



Figure 1

"Margaret On the Guillotine..." The Politics of Popular Music, c.1979-1988.

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Figure 2

- The 1980s was a time of mass consumerism, played out under Thatcher.
- 'Thatcherism' led to discontent and divide between social classes.
- This was portrayed in music, both party-politically and anti-ideologically.
- Examples include Miners' Strike benefit gigs and Red Wedge, but also Band/Live Aid and the music of The Smiths.

CHAPTER I

- 1980s protest and political music had roots in the counter-culture of the 1960s and punk of the 1970s. This was reinvented with post-punk in late-1970s and into the 1980s.
- This was used by musicians to highlight their disgust of the Thatcher government's monetarist policies, which had led to high unemployment rates and the decline of the working class.
- It was summed up by The Specials' 1981 song "Ghost Town," released amidst rioting in Brixton and Toxteth.
- Pop also got involved, with Wham! releasing their song "Wham Rap" in 1982, which tried to find the positives in being on the dole.
- Unemployment hit young people hard, so it is clear to see how it infiltrated popular culture.

CHAPTER II

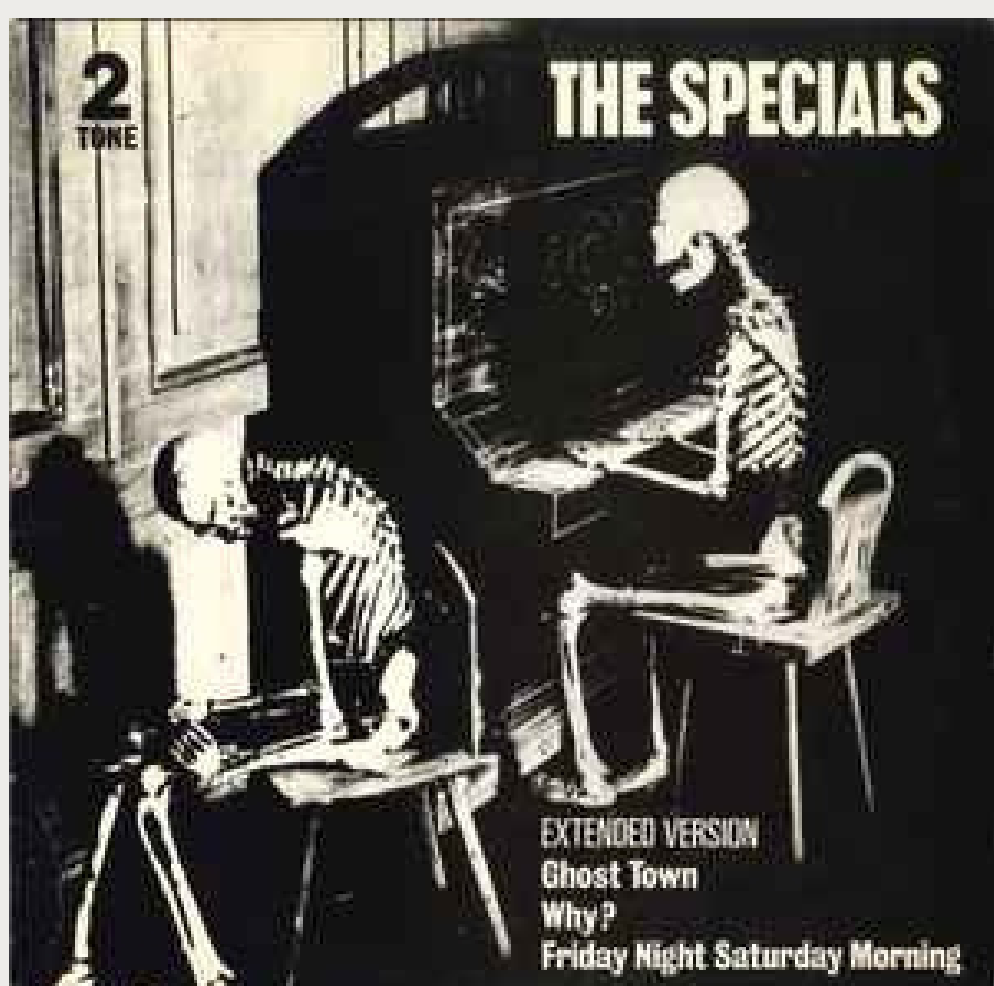
- How was party-politics used in music throughout the 1980s?
- It had roots in the late-1970s with the creation of Rock Against Racism, a direct predecessor of musical collectives in the 1980s.
- Miners' Strike benefit gigs (1984/1985) also played an important part, famously attended by musicians such as Billy Bragg and Paul Weller.
- Red Wedge was a product of the experiences of the Strikes. Formed in 1985 in collaboration with the Labour Party under Neil Kinnock, it aimed to get young people voting.
- It achieved this, and also showed music was still very much linked with party-politics.

CHAPTER III

- To that end, how was music used 'anti-politically?'
- Firstly, Band/Live Aid were humanitarian, appealing to the generosity of politicians and the public - but it shied away from a specific party-political stance.
- The Smiths represent cynicism in this period. The band offered an alternative approach to life (one that attacked the life celebrated by Thatcherism), but they did not align themselves to an exact ideology.
- Neither of these examples can necessarily be placed on a left-right political axis. Instead, they offered a different solution to party-politics.

CONCLUSION

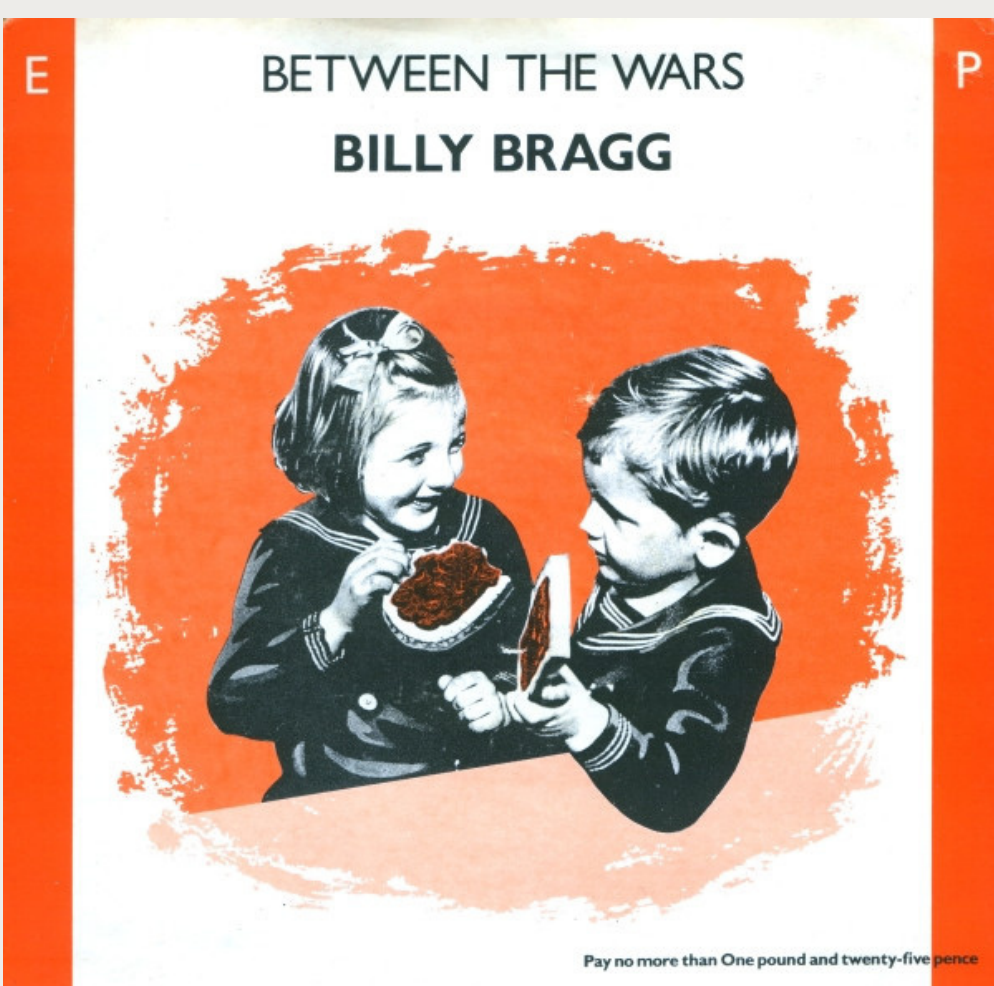
- Music appeals to everyday people with everyday problems.
- It can be used party-politically, or independently of any ideology.
- This makes it useful as a tool for political expression, as well as a form of critique.
- The link between music and politics has carried on from the 1980s. Oasis supported Blair's 'New Labour' in the late-1990s, Stormzy has called out specific politicians, and artists such as Sam Fender and Sleaford Mods are carrying on the cynical approach to politics.
- These are just a handful of examples, but music continues to give the voiceless a means of expression.



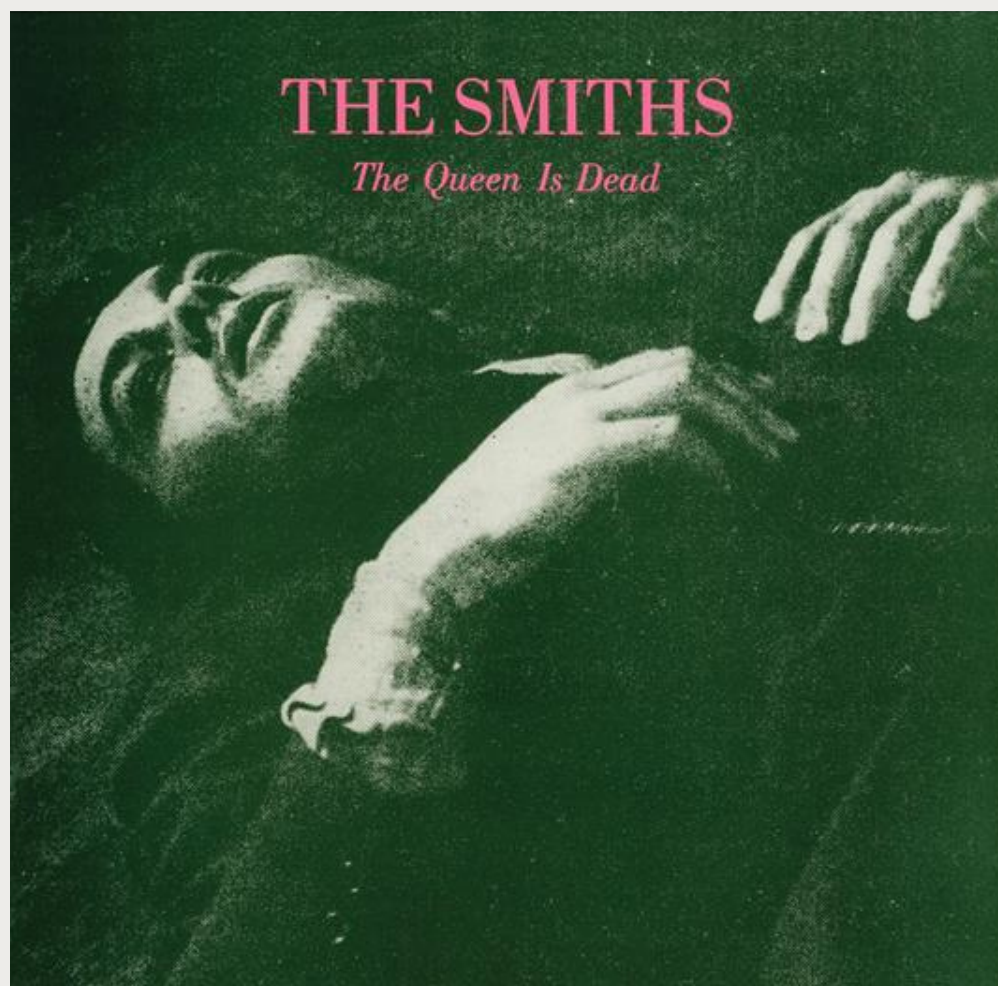
The Specials, "Ghost Town," recorded April 1981, track 1 on *Ghost Town*, 2 Tone Records, 1981, vinyl.



Wham!, "Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)," recorded March 24, 1982, track 1 on *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do)*, Innervation, 1982, vinyl.



Billy Bragg, "Between the Wars," recorded 1985, track 1 on *Between the Wars*, Go! Discs, 1985, vinyl.



The title track of The Smiths' *The Queen is Dead* album is widely regarded to be the band's most iconoclastic song. The Smiths, "The Queen is Dead," recorded October-November 1985, track 1 on *The Queen is Dead*, Rough Trade Records, 1986, vinyl.

Figure 1: Image from Matt Phillips, "Book Review: Walls Come Tumbling Down by Daniel Rachel," *movingtheriver.com*, January 21, 2017, <https://movingtheriver.com/2017/01/21/book-review-walls-come-tumbling-down-by-daniel-rachel/>.

Figure 2: Richard Young, *Paul Weller with GLC leader Ken Livingstone and Labour leader Neil Kinnock at the launch of Red Wedge in 1985*, accessed February 21, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/apr/22/red-wedge-bringing-labour-party-politics-to-young-music-fans>.