30–1; 'Skunk Rock '81', *Sounds*, 11 July 1981, 16; Johnson, 'United/The Voice of Oi!', in his *The Story of Oi*, 92.
- [75] The Business, 'Suburban Rebels', on *Carry on Oi!* (Secret Records, 1981); Turner, *Cockney Reject*, 57–60; Cock Sparrer, 'Watch Your Back', on *Shock Troops* (Razor, 1983).
- [76] Paul Castles, '4 Play', *Punk Lives*, 8 (1983), 6–7. Members of 2-tone bands said similar. See, for example, Pauline Black quoted in *Big Flame*, April 1981, 13.
- [77] Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today*, January 1979, 14–20.
- [78] For example, Noel Halifax, 'The Personal is Artistic', *Socialist Review*, July–August 1981, 43.
- [79] Matthew Lynn, 'Music and Politics', *Challenge*, December 1979, 7; Simon Frith, 'Post-Punk Blues', *Marxism Today*, March 1983, 18–21; Halifax, 'The Sounds of Struggle', *Socialist Review*, March 1983, 27–8; Torrid McTorrent, 'Punk is Dead', *Big Flame*, December 1980/January 1981, 13; Chris Schüller, 'Wanna Buy a Lifestyle?', *The Leveller*, 9–22 January 1981, 18.
- [80] See *Bulldog*, issues 32–9 (1983–4).
- [81] *Spearhead*, May and June 1981, 16–17.
- [82] For an excellent discussion of this, see Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*.
- [83] Street, *Rebel Rock*, 222–6.

## References

- Andrews, Geoff. *End Games and New Times: The Final Years of British Communism, 1964–91*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2004.
- Bradshaw, Paul. 'Trends in Youth Culture in the 1970s'. *Cogito* 3 (1976): 3–13.
- Beckett, Andy. *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Faber & Faber, 2009.
- Brown, Timothy, S. 'Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and "Nazi Rock" in England and Germany'. *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (2004): 157–78.
- Bushell, Garry. *Hoolies: True Stories of Britain's Biggest Street Battles*. London: John Blake, 2010.
- Callaghan, John. *The Far Left in British Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
- Clarke, John, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts. 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class: A Theoretical Overview'. In *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, edited by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976.
- Clutterbuck, Richard. *Britain in Agony: The Growth of Political Violence*. London: Penguin, 1978.
- Cotter, John, M. 'Sounds of Hate: White Power Rock and Roll and the Neo-Nazi Skinhead Subculture'. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11, no. 2 (1999): 111–40.

- Crass/Poison Girls. 'Statement'. *Kill Your Pet Puppy* 1 (1979): 13–15.
- Cross, Richard. 'The Hippies Now Wear Black: Crass and the Anarcho-Punk Movement, 1977–84'. *Socialist History* 26 (2004): 25–44.
- Davis, Julie. *Punk*. Southampton: Millington, 1977.
- Frith, Simon, and Howard Horne. *Art into Pop*. London: Methuen, 1987.
- Goodyer, Ian. *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.
- Harrison, Brian. *Finding a Role? The United Kingdom, 1970–90*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010.
- Hay, Colin. 'Chronicles of a Death Foretold: The Winter of Discontent and Construction of the Crisis of British Keynesian'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 63, no. 3 (2010): 446–70.
- . 'Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the "Winter of Discontent"'. *Sociology* 30, no. 2 (1996): 253–77.
- Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen & Co, 1979.
- Hill, Ray, and Andrew Bell. *The Other Face of Terror: Inside Europe's Neo-Nazi Network*. Glasgow: Grafton, 1988.
- Johnson, Garry. *The Story of Oi! A View from the Dead End of the Street*. Romford: New Breed, 2008.
- Laing, Dave. *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*. Milton Keynes: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Lowles, Nick, and Steve Silver, eds. *White Noise: Inside the International Nazi Skinhead Scene*. London: Searchlight, 1998.
- Lydon, John, Keith Zimmerman, and Kent Zimmerman. *Rotten: No Irish, No Black, No Dogs*. London: Plexus, 2003.
- Marshall, George. *Spirit of '69: A Skinhead Bible*. Dunoon: ST Publishing, 1991.
- Moran, Joe. "'Stand Up and Be Counted": Hughie Green, the 1970s and Popular Memory'. *History Workshop Journal* 70 (2010): 173–98.
- Reddington, Helen. *The Lost Women of Rock Music: Female Musicians of the Punk Era*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- Renton, Dave. *When We Touched the Sky: The Anti-Nazi League, 1977–81*. Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2006.
- Reynolds, Simon. *Rip it Up and Start Again: Post-Punk, 1978–84*. London: Faber & Faber, 2005.
- Rimbaud, Penny. 'The Last of the Hippies—An Hysterical Romance'. In *A Series of Shock Slogans and Mindless Token Tantrums*, edited by Crass. London: Existential Press, 1982.
- Robinson, Lucy. *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
- Sabin, Roger. 'I Won't Let the Dago By: Rethinking Punk and Racism'. In *Punk Rock: So What? The Cultural Legacy of Punk*, edited by Roger Sabin. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Savage, Jon. *England's Dreaming: The Sex Pistols and Punk Rock*. London: Faber & Faber, 1992.
- . *The England's Dreaming Tapes*. London: Faber & Faber, 2009.
- Simonelli, David. 'Anarchy, Pop and Violence: Punk Rock, Subculture and the Rhetoric of Class, 1976–78'. *Contemporary British History* 16, no. 2 (2002): 121–44.
- Smith, Evan. 'Are the Kids United? The Communist Party of Great Britain, Rock Against Racism and the Politics of Youth Culture'. *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 5, no. 2 (2011): 85–117.
- Street, John. *Rebel Rock: The Politics of Popular Music*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.
- Thurlow, Richard. *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2006.
- Tomlinson, Jim. *Left, Right: The March of Political Extremism in Britain*. London: John Calder, 1981.
- Triggs, Teal. 'Scissors and Glue: Punk Fanzines and the Creation of a DIY Aesthetic'. *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 69–83.
- Turner, Jeff. *Cockney Reject*. London: John Blake, 2010.

- Waite, Mike. 'Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll (and Communism)'. In *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party*, edited by Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy. London: Pluto, 1995.
- Walker, Martin. *The National Front*. London: Fontana, 1978.
- Ward, Colin, and Chris Henderson. *Who Wants It? Mainstream*. Edinburgh, 2002.
- Whitehead, Phillip. *The Writing on the Wall: Britain in the Seventies*. London: Michael Joseph, 1985.
- Widgery, David. *Beating Time: Riot 'n' Race 'n' Rock 'n' Roll*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1986.
- Wise, David, and Stuart. 'The End of Music'. In *What is Situationism? A Reader*, edited by Stewart Home. Edinburgh: AK Press, 1996.
- Woodbridge, Steve. 'Purifying the Nation: Critiques of Cultural Decadence and Decline in British Neo-Fascist Ideology'. In *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, edited by Julie Gottlieb and Thomas Linehan. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.
- Worley, Matthew. 'One Nation Under the Bomb: The Cold War and British Punk to 1984'. *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 5, no. 2 (2011): 65–83.