

The Marxism Today Story

The history of the magazine from 1977-1991

NOV 1977: Martin Jacques becomes editor.

Sep 1978: Eric Hobsbawm's article 'The Forward March Of Labour Halted?' argues, in contrast to the prevailing wisdom, that the labour movement is in long-term political decline.

The forward march of labour and the labour movement, which Marx predicted, appears to have come to a halt in this country about 25 to 30 years ago. Both the working class and the labour movement since then have been passing through a period of crisis, or, if you prefer to be mealy-mouthed about it, of adaptation to a new situation.

(Eric Hobsbawm, *The Forward March Of Labour Halted?*)

NOV 1978: Tony Lane's article on Liverpool predicts the riots.



Young people, already disaffected, will turn increasingly to theft and destruction of public property... A discreet cordon of police will surround the middle-class areas and the city centre. Working-class areas in the inner city and the perimeter estates will become 'no-go' areas subjected to sporadic raids by heavily protected task forces. Riots will occasionally break out, shops looted and buildings fired.

(Tony Lane, *Liverpool - City Of Harder Times To Come*)

Jan 1979: Stuart Hall's 'The Great Moving Right Show' inaugurates MT's pioneering analysis of 'Thatcherism' and sees the first recorded use of the term.

Nobody seriously concerned with political strategies in the current situation can now afford to ignore the 'swing to the Right'. We may not yet understand its extent and its limits, its specific character, its causes and effects. But the tendency is hard to deny. It no longer looks like a temporary swing in political fortunes, a short-term shift in the balance of forces... We need to discuss its parameters more fully and openly on the Left without inhibition or built-in guarantees.

(Stuart Hall, *The Great Moving Right Show*)

May 1979: Margaret Thatcher becomes prime minister.

Oct 1979: The magazine is redesigned, with a bigger format, graphics and a snappy logo. Margaret Thatcher is on the cover.

Oct 1980: Eric Hobsbawm interviews Tony Benn - the start of a relationship that finally soured in 1983 when Benn publicly criticised the magazine for its line on Labour. The interview was extracted in *The Guardian*, the first of many to be reprinted in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, and also the *Financial Times*, *The Times*, *Sunday Times* and *Sunday Correspondent*.

Sep 1980: Polish workers, led by Lech Walesa, form Solidarity.

Jul 1981: Rioting erupts in Toxteth.

Oct 1981: *Marxism Today* is sold nationally in newsagents for the first time. Sales leap to over 9000. Exclusive interview with Lech Walesa. Also the publication of *Marxism Today's* first book, *The Forward March Of Labour Halted*, in which Eric Hobsbawm takes issue with the Bennite Left.

I am not a good politician. I am first of all a consumer and I want something to consume. So I want to tell the truth. I want to have more than you have in your country. I want to be happier than you are. I want to adjust everything so as to reach these aims. But at the same time I don't want power.
(Interview with **Lech Walesa**)

Apr 1982: Task force sets sail for the Falklands.

Sep 1982: Tony Lane writes an article criticising corruption among shop stewards. *Marxism Today* is attacked by Mick Costello, Communist Party industrial organiser, in the *Morning Star*. Bitter warfare in the CP culminates in a formal split in 1985. *Marxism Today* is under assault from many different points on the Left.

Oct 1982: *Marxism Today* holds its first weekend event: 'The Moving Left Show'. About 1700 people attend.

I was **surprised** by the **openness of mind of the** participants... Their **capacity to take realistic and comprehending** account of Thatcherism **and their sympathetic awareness of the expanding centre in British politics was in contrast with the myopia which afflicts much of the Labour Party.**

The **participants were predominantly youngish and** inevitably **middle class**... They were **people of superior intelligence or education and of moderate disposition**... A **good deal of the talk was about how to come to terms with the political cen-** •

tre... Some of them envisaged a constitutional crisis, rather than an industrial confrontation, as the eventual outcome of Thatcherism.' (Peter Jenkins, *The Guardian*, 3.11.1982)

Nov 1982: In 'A Long Haul' Stuart Hall analyses the underlying reasons for Labour's crisis.

Dec 1982: A long feature appears in the *Financial Times* by Malcolm Rutherford, the first to understand the true significance of *Marxism Today*.

'One of the most interesting developments in current British politics is taking place in the pages of *Marxism Today*... The issue at stake is whether the British Left will continue to disintegrate or whether, partly through *Marxism Today*, it can re-establish itself on a new basis.' (Malcolm Rutherford, *Financial Times*, 23.12.1982)

Jun 1983: Thatcher triumphs again in the general election. Publication of *Marxism Today's* second book, *The Politics Of Thatcherism*. Interview with Neil Kinnock.

Oct 1983: Eric Hobsbawm, in 'Labour's Lost Millions' - an analysis of the reasons for Labour's election defeat - suggests Labour needs a pact with the centre parties to win the next election. It becomes the pivotal text in Labour's election post-mortem. Neil Kinnock sings its praises.

Five years ago the question was raised in this journal whether 'the forward march of Labour' had been halted. This led to a long debate... two things strike me about it: first the sheer refusal of some of the Left to look unwelcome facts in the face... and second the failure of even the gloomiest among us to appreciate the rate and distance of Labour's imminent retreat. (Eric Hobsbawm, *Labour's Lost Millions*)

Oct 1984: Neil Kinnock is interviewed by Eric Hobsbawm.

Nov 1984: *Marxism Today* holds its second weekend event - 'Left Alive' - which includes jazz dance, jogging and rock climbing, as well as political discussions and workshops. 2500 people attend. Debates between Ken Livingstone and Beatrix Campbell, •

and Stuart Hall and Tony Benn proved the biggest attractions. **Dec 1984:** Beatrix Campbell and Ken Livingstone debate the impact of the GLC and its meaning for the Left.

The strength of the GLC's encounter with radicalism is that it brought to the Labour Party initiatives beyond its own imagination and beyond its own doing.
(Beatrix Campbell, *Politics, Pyramids And People*)

Mar 1985: Gorbachev is elected general secretary of the CPSU.

Apr 1985: NUM activists give a devastating critique of Scargill and the conduct of the miners' strike in a roundtable discussion.

I've been against mass picketing from the word go in this strike because it wasn't only an industrial battle we were in but a political battle where we should have tried to argue the case for coal against the government's strategy, and to bring this out to millions of people.

(Alan Baker, secretary of the Oakdale Lodge, South Wales Area of the NUM)

Jul 1985: *MT* carries its first article by a significant figure on the Right, Ferdinand Mount, about the meaning of socialism. Live Aid is held, and the GLC ceases to operate.

Nov 1985: Robin Murray's article, 'Benetton Britain', prefigures the New Times analysis.

Mar 1986: Stuart Hall interviews Jesse Jackson.

Jul 1986: *Marxism Today* organises a national women's weekend - 'Women Alive'. Over 1000 attend.

Oct 1986: *MT* is redesigned and relaunched and holds its third national weekend event - 'Left Unlimited' - which attracts nearly 4000. The 'designer socialism' tag is used to describe *MT*.

'Call them 'yummies' - young, upwardly mobile marxists. Their favourite magazine is *Marxism Today*, slick and sharply written.'
(*Wall Street Journal*)

Mar 1987: First interview with a prominent Tory MP, Edwina Currie.

Apr 1987: *MT* holds a Gramscifest. Over 1000 attend.

May 1987: Eric Hobsbawm argues the case for tactical voting in the run-up to the general election.

'The case for tactical voting was given a powerful boost yesterday by Professor Eric Hobsbawm, guru of the new euro-communist Left, who urged voters to vote any way they have to in order to defeat Mrs

Thatcher at the next election - even if it means voting for the Alliance.'
(*Guardian*, 23.4.1987)

Jun 1987: Thatcher triumphs for the third successive time in the general election. *MT* launches its Central Committee Outfitters with a range of 'clothing for autonomy'.

Ort 1987: 30th anniversary issue. The bottom falls out of the stock market.

Fell 1988: A series of articles discuss the impact of *perestroika* on eastern Europe.

The signals in Moscow are that Soviet imagination of the tolerable still stops well before a society in which the Communist Party abandoned the conventional 'leading role', or effectively shared power with a 'non-socialist' force. Alexander Dubcek, in his *Vnita* interview, stated his belief that Gorbachev would never have authorised the 1968 military intervention in his country. For my part, I will wait and see for a few years before feeling able to agree with him.
(Neal Ascherson, *A Spectre Haunts The East*, Feb 1988)

Mar 1988: Interview with Michael Heseltine:

No-one can foresee the circumstances that will confront one, but I've always enjoyed political power and if I have an opportunity to exercise it in the interests of the Conservative Party and the country, of course I'll take it.
(Michael Heseltine interviewed by John Lloyd)

Oct 1988: The 'New Times' issue introduces a whole new way of looking at contemporary society. There is enormous interest. Sales, which were now over 14000, leap to over 17000 for this issue.

'Once again, the magazine *Marxism Today* has thrown down a dramatic challenge to the British Left, this time on the eve of the Labour Party conference... in its issue published today, the magazine provides, not a blueprint or a programme, but a controversial description of what is going on in the world that throws much conventional analysis out of the window. We are living, the magazine argues, in a new era.

These are 'New Times'... (*Marxism Today's*) picture of the changing world... is likely to stand as the essential backcloth to all contemporary political debate.'
(Richard Gott, *The Guardian*, 28.9.1988)

'*Marxism Today* offers the most coherent and stimulating effort I've yet come across to grapple... with the New Times in which we live.*'
(Hugo Young, *The Guardian*, 29.9.1988)

Nov 1988: Interview with Edward Heath.

'Mr Heath, in the long interview with the 'designer communism' magazine, rejects the view that Thatcherism will remain the Conservative orthodoxy into the next century and says the tradition he embodies will come back.'
(*Glasgow Herald*)

'*Marxism Today* is far and away the best socialist journal in the land. The most remarkable of its many virtues is that it actually understands Thatcherism and the ideas that underpin popular capitalism.'
(Brian Walden, *The Sunday Times*, 4.12.1988)

Apr 1989: *Marxism Today* produces an issue entirely devoted to Europe.

Britain has never worn its European hat with much enthusiasm. And the Left has been no exception. But there is now a dawning recognition that the old insularity will no longer do. Unless we change, we will be cast in the role of spectators rather than actors in a process of extraordinary historic importance which will be one of the great themes of the 90s.
(Leader, *Marxism Today*)

Jun 1989: Tanks roll into Tiananmen Square.

Oct 1989: *Marxism Today* organises a New Times weekend event attended by 1500 people, and in November, its third book, *New Times*, is published.

Nov 1989: The velvet revolution brings sweeping change to Czechoslovakia, and in Germany, the Berlin Wall is breached. With unflinching regularity, the revolutions of 1989 occur just after *Marxism Today* goes to press.

Britain is heading for a recession and the going will be rough. Given the time-scale involved, the Tories have little scope for engineering a convincing pre-election boom, and the next election is likely to be fought against a grim economic background.
(Leader by Bob Hawthorn, *No Such Miracle*)

Feb 1990: Marx appears on the cover, this time with egg on his face.

Aug 1990: Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait.

Nov 1990: Thatcher resigns in the Tory leadership challenge.

The chances of Labour inheriting the mantle of the post-Thatcher era look better with every passing day. But... a party which lacks an original analysis of society, which has no clear idea of where it wants society to go, and whose project is so obviously derivative, is likely to run rapidly out of steam.

(Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, *March Without Vision*, Dec 1990)

Feb 1991: Interview with Chris Patten which became the key document for analysing the new Major government.

If we can find, more successfully than we've been able to in the past, an English rhetoric for what seems to come so naturally to the German Christian Democrats, namely the social market economy, then we're on to a very substantial winner.

(Chris Patten interviewed by David Marquand)

Mar 1991: *Marxism Today* produces a special issue criticising the Gulf war.

'*Marxism Today* is now a moderate paper, and far more realistic and worth reading than anything that comes from the Labour Party.'

(Norman Lamont, Chancellor of the Exchequer, replying to the debate on the Financial Statement, *Hansard*, March 1991)

Nay 1991: Widely-acclaimed special issue on the public sector.

'Public-sector perestroika involves post-Fordist decentralisation, reintroducing a sense of community among workers and redefining jobs ...*Marxism Today* is emerging as the Left's most creative as well as iconoclastic think tank.'
(*The Guardian*, leader, 23.4.1991)

Aug 1991: Gorbachev is temporarily removed from power by the Moscow coup.

Nov 1991: In a powerful interview with *Marxism Today*, Sir John Harvey-Jones suggests that he is 'just a retired old fart'.t