

**UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**

**GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE**

**IDEOLOGY IN PRACTICE:  
THE CONSTRUCTION OF BRITISH HIGHER EDUCATION  
IN THE SERVICE OF THE STATE 1979-1990**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Jo Halliday

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since 1979, British higher education has moved away from a model informed by traditional liberal values. Government now expects universities to serve the instrumental needs of the state. This thesis asks how and why this change was possible, arguing that this was not an inevitable, “natural” response to a modern society’s needs but, rather, a central aspect of the neoliberal revolution. It therefore has to be understood ideologically. Given that the Thatcher Governments (1979-1990) exemplify an overtly ideological approach, what happened in political terms to higher education in that period serves as a case study through which to explore two interrelated meanings of ideology: first, ideology as a set of ideas; and, second, as a medium for framing, universalising and transmitting those ideas through selective and partial presentations of reality. I take the work of Marx and certain Marxists as a starting point in understanding ideology and through which to explore how higher education could be requisitioned as an “ideological state apparatus”. Speeches and writings of the New Right are considered and an account given of how the Thatcher Governments’ higher education policies were enacted, not only in terms of what policy papers and legislation actually stated but - crucially - how they were argued through Parliament. Some of these statements and policies appeared to be contradictory: however, the Thatcher Governments were able to capitalise on this. In conjunction with using the contradictions inherent in the traditional liberal view of higher education, it was possible to recruit ideological agents and “manufacture consent” so that a new ideological relationship between higher education and the state was constructed. I conclude that higher education became from this period onwards an explicitly ideological arm of the state, and that this analysis sheds light both on higher education’s current status and on how ideology works.

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## Abbreviations

AFE	Advanced Further Education
APR	annual participation rate
AUA	Association of University Administrators
AUT	Association of University Teachers
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CAT	College of Advanced Technology
CDP	Committee of Directors of Polytechnics
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
CPG	Conservative Philosophy Group
CPS	Centre for Policy Studies
CPRS	Central Policy Review Staff
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
DES	Department of Education and Science
DipHE	Diploma of Higher Education
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
GDP	gross domestic product
HC Deb	<i>Hansard</i> House of Commons Debates
HL Deb	<i>Hansard</i> House of Lords Debates
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
HND	Higher National Diploma
IEA	Institute of Economic Affairs
ISA	ideological state apparatus
IT	information technology
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
LEA	local education authority
MP	Member of Parliament



MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NAB	National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education/Public Sector Higher Education
NATFHE	National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers Association
NHS	National Health Service
NUS	National Union of Students
OU	Open University
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PCFC	Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council
PNL	Polytechnic of North London
PR	public relations
PSBR	public sector borrowing requirement
PSHE	public sector higher education
QA	quality assurance
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SCUE	Standing Conference on University Entrance
SISTERS	Special Institutions for Scientific and Technological Education and Research
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
SSR	student:staff ratio
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
THE	Times Higher Education
THES	The Times Higher Education Supplement
UCU	University and College Union
UFC	Universities Funding Council
UGC	University Grants Committee
VC	Vice-Chancellor

## **Chapter 1    Introduction**

### **(i)    Higher education and the state<sup>1</sup>: from liberalism to instrumentalism**

Anyone looking even superficially at British higher education<sup>2</sup> since 1979 cannot fail to be struck by how far it has shifted from a model informed predominantly by traditional liberal values. I am taking these as broadly those inherent in the liberalism associated in Britain from the mid-nineteenth century with John Stuart Mill, who emphasised, *inter alia*, the importance of the individual; equality; and minimal interference by government in individuals' lives.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding that, Mill considered that education was necessary for the individual's progress and should therefore be required by the state (with subsidies for the poor), although not controlled by it.<sup>4</sup> Consider, for example, Mill's expression in 1867 of his view that the function of the university was to develop people as 'cultivated human beings', not train them for work:

It is not a place of professional education. Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings. [...] Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers: and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians. What professional men should carry away with them from an University, is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit.<sup>5</sup>

Cardinal John Newman, too, had stated in 1852 that a liberal education should be 'the cultivation of the intellect [as] an end distinct and sufficient in itself',<sup>6</sup> arguing against a view of education whose proponents

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<sup>1</sup> I am simply taking "the state" to mean the organisation of the body politic, managed by a centralised system of government, whose functions are carried out by state apparatuses.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space, this thesis concentrates on (a) English higher education (notwithstanding that the British Parliament's discussions in the 1980s encompassed higher education in England, Scotland, Wales - this being prior to devolution to the latter two - and Northern Ireland, prior to its Parliament's restitution); and (b) taught (and mainly undergraduate) state-funded higher education.

<sup>3</sup> Mill, J. S., *On Liberty* (London: The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1952 [1859]).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. Michael Freeden summarises Mill's position on education: 'Education was itself immediately adjacent to the liberal version of rationality, the cultivation of talent and intelligence being essential to the ends of self-developing, active, and internally harmonious human beings.' - Freeden, M., *Ideologies and Political Theory: a Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> Mill, J. S., 'Inaugural Address Delivered at the University of St Andrews, 1 February 1867', in Cavenagh, F. A. (ed.), *James and John Stuart Mill on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), pp. 133-134.

<sup>6</sup> Newman, J. H., *The Idea of a University* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996 [1899]), p. 93.

insist that Education should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured. They argue as if every thing, as well as every person, had its price; and that where there has been a great outlay, they have a right to expect a return in kind. This they call making Education and Instruction “useful”, and “Utility” becomes their watchword. With a fundamental principle of this nature, they very naturally go on to ask, what there is to show for the expense of a University; what is the real worth in the market of the article called “a Liberal Education”, on the supposition that it does not teach us definitely how to advance our manufactures, or to improve our lands, or to better our civil economy; or again, if it does not at once make this man a lawyer, that an engineer, and that a surgeon; or at least if it does not lead to discoveries in chemistry, astronomy, geology, magnetism, and science of every kind.<sup>7</sup>

More recently, the twentieth-century conservative academic Michael Oakeshott considered that

[a] university will have ceased to exist when [...] those who came to be taught come, not in search of their intellectual fortune but with a vitality so unroused or so exhausted that they wish only to be provided with a serviceable moral and intellectual outfit; when they come with no understanding of the manners of conversation but desire only a qualification for earning a living or a certificate to let them in on the exploitation of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Contrast these expressions with the avowedly ideological and instrumental role ascribed to education by Mao Zedong in 1966, launching the Chinese Cultural Revolution:

While their main task is to study, [students] should also learn other things, that is to say, they should not only learn book knowledge, they should also learn industrial production, agricultural production, and military affairs. They should also criticize and repudiate the bourgeoisie. The length of schooling should be shortened, education should be revolutionized, and the domination of our schools and colleges by bourgeois intellectuals should not be tolerated any longer.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, consider an extract from a British Tory Government policy document of 1987, expressing the purposes of higher education not in terms of the cultivation of the individual but, rather, predominantly in terms of economic objectives, stating that higher education should:

- serve the economy more effectively

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>8</sup> Fuller, T. (ed.), *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 104.

<sup>9</sup> Mao Zedong’s letter to Lin Piao in 1966, quoted in Kerr, C., *Observations on the Relations between Education and Work in the People’s Republic of China: Report of a Study Group* (Berkeley, California: Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1978), p. 111. For a comparison of Mao’s and Thatcher’s “vocationalisation” of higher education, see my ‘Maoist Britain? the ideological function of vocationalising the higher education curriculum’, *Curriculum Studies*, Volume 1, Number 3, 1993, pp. 365-382.

- pursue basic scientific research and scholarship in the arts and humanities
- have closer links with industry and commerce, and promote enterprise.<sup>10</sup>

A New Labour Government report in 2008 similarly sets government-defined purposes for higher education:

We have set ambitious targets in response to the analysis of our skill needs [...]. Meeting them will require a culture shift among higher education providers *and* employers. [...] Universities need to help organisations through knowledge exchange as well as by supplying skilled graduates and post-graduates and by providing high level skills learning for those already in the workforce.<sup>11</sup>

The end result, ‘student employability’, assumes paramount importance:

We want to see all universities treating student employability as a core part of their mission. So we believe it is reasonable to expect universities to take responsibility for how their students are prepared for the world of work.<sup>12</sup>

As the culminating expression of the shift away from liberal values, the Browne Review - commissioned by the New Labour Government in 2009 but reporting back to a Coalition Government of Tories and Liberal Democrats in October 2010 - interprets higher education in terms almost exclusively concerned with its utility to ‘the world of work’. Despite seeming initially to announce the role of higher education in developing the liberal individual, the Report goes on to characterise the former simply in instrumental terms as the route through to paid employment:

*Higher education matters because it transforms the lives of individuals. On graduating, graduates are more likely to be employed, more likely to enjoy higher wages and better job satisfaction, and more likely to find it easier to move from one job to the next.*<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, the Report recommended, *inter alia*, retaining public funding only for subjects deemed best to equip students for work - namely, science, technology, engineering and mathematics - claiming that ‘there needs to be a closer fit between what is taught in higher education and the skills needed in the economy’.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Education and Science (DES), *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, White Paper, Cm. 114 (London: HMSO, April 1987), p. iv.

<sup>11</sup> Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), *Higher Education at Work - High Skills: High Value* (London: DIUS, April 2008), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6. ‘Education for the world of work’ was a slogan coined by James Callaghan’s Labour Government (1976-1979): see Jones, K., *Right Turn: the Conservative Revolution in Education* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: an Independent Review of Higher Education Funding & Student Finance (Browne Report)*, 12 October 2010: available at [www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report](http://www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report) [accessed 15 October 2010], Chapter 1, section 1.1, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, section 2.3, p. 23.

Why and how has the shift in Britain from an inherently liberal to an explicitly neoliberal, government-led instrumental view of higher education taken place; from a concern for the development of individuals as citizens to a concern solely with individuals' putative self-interest? For that is fundamentally how neoliberalism distinguishes itself from Mill's liberalism and from the 1940s "social democratic" liberalism of William Beveridge and the welfare state alike.<sup>15</sup> Without implying that Newman's, Mill's and others' liberalism is either value-free or unproblematic, I am using their views on what constitutes a university education as a foil, as the predominant idealisation of the university extant up to my starting-point of 1979.<sup>16</sup> So how did universities' liberal traditions give rise to their neoliberal present-day characteristics? How has higher education been "neoliberalised"?<sup>17</sup> Claiming that the most radical manifestations of this shift were laid down by the "New Right" Tory Governments of Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990), I use this period as an extended case study.<sup>18</sup> My initial question is: how and why did the shift in the 1980s to an explicitly ideological relationship between British higher education and the state, and one that privileged a narrowly instrumental view, develop and take hold?

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<sup>15</sup> After the Second World War, British governments mainly followed the economic strategies of John Maynard Keynes who, broadly speaking, advocated government intervention in the economy with the aim of providing full employment, economic growth and public welfare: see, for example, Stedman Jones, D., *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 180-214. William Beveridge spearheaded the so-called welfare state, put into operation by the Labour Governments of 1945-1951. For a history of post-war consensus politics, see Kavanagh, D., *Thatcherism and British Politics: the End of Consensus?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> For more historical detail, see Ch. 3, fn.78.

<sup>17</sup> I borrow the term from David Harvey, who identifies the impact of neoliberalism (or the "New Right", as it was called in 1980s Britain) on all aspects of society as a 'process of neoliberalization': Harvey, D., *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3. Another Marxist, Alex Callinicos, takes neoliberalism as the project which seeks to subject not just economic matters but 'every aspect of social life to the logic of the market, and to make everything into a commodity that can be privately owned and bought and sold for a profit': Callinicos, A., *Universities in a Neoliberal World* (London: Bookmarks Publications, 2006), p. 6. Daniel Stedman Jones describes 'transatlantic neoliberalism' as 'the free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the competitive marketplace': Stedman Jones, D., op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> In common with many Tories/Conservatives, I use the terms interchangeably. See Gilmour, I., *Inside Right: a Study of Conservatism* (London: Hutchinson, 1977) for a history of the Tory Party, dating from its seventeenth-century beginnings, the subsequent absorption of some Whig elements, and the use of the term "Conservative" from the 1830s. Aspects of the New Right emerged within this Party in Britain in the 1960s with Enoch Powell and Angus Maude challenging the politics of Edward Heath and advocating the free market and a strong nation. For commentaries on the New Right or "Thatcherism" - its 1980s manifestation - see: Nairn, T., 'Enoch Powell: the New Right', *New Left Review*, Number 61, 1970, pp. 3-27; Knight, C., *The Making of Tory Education Policy in Post-war Britain 1950-1986* (Lewes, Sussex: Falmer Press, 1990), p. 25; Gamble, A., *The Free Economy and the Strong State: the Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, Second Edition, 1994), pp. 77-81; Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma: Britain under Thatcherism* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1992), the latter constituting a scathing critique of Thatcherism and its neoliberal manifestations by an ousted traditional Tory.

**(ii) The context**

Before I can consider that question in detail, it needs to be established that the assault of “Thatcherism” on the British social democratic state and its institutions is positioned within the ideological “big picture” of the neoliberal project. This is represented by the objectives of the Mont Pelerin Society, formed in 1947 by Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and other free-market economists much favoured by Thatcher, Keith Joseph and their supporters.<sup>19</sup> That project sought to move Western democracies away from a broadly “social”/progressive liberalism (as developed in Britain by - for example - the later J. S. Mill through to L. T. Hobhouse) to “a new liberalism”, reflecting elements of the Manchester School of the 1830s.<sup>20</sup> In terms of Newman, Mill and others, their idea of a liberal university education is to be understood as expressing the underlying notion of “social” liberalism, as something open and available, “liberal” in an everyday sense of the term.<sup>21</sup> However, I am not setting up a dichotomy between liberal and vocational subjects. What I am highlighting is that neoliberal governments have identified

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<sup>19</sup> The Mont Pelerin Society’s Aims assert a ‘belief in private property and the competitive market’ so that ‘freedom may be effectively preserved’: [www.montpelerin.org](http://www.montpelerin.org) [accessed 10 September 2012]. Daniel Stedman Jones (op. cit.) gives a comprehensive history and commentary on the various strands of neoliberalism and its liberal roots, showing that some aspects of neoliberalism derive from eighteenth and nineteenth century English Whig politics (from which the Liberal Party took elements in its development from the 1860s). Friedman called for a “new” liberalism, while Hayek rooted his neoliberalism back in the ideals of the Whigs, emphasising above all that he was not a Conservative. Stedman Jones tracks the influence of the Mont Pelerin Society on New Right politicians and its transatlantic cross-fertilisations. Thatcher recalls how, early in the 1950s, she was inspired as a Young Conservative by Hayek’s writings, which she commended to her Cabinet as Prime Minister: see Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 12. Similarly, Joseph circulated a reading list of these gurus’ texts to his civil servants at the Department of Industry when he became Secretary of State in May 1979: see Riddell, P., *The Thatcher Government* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Eccleshall, R., Geoghegan, V., Jay, R., Kenny, M., MacKenzie, I. and Wilford, R., *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, Second Edition, 1994), pp. 49-53; Stedman Jones, D., op. cit., pp. 10-12. Hobhouse valued not just individual rights but ‘the common good’ and ‘social progress’, stating his ‘positive conception of the State’ which was ‘necessary to [the] effective realization’ of personal liberty: Hobhouse, L. T., *Liberalism* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1934), p. 134. Friedman characterised Thatcher, however, as a nineteenth-century liberal of the Manchester School, favouring *laissez-faire* economics and minimal government interference in the market: see Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma*, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> The American educationalist John Dewey wrote: ‘Liberal education becomes a name for the sort of education that every member of the community should have: the education that will liberate his capacities and thereby contribute both to his own happiness and his social usefulness. [...] In short a liberal education is one that liberalizes. Theoretically any type of education may do this.’ - Dewey, J., ‘Liberal education’, in Monroe, P. (ed.), *A Cyclopaedia of Education*, Volume 4 (New York: Macmillan, 1913), p. 6, quoted in Silver, H. and Brennan, J., *A Liberal Vocationalism* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 4.

radically different neoliberal and, crucially, instrumental purposes for higher education as a whole.

Positioning itself within the Tory Party, the British New Right set out systematically to put a free-market ideology into practice in government from 1979 through all the structures and organs - the state apparatuses - of British society.<sup>22</sup> Thatcher and her followers were explicit about their radical agenda from the start and, once in government, they set to work to reverse the post-war “settlement” by cutting back government expenditure in publicly-funded areas; to curb the power of trade unions and to banish collectivism and socialism from Britain;<sup>23</sup> and to shift people towards an overriding focus on the benefits of private property, enterprise and economic individualism. To achieve their ideological ends, the relationship which had developed post-war between the state and the people had to be reconfigured, so that the new liberalism would appear to be “common sense”. As Thatcher later wrote in her memoirs, she had hoped that, by the time they took office, ‘our agenda would, with luck, strike people as familiar common sense rather than as a wild radical project’.<sup>24</sup> They needed to move people away from the post-war social democratic consensus of the welfare state and to bring into being instead the sort of individual - and competitive relationship between individuals - that neoliberals took to be “natural” and demanded that everyone else take as “natural” too. The manner in which British higher education - and all areas of the public sector, gradually, one by one - has changed since 1979 and come to reflect neoliberal characteristics can best be understood as the outcome of this ideologically-driven agenda.

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<sup>22</sup> The Tory Party had not previously identified itself with a radical ideological approach. Disraeli (in 1867) stressed the importance of ‘the manners, the customs, the laws, and the traditions of a people’ as opposed to ‘abstract principles, and arbitrary and general doctrines’: quoted in Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 139. Gilmour (*Inside Right*, op. cit., p. 83) draws attention to a later speech (1872) in which, in the tradition of Edmund Burke, Disraeli emphasised the importance of the country’s established institutions. Roger Scruton demonstrates traditional Tory scepticism about ideology: ‘[C]onservatism arises from the sense that one belongs to some continuing and pre-existing social order, and that fact is all important in determining what to do.’ - quoted in Hayes, M., *The New Right in Britain: an Introduction to Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 5. See also fn.18 above.

<sup>23</sup> To the Conservative Party Conference on 10 October 1975, Thatcher said: ‘Britain and Socialism are not the same thing. As long as I have health and strength, they never will be.’ - <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102777> [accessed 26 July 2013]. By 1985, she confirmed even more confidently: ‘I have always regarded part of my job as - and please do not think of it in an arrogant way - killing Socialism in Britain.’ - Thatcher in *Financial Times*, 14 November 1985, quoted by Schwarz, B., ‘The Thatcher Years’, in Miliband, R., Panitch, L. and Saville, J. (eds), *The Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 1987), pp. 144-145.

<sup>24</sup> Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 5.

### (iii) Commentaries on higher education in the Thatcher years

There have been many scholarly accounts of the twentieth-century history of higher education, written around the 1980s, giving the background to successive government policies and their implementation. Most educationalists take up a position as “neutral” documenters of events, tracking the shift from an élite to a mass higher education system and concluding that, once student numbers grew substantially and the state became the predominant funder, then increased state intervention in higher education to make it serve government-dictated ends was either inevitable, or understandable given various factors, or just happened.<sup>25</sup> Such commentators demonstrate an interest in the fact that higher education changed, and examine the policy implications, but they do not address how it is possible for a fundamental shift to have occurred.

For example, John Carswell (in his study of the relationship of universities to the state, written in the mid-1980s) considers that different decisions in the policy-making process could have been possible at various stages, but views such decisions as specific instances: he does not put the decision-making process as a whole into any political or ideological context. Characterising his story in somewhat gloomy tones as ‘the change from euphoria to despair’,<sup>26</sup> he can conclude only that, dating from the early 1960s onwards, ‘the recognisable steps from a continuum to a formal and ultimately adversarial relationship [between government and the universities] can be seen as inevitable’.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in tracking specifically the changes leading up to the 1988 Education Reform Act, Gareth Williams characterises the Act as ‘the inevitable result of the public funding of the universities after the Second World War’, considering that history to be ‘a progression of incremental change’.<sup>28</sup>

In his 1994 leading analysis of the relationship between the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the universities and government, Michael Shattock concludes

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Trow’s widely accepted definitions are: élite higher education comprises up to 15% of school-leavers; mass higher education constitutes up to 40%; and universal higher education is over 40%, quoted in Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., *Reforming Higher Education* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> Carswell, J., *Government and the Universities in Britain: Programme & Performance 1960–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, G., ‘Higher Education’, in Flude, M. and Hammer, M. (eds), *The Education Reform Act 1988: its Origins and Implications* (Lewes, Sussex: Falmer Press, 1990), p. 262.



that the demise of the UGC was because it was overtaken by ‘the pressures of politics, demography and financial stringency’, which was not so much to do with ‘political attitudes’ as ‘its inability to manage the university system effectively within the constraints imposed by its constitutional position’. ‘This inability’, he claims, ‘was exacerbated by government policies but was not a product of them.’ He continues: ‘That government wanted more control of the university system is not in doubt and should not be surprising bearing in mind the rising cost of higher education.’ He appears to take the political context for granted. For instance, he seems to take as a given the first Thatcher Government’s decision to reduce public expenditure and encourage universities to seek private funding. He refers to ‘the Thatcher revolution’ without examining its interrelationship in ideological terms with the higher education sector.<sup>29</sup>

Other commentators acknowledge that ideological factors were involved, but present little analysis either of what an ideological process actually is, or of how its specific manifestations worked in particular cases. For example, Maurice and David Kogan, writing soon after the 1981 university cuts, condemn the Government’s moves as an attack on higher education’s liberal values. However, while recognising the Government’s belief in market solutions, they conclude that the consequences of the Government’s actions were unintended, and they fail to comment on that assertion. They simply cast the Government’s actions as having been ‘begun in ignorance and confusion’, and having ‘gathered particular biases’ as the situation developed.<sup>30</sup>

In a later text in 2000, Maurice Kogan and Stephen Hanney favour an explanation based on what they call ‘the power of intention and ideology’, but do not think it ‘to be always the driving force of change’, which happens ‘partly by the power of circumstances’.<sup>31</sup> They do not explain what they mean by these phrases, simply stating that ‘the economic ideology’ was pushed to the fore by a more interventionist state, and that the former ‘clashed with the classic liberal notions the government espoused of rolling back the frontiers of the state and encouraging a market

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<sup>29</sup> Shattock, M., *The UGC and the Management of British Universities* (Buckingham: SRHE and the Open University Press, 1994), p. 154, p. 136, p. 112 and p. 145 respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., *The Attack on Higher Education* (London: Kogan Page, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., *op. cit.*, p. 237.

system'.<sup>32</sup> Summarising the history of this as largely one of 'issue emergence and resolution', they conclude that they are unable to present any clear picture as to 'how policies emerged and ideologies were sponsored'.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, Brian Salter and Ted Tapper (in their extensive body of work from the late 1970s onwards) view what happened as 'the ideological struggle between the economic view of higher education and the traditional liberal ideal of the university'.<sup>34</sup> Like others, they recognise the New Right's attempts to bring the concept of the market into higher education. However, although frequently using the term "ideology", their analysis of its effects is constrained by a lack of explanation of the way in which they are interpreting the term. They in fact use it (as do Kogan and Hanney) simply to denote single ideas or policy directions - for example, 'the economic view of higher education' - and to view these as clashes in 'the continuing dynamic for change'.<sup>35</sup> But what does this amount to as an explanation?

Ron Barnett often returns to discuss ideology and ideologies in the university context in his considerable body of work. He views ideology as an externally-driven and nefarious force, and seeks to 'neutralize' it, expressing his interest in effectively a liberal higher education 'in which the minds of students are really free, and do not succumb unwittingly to ideology'.<sup>36</sup> Later, he applies the term "ideology" to specific trends and characteristics of university life, such as 'entrepreneurialism' or 'quality', which he characterises as either 'pernicious' or 'virtuous' ideologies.<sup>37</sup> So, like both Kogan and Hanney and Salter and Tapper, he talks about 'quality' - for example - as an ideology, rather than seeing the former - as I do - as merely a specific manifestation of a much broader ideological structure, and so does not discuss in any detail the place of universities in the larger constructions more traditionally termed ideologies, such as liberalism or socialism or neoliberalism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 231-236.

<sup>34</sup> Salter, B. and Tapper, T., *The State and Higher Education* (Ilford, Essex: Woburn Press, 1994), p. x.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>36</sup> Barnett, R., *The Idea of Higher Education* (Buckingham: SRHE and the Open University Press, 1990), p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> Barnett, R., *Beyond All Reason: Living with Ideology in the University* (Buckingham: SRHE and the Open University Press, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Indeed he is rather dismissive of those who set the discussion up in this way (ibid., p. 206, fn.2).

In his 1989 article on higher education in the Thatcher years, Peter Scott adopts the useful tool of organising others' accounts into three categories. His first set of commentators describe the moves Thatcher made towards higher education as constituting a largely positive process of radical modernisation or reform; the second set tell the story as an evolution, stressing the continuity with what went before; and the third set consider Thatcher's moves as a largely negative radical reaction to - and abandonment of - an earlier liberal agenda. In framing his own account, Scott takes elements from all three, structuring what happened to higher education under the Thatcher Governments into phases and trends, at the end of which he highlights the Government's attempts to create 'conditions in which free competition can thrive' in higher education.<sup>39</sup> He considers that the third trend - the subordination of universities to the state - 'had already been set' prior to the Thatcher Governments of the 1980s, that Thatcher simply accelerated its pace.<sup>40</sup> However, Scott confesses that he was unable to conclude (at that time of writing) much more than that the effect of "Thatcherism" on higher education is 'difficult to weigh up' in ideological terms.<sup>41</sup>

Political theorists have of course analysed extensively both ideology and Thatcherism (to which I turn in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively) but have paid scant attention to higher education's place within an ideological framework. Dating from around the time it became apparent that the Governments of New Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair (1997-2007), were intent on extending - rather than reversing - a Thatcherite agenda, many academics and political activists have written and campaigned against forms of neoliberalism now endemic in British universities.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Scott, P., 'Higher Education', in Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (eds), *The Thatcher Effect - a Decade of Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 210.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>42</sup> See, for example: Robinson, A. and Tormey, S., 'New Labour's neoliberal *Gleichschaltung*: the case of higher education', *The Commoner*, Spring/Summer 2003: available at <http://www.thecommoner.org> [accessed 22 February 2012], p. 8; Brecher, B., 'Complicity and modularisation: how universities were made safe for the market', *Critical Quarterly*, Volume 47, Issue 1-2, 2005, pp. 72-82; Callinicos, A., *Universities*, op. cit; Hotson, H., 'Don't Look to the Ivy League', *London Review of Books*, Volume 33, Number 10, 19 May 2011, pp. 20-22: available at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n10/howard-hotson/dont-look-to-the-ivy-league> [accessed 15 August 2013]; Collini, S., *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin Books, 2012). See also Collini's earlier articles: 'Impact on humanities: Researchers must take a stand now or be judged and rewarded as salesmen', *The Times Literary Supplement*, Number 5563, 13 November 2009, pp. 18-19; 'Browne's gamble', *London Review of Books*, Volume 32, Number 21, 4 November 2010, pp. 23-25: available at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n21/stefan-collini/brownes-gamble> [accessed 8 November 2010]; and 'From Robbins to McKinsey', *London Review of Books*, Volume 33, Number 16, 25 August 2011: available at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n16/stefan-collini/from-robbins-to-mckinsey> [accessed 28 August 2011]. See also the debates on the websites of the Council for the Defence of British Universities, available at

Most view the manifestations of neoliberalism as external impositions on academe and, although they are very clear that this agenda stems from the Thatcher years, they do not offer explanations as to how neoliberalism was imposed on universities or how the latter permitted it to take hold.

On a more general level, other commentators, politicians and journalists have written histories or commentaries of the Thatcher years or biographies of Thatcher (with her death in 2013 prompting some renewed interest). These contain useful contextual information but, by their nature, do not amount to either a detailed analysis of the ideological context of her Governments or of particular manifestations of the ideology in areas of the state apparatus, such as higher education.<sup>43</sup>

In sum, educationalists' early accounts of higher education under Thatcher contain many valid observations on the issues and events of those times but they stop short of analysing the ideological process that enabled fundamental change to be wrought; later analysts pinpoint the effects but do not study in detail their provenance; and political theorists do not include the place of higher education in their analyses of ideology or Thatcherism. Whilst in part some of these shortcomings may be due to the fact that it is now easier, with hindsight, to see the significance of certain factors and a process at work, I conclude that existing commentaries fail to address my initial question seeking explanation. I contend that it is inadequate to assert that the changes resulting in a more government-dominated, market-oriented, employment-driven higher education system have occurred consequentially, inevitably, unavoidably, as a "natural" by-product of the move from an élite to a mass higher education system required to meet the needs of modern society.

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<http://cdbu.org.uk>, and the Campaign for the Public University, available at <http://publicuniversity.org.uk> [both accessed 5 March 2013].

<sup>43</sup> For discussions by political theorists and other general commentaries, see for example: Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983); Riddell, P., op. cit.; Levitas, R. (ed.), *The Ideology of the New Right* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986); Schwarz, B., op. cit., pp. 116-152; Dunleavy, P. and O'Leary, B., *Theories of the State: the Politics of Liberal Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Jessop, B., Bonnett, K., Bromley, S. and Ling, T. (eds), *Thatcherism: a Tale of Two Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); Plant, R., 'Ideology', in Drucker, H., Dunleavy, P., Gamble, A. and Peele, G. (eds), *Developments in British Politics 2* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 8-33; Dunleavy, P., Gamble, A., and Peele, G. (eds), *Developments in British Politics 3* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1990); Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma*, op.cit; Young, H., *One of Us* (London: Macmillan, Final Edition, 1993); Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit; Kavanagh, D. and Seldon, A. (eds), op. cit.; Gamble, A., op. cit; Hayes, M., op. cit; Moore, C., *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorised Biography – Volume One: Not for Turning* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

**(iv) An ideological process**

Higher education's current neoliberal characteristics did not appear from nowhere. As others have argued more generally, the neoliberal ideological transformation did not occur 'by accident', as David Harvey puts it.<sup>44</sup> That neoliberalism has become a dominant ideology in many parts of the world is often seen as 'a necessary, even wholly "natural", way for the social order to be regulated', Harvey comments.<sup>45</sup> It has developed 'pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world', he writes.<sup>46</sup> Mary Evans also challenges the way in which 'present-day constructions of the needs of the marketplace' are seen 'as both definitive reality and definitive knowledge'.<sup>47</sup> Doreen Massey similarly observes: 'That markets are natural is now so embedded in the structure of thought that even the fact that it is an assumption is rarely brought to light.'<sup>48</sup>

My central claim is that we can begin to understand this radical change and its specific manifestations in organisational contexts, including how a neoliberal agenda has taken hold in a traditionally liberal higher education system, only if we understand the process ideologically. While it is the case that many of the changes to higher education under Thatcher took place in a 'piecemeal and pragmatic fashion',<sup>49</sup> this does not mean that no ideological process was at work. Universities are now operating to agenda that reflect neoliberal characteristics: centralised control, accountability, differentiation, specification, outsourcing and privatisation of services. But if one considers the changes in more detail, some appear to be puzzling, contradictory, paradoxical and even contrary to the theoretical goals of the political parties who proposed them or to the traditions of the sector which accepted them. For instance, how and why have historically liberal universities accepted the competitive and preferential funding and promotion of some subjects over others; the drive to

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<sup>44</sup> Harvey, D., op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, M., 'A home of one's own', *Times Higher Education*, 12 April 2012, p. 26: available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=419623> [accessed 14 April 2012].

<sup>48</sup> Massey, D., 'Ideology and economics in the present moment', *Soundings*, Issue 48, Summer 2011, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Bird, R., 'Reflections on the British Government and Higher Education', *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume 48, Number 2, 1994, p. 83.

increase vocational, part-time and work-related courses, “delivered” via distance and/or e-learning; the publication of university “league tables”; the use of selectivity and “impact” in funding academic research; centralised admissions; learning being expressed in industrial and commercial language, with courses divided up into bite-sized “modules” whose “outcomes” are documented in “programme specifications”?<sup>50</sup> Why was increasingly centralised - indeed, ironically, ‘nationalised’<sup>51</sup> - control of higher education institutions by government and quangos exercised initially by a Tory government? Surely Tories believe in the power of the individual, the free market, minimal interference by the state, and even ultimately privatised independent institutions? Furthermore, why was this centralisation accepted and mirrored at institutional level by many university managers (often formerly practising academics) whose precursors had reflected traditional liberal values? Did the former want to be dominated by government; did they change their views; or did they have no choice? Why did some of these changes at national level come to be supported, defended and even actively promoted - and in later decades extended - by those who were originally political opponents of the Tories? What sense can be made of this?

Some might say, as we noted earlier, that the changes “just happened” or could not be resisted; others that higher education had to change in this way because more people need a more “relevant” higher education to enable Britain to become more economically competitive in world markets, or that universities needed to come down from their “ivory towers”, be “modernised” and join “the real world”.<sup>52</sup> Or it could be claimed that some of the changes have engendered a better and more accessible form of higher education, morally and/or pedagogically, than the earlier traditional three-year full-time state-funded undergraduate course of study.<sup>53</sup>

However, irrespective of one’s view of these or any other changes, I maintain that

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<sup>50</sup> Brecher, B., ‘Complicity and modularisation’, op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> Lal, D., *Nationalised Universities: Paradox of the Privatisation Age* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, Policy Study Number 103, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, DIUS, op. cit. Peter Scott reminds us that ‘modernisation’ was a term much favoured by Tony Blair: see Scott, P., ‘The Case for Public Universities’, *The Future of Public Universities* (web forum) (New York: Social Sciences Research Council, 2006): available at <http://publicuniversities.ssrc.org/commentaries/> [accessed 4 June 2013].

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, *The Guardian* (author not stated), 14 April 2008, ‘Man with a mission to open universities to the many’, interview with John Denham, Labour Secretary of State for DIUS (2007-2009): available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/apr/14/highereducation.accesstouniversity> [accessed 20 June 2010].

they were not simply either inevitable or random responses to economic or social needs. What might otherwise appear as an unstructured, often arbitrary and in many instances a simply contradictory narrative can be explained if we understand it ideologically. In this way, we can see why and how it has been possible to bring about radical change from a liberal to an instrumental relationship between higher education and the state, and to understand that history and the present day reality in a way that a simply descriptive account cannot provide.

Why does this matter? It matters, first, because it enables us to interpret the progress of history: what is happening to and in higher education can best be understood on the basis of what happened in a particularly politically and ideologically formative period - from 1979-1990 - for British society and its institutions, and this helps us to understand what happened after and what might happen next, if no other intervention is made. Otherwise, it is as if we are simply taking events for granted. Second, it offers a case study of how ideological rupture and change - and, ultimately, hegemony - is brought about through the construction of a new “common sense” that becomes dominant.

**(v) Two applications of ideology**

I am claiming that what has occurred is not as simple as it might appear to be, or as those who profess a “value-free” or “unbiased” stance would have us believe. If we interpret the shift as an ideological process, how are we to understand the workings of the term “ideological” in this context? I shall apply Marxist theories of ideology, using them as a framework within which to interpret my case study. While my approach itself involves assuming an ideological position, namely that the development of higher education under Thatcher and since can best be explained by applying a Marxist model of ideology, rather than simply accepting that things were bound to happen in the way they have, my thesis offers a theory through which to test evidence, whereas “simply” descriptive approaches (with their inbuilt assumptions) do not. For as Terry Eagleton says: ‘[I]deology offers a set of *reasons* for [particular] material conditions.’<sup>54</sup> And as Michael Freeden puts it: ‘Ideologies

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<sup>54</sup> Eagleton, T., *Ideology: an Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 209.

are the arrangements of political thought that illuminate the central ideas, overt assumptions, and unstated biases that in turn drive political conduct.’<sup>55</sup>

I am looking at how ideology functions in two ways. First, I am considering ideology as a set of ideas. Second, I am using the term to designate the way it works to distort reality and engineer consent. What follows, then, is to be understood in this “double” context of the interplay between ideas and political practice: understanding British higher education under Thatcher as an ideological process, we at the same time come to understand how such a process works in practice, on the ground.

In the first sense, we can see the Tories’ set of ideas in their 1979 Manifesto and other tracts, as was the case with the other political parties seeking election. The basic tenets of what they stood for were there for all to see. What was different from previous post-war governments was that Thatcher and the New Right Tories had not just a set of ideas but an approach that signalled a definitive break with the past, including their own party’s middle ground politics of consensus, continuity and ‘one-nation’ Conservatism.<sup>56</sup> The new ideas and approach were far more explicitly ideologically driven than had been the case with earlier Tory governments; and this was openly acknowledged.

In 1979 the New Right Tories had in outline a set of radical moves which they fully intended to make in government. However, not everyone - not even their own supporters - had been involved in formulating these ideas; nor were they fully worked out. Apart from the committed, many Tories who espoused the traditional one-nation Conservatism of ‘the wets’,<sup>57</sup> were not even sure whether they agreed with the ideas or the approach or that the ideas would work in practice.<sup>58</sup> The New Right needed to make the Tory Party and the general public take their ideas on board and make them work. It was not simply a matter of implementing policies to enact a

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<sup>55</sup> Freedon, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 127.

<sup>56</sup> Disraeli had advocated ‘one nation’ politics: see Gamble, A., *op. cit.*, p. 150. There is also a sense, however, in which Thatcherism can be seen, in part, as seeking to re-establish the old order: see Freedon, M., *ibid.*, pp. 34-35 and p. 90.

<sup>57</sup> The term ‘wet’, first noted by Jim Prior in 1976, characterised those who opposed, or did not demonstrate wholehearted enthusiasm for, Thatcher’s proposed policies: see Young, H., *op. cit.*, pp. 198-199; Gamble, A., *op. cit.*, p. 118; and Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma*, *op. cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Thatcher later termed the process of bringing her own Party around to her views as ‘the Party’s conversion to its own philosophy’: see Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.



pre-determined detailed plan. In order to understand what happened and why, it is of course necessary to consider the content of their ideas; but this will not on its own explain why and how the ideas developed in certain ways and came to be accepted. If it were simply a matter of presenting ideas and putting them into practice, the New Right Tories might have stated from the outset what they wanted to achieve for higher education. For example, they could have said in the run-up to the election in 1979 that they wanted to cut undergraduate student numbers in universities because fewer and only rich people should have access to a university education at taxpayers' expense, while others should be directed towards a technical training at a much lower level. They could have stated in their 1979 Manifesto that they needed to limit access to higher education as a means of safeguarding standards for the élite because only the rich and those of a certain ideological persuasion should go to the "best" universities, as only those graduates were likely to remain 'one of us',<sup>59</sup> and only they would be able to afford to pay tuition fees and maintenance costs once universities had been privatised. They could have said that, for all other students and higher education institutions, they wanted to cut the length of degrees and change the predominant mode of undergraduate degree study from full- to part-time so that students could live at the parental home and undertake paid work at the same time as their studies; that there should be an increase in class sizes and academics' and administrators' workloads; that courses should be modularised, in order to fragment sustained and coherent study by stunting critical thought; that they wanted radically to undermine the previously widely-accepted idea of a "student"; that the power of students' unions should be curbed; and that a PR sham of "quality assurance" should be created to paint a gloss over it all. They could have clearly stated that all this was to be done to promote a radical agenda of "higher education" for the masses consisting of short-term, cheap, narrowly occupational training as opposed to education, which they saw as politically dangerous (as proved to them by the students' and workers' demonstrations and strikes of the 1960s and 1970s). They could have said that, in order to promote neoliberalism, they needed to restructure higher education in a neoliberal mode, to create a market in higher education, and to make it serve government-dictated instrumental ends. However, even if they had fully known at that stage what could - or even should - be done and had presented a

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<sup>59</sup> Thatcher apparently asked advisers when considering people for appointments: 'Is he one of us?': see Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 145.

ready worked-out “blueprint”, such plain talking would hardly have been likely to win votes. If they had explicitly stated that they wanted to change the ideology of students and academics, to cut provision, and to engineer demand to follow a government agenda, then their own backbenchers and the electorate would have rejected both their ideas and their dictatorial imposition. Newly won over to Thatcher’s enchanting promises of personal freedom and material gain, the post-war rising working and middle classes, who were now increasingly expecting their children and grandchildren to go to university, would not have voted them in.

As the ideas of the incoming Thatcher Government were by no means watertight and did not necessarily “hang together”, persuading people to convert to the ideas could not be achieved by argument alone. As the set of ideas constituting Thatcherism was often incoherent and contradictory, it had to be a matter of trial and error to see what could be borne at any one time, and what might be helped along by a combination of existing circumstances and chance occurrences and exigencies. The politicians needed to work at the interface and on the contradictions, using what Harvey terms ‘the tension between the theory of neoliberalism and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalization’.<sup>60</sup> They had to proceed step by step and make their moves look “common sensical” and thus legitimate. Acceptance of New Right ideas and practices had to become a free choice but adherence needed to be constructed and seem inevitable. For example, it had to be made to be common sense to MPs and “the taxpayer” to cut universities’ funding in 1981 because too much public money was being spent on them - and that this was simply wrong *per se*. In any case, the Government would argue, the cost outweighed the benefit because standards were falling because there were too many universities; that they were in any case teaching the “wrong” subjects; and, on top of that, producing students with a lack of social responsibility. Once - if - people were persuaded of this, further steps could be taken. In short, and as I will show later, Thatcher needed to build her ideology.

How could this be achieved? How could people be eventually won over? To explain what happened to higher education under Thatcher, it is necessary to go beyond a merely descriptive - as it were, phenomenological - account of the set of ideas that developed over the decade. This requires using the term ideology also in a second

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<sup>60</sup> Harvey, D., op. cit., p. 21.

sense, to designate the way in which it functions to distort reality and build consent. I am therefore starting from the notion that this sense of ideology, in going beyond its referring to a set of ideas, captures how people are brought to experience a particular view of the world, to accept a particular set of ideas. In this sense, ideology is a medium through which interests come together, or can be brought together, to create a common interest or “common sense” to which people can be recruited and in turn recruit others. In order to make this work, it draws a veil over some things; and in this way may be said to mask reality. I am not arguing here for any particular conception of what “reality” is or what I think it should be. I am not making an epistemological claim about Thatcherism or one about whether or not its “real” ideas can be uncovered. In short, I am not subscribing to any particular epistemological view of what is “really” real and what is not. Rather, I am asking a particular question in one context and at one time: why and how is it that these conditions produced this set of ideas, forms and practices which were able to hold sway, working partly by the distortion of “reality”, and amounting to such radical changes in the relationship between higher education and the state? We shall see that the “reality” presented by Thatcher and her followers in respect of the actual situation in higher education and their relation to it was, even in their own terms, ‘manifestly not the case’,<sup>61</sup> because circumstances in particular instances had been obscured and distorted. But through a series of projects on many different fronts, and by winning battles along the way, the New Right was able to build people’s acceptance of a changed way of looking at higher education. “Key messages” and the publication of successes in one sector could be made to reinforce the new “reality” in all.<sup>62</sup> Over time, people would come to accept this new state of affairs as “normal” and understand themselves as actors within its parameters, rather than in terms of the *status quo ante*.

#### **(vi) The role of pragmatism and contradiction**

So if we stand back and offer an ideological account of the changes to higher education in the Thatcher years, we can test the premise that ideological change was in part the outcome of a deliberate agenda, and in part functioned through distorting -

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<sup>61</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Thatcher’s appointment of Bernard Ingham as her chief press secretary and propagandist marked the beginnings of the explicit “politicisation” of government communications, later consolidated under the Blair governments. My thanks to Pauline Sinkins (formerly Head of Communications, Directorate of Health and Social Care [South]) for this point.

or only partially representing - reality. These two interrelated ways in which ideology operated were strengthened by the New Right simply capitalising pragmatically on events and circumstances. The progress of the ideology was not thwarted by whether or not individual elements of the Thatcher Governments' policies made sense in themselves or in relation to others, or whether or not they succeeded in imposing this or that individual policy in the way it was originally presented. The way in which a situation unfolded enabled them to see what could and could not be achieved at the most appropriate time. Something else could always be tried instead, or the original attempt resurrected later. For example, the idea of two-year degrees was at the time presented as an end in itself, and believed to be so both by those in favour and those against. That they did not materialise did not matter: once resources became tighter, a variant of the idea - so-called 'Foundation' degrees, for the less able - would be taken up by the former polytechnics and colleges of higher education. That might be perceived as a victory by those opposing two-year degrees since they were kept out of most universities. However the New Right's ability to capitalise on whatever was "going on" - or allegedly going on - lent strength to its project overall. What was most important was that the ideology was being practised and the "endgame" remained clear: to move people to a predominantly neoliberal way of thinking, so that neoliberalism became people's "new reality". If the situation availed itself, 'shock tactics'<sup>63</sup> could be used, whereby a crisis was created or a state of affairs embellished in order to force change:<sup>64</sup> for instance, the "need" for immediate cuts to

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<sup>63</sup> Naomi Klein describes how Friedman advised the Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet on the need for 'shock treatment' in order to embed free market economics and banish Allende's socialism from Chile, stating that 'it was the only medicine. Absolutely. There is no other. There is no other long-term solution.' - quoted in Klein, N., *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 81. The Thatcher Government did not use physical violence to the same extent as Pinochet but did use attack (such as by the police against the striking mineworkers and their supporters), either deliberately or opportunistically, to obtain submission. Peregrine Worsthorne, in 1978, expressed his fear of 'the spectre haunting Britain', that is, that 'ordinary people [are] being allowed to run wild', whereas what was required was 'an ugly battle to restore some minimum of social order': quoted in Hayes, M., op. cit., p. 7. William Whitelaw is reported to have said: 'If we hadn't had the Toxteth riots, I doubt if we could have dealt with Arthur Scargill.' - quoted in Young, H., op. cit., p. 368. Thatcherite Alfred Sherman considered that 'if the unemployed get lower benefits, they will be quicker to start looking for work. [...] As for the lumpen proletariat, coloured people and the Irish, let's face it, the only way to hold them in check is to have enough properly trained police.' - quoted in Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma*, op.cit., p. 117. See also Ch. 3, fn.34.

<sup>64</sup> Friedman advised that 'only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis occurs the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are around. [...] Our basic function [is] to develop alternatives to existing policies [...] until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable.' - quoted in Hall, S., 'The neoliberal revolution', *Soundings*, Issue 48, Summer 2011, p. 11. Martin Cohen writes: 'A crisis is never bad news for a shrewd politician: it is an opportunity to implement an agenda'; and he quotes Rahm Emanuel, former policy adviser to Barack Obama (President of the United States, 2009- ), who stated: 'You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.' -

universities in 1981 or the alarmist allegations that some higher education institutions or educational bodies were being overrun by “ideological” or “biased” Marxist academics and students, thus requiring investigation by government agents.<sup>65</sup>

But wasn't it contradictory to Tory ideas of freedom to impose cuts in particular subject areas on free universities, for example, or to intervene in their internal affairs? As we shall see later, distortions, contradictions, limitations and inconsistencies inherent in the Thatcher Governments' own practices and in those of their liberal opponents could be harnessed to force change and help build consent to - or at least acceptance of - policies.<sup>66</sup> For example, we shall see that the 1981 university cuts would in fact cost more than they would save, even though the Government claimed that the cuts were necessary to save money.<sup>67</sup> Liberal-minded educationalists and politicians could help here as they could be won over for

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‘Reversing into trouble’, *Times Higher Education*, 9 December 2010: available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/414510.article> [accessed 12 December 2010]. See also Monbiot, G., ‘For the Tories, this is not a financial crisis but a long-awaited opportunity’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2010, p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> Julius Gould (a sociologist at the University of Nottingham) and his fellow ‘Black Papers’ contributors accused left-wing teachers and students at the Polytechnic of North London (PNL) of denying others freedom of speech and imposing a Marxist ideology: see Gould, J. (ed.), *The Attack on Higher Education: Marxist and Radical Penetration - Report of a Study Group of the Institute for the Study of Conflict* (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1977); and Jacka, K., Cox, C., Marks, J., *Rape of Reason: the Corruption of the Polytechnic of North London* (London: Churchill Press, 1975). The Secretary of State, Keith Joseph, ordered an investigation. The resultant report alluded to the possibility of bias and alleged low academic standards, making various recommendations which were implemented: see Department of Education and Science, *Report by HM Inspectors on the Polytechnic of North London: BSc Sociology, BA Applied Social Studies courses, Inner London, inspected 27-29 April and 3-6 May 1983*, DES 177/83 (London: HMSO, 1983). The validating body - the Council for National Academic Awards (the CNAA) - criticised the HMI report and was subsequently “punished” (it was widely thought) by not being invited to sit on the 1984 Lindop Committee, set up to consider the future of the very validation process it ran for polytechnic courses: see Silver, H., *A Higher Education: the Council for National Academic Awards and British Higher Education 1964-1989* (Basingstoke: Falmer Press, 1990). Thatcher's and Joseph's dislike of the social sciences and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), with its “wrong” economic theories, is notorious, Joseph repeatedly attempting to cut its funding and change its focus: see, for example, Halsey, A. H., *Decline of Donnish Dominion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 181-182. Thatcher also interfered at local levels, such as by criticising Brighton Polytechnic's BEd degree for putting too little emphasis on ‘factual knowledge’ and ‘practical classroom experience’ and too much on “trendy” equal opportunities issues: see *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 598.

<sup>66</sup> As Slavoj Žižek puts it, an ideology ‘really succeeds when even the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function as arguments in its favour’: Žižek, S., *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 49.

<sup>67</sup> For a strikingly similar later example of the same contradiction, see Morgan, J., ‘Reforms’ impact on deficit may be less than zero, says Hepi’, *Times Higher Education*, 25 October 2012, p. 6: available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/421590.article> [accessed 25 October 2012]; Million Plus, ‘Economic cost of higher tuition fees almost 6.5 times greater than potential Treasury savings’, 18 February 2013: available at <http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/press-releases/latest-press-releases/economic-cost-of-higher-tuition-fees-almost-6.5-times-greater-than-potential-treasury-savings/> [accessed 25 March 2013].

“change” as they were, for example, finding it increasingly difficult to support elite universities which very largely excluded lower social classes and “non-standard” entrants. Situations could be harnessed to the service of a much larger goal: destabilising universities in order to further a neoliberal agenda. In fact, their opponents not perceiving the full extent of how this worked stymied their opposition, as specific policies - together with the contradictions in the opponents’ own position - often masked the “bigger picture” they ultimately served.<sup>68</sup> The internal tensions in the Thatcher Governments’ positions, which appear at times to suggest that an argument was being lost or did not make sense, did not matter. For even if a particular policy or argument was lost, the terms in which the debate was conducted in itself helped to bring about the more important fundamental aim. Even if a proposal did not make sense, even if reality and reason had been distorted and “common sense” made to prevail, there nonetheless had to be an apparently practical and pragmatic solution to the “problem” it purported to address. Conditions could be created in which people were sufficiently disoriented to believe that a new order was “given”, to accept that - in Thatcher’s infamous phrase - there was ‘no alternative’.<sup>69</sup>

The New Right themselves might have thought (or purported to think) that their ideas were not ideological. They might have presented them as pragmatic responses to material, economic and social needs, to situations outside their control, a set of ideas and solutions based simply on “common sense”. But on both counts they would have been mistaken. This sort of ideology works through being deliberately inexplicit, through diverting attention from what is actually being sought, or by actually distorting “reality”. It functions to further one or other set of interests, irrespective of whether or not those promoting these interests know that it is ideology which is at work. If people can be brought to believe this “common sense” view of the world, the resultant ideological shift will at once reinforce its foundations and set up the next step.

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<sup>68</sup> For example, see Brecher, B., ‘Complicity and modularisation’, op. cit.

<sup>69</sup> The phrase “There is no alternative” (TINA) was first used by nineteenth-century liberal Herbert Spencer. Young describes Thatcher’s use of the phrase as ‘an assertion that mesmerised the anti-monetarists, terrorising them into spellbound if curmudgeonly acquiescence’: see Young, H., op. cit., p. 205.

### (vii) Language and practice

To bring about the changes required, it was vital to start to change the language, assumptions, attitudes and practices of those in higher education and, indeed, of parents, funders of research, potential employers of graduates, etc. The New Right Tories made use of a discourse which served to promote their set of ideas to the electorate and, crucially, to their own backbenchers in acceptable, normalising terms. To put in place a lasting “cultural revolution”, a movement that would continually reinforce and reproduce its basic premises, the New Right - ironically in a quasi-Maoist way - needed to change material conditions in such a way that the changed situation would itself lead to ever more radical ideological change.<sup>70</sup> That process had to be pursued methodically and repeatedly over time, so that the messages would be embedded and the ideology internalised and put into practice by the very people who might previously have opposed the ideas. In this way, the reality - the practice of everyday life in universities - would help to bring about radical changes in ideas, without many practitioners, let alone the general public, even noticing the nature of developments. Most would not be aware of the wider context and significance of changes in higher education until such time as the material conditions had themselves determined a new reality. As Stuart Hall puts it:

[This practice] changes the field of struggle by changing the place, the position, the relative weight of the condensations within any one discourse and constructing them according to an alternative logic. What shifts them is not ‘thoughts’ but a particular practice of class struggle: ideological and political class struggle. What makes these representations popular is that they have a purchase on practice, they shape it, they are written into its materiality. What constitutes them as a danger is that they change the nature of the terrain itself which struggles of different kinds are taking place; they have pertinent effects on these struggles, their effect is to constitute a new balance of political forces.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, the practice of an ideology changes the original ground on which its ideas are formed.

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<sup>70</sup> John Gray later bemoans ‘the undoing of conservatism’ which had been ‘thrown away in the pursuit of a managerialist Cultural Revolution seeking to refashion the entire national life on the impoverished model of contract and market exchange’, calling this a ‘Maoism of the Right’, amounting to a ‘permanent revolution of unfettered market processes’: Gray, J., *Enlightenment’s Wake* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 87. Similarly, Tory ex-Cabinet Minister Douglas Hurd, warned: ‘We shouldn’t give the impression that we believe in a sort of permanent cultural revolution in the style of Chairman Mao or Comrade Trotsky.’ - speaking at a fringe meeting, Tory Party Conference, Blackpool, 7 October 1993, reported on BBC News at Ten. At the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act, Peter Scott wondered whether government had now become ‘an arena for cultural counter-revolution rather than [...] an exercise in rational public administration’: Scott, P., ‘On the silly side’, Editorial, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 11 November 1988, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), op. cit., p. 39.

Ideological change can be brought about by persuading people to adopt certain concepts, practices and forms of expression - a subtle introduction of ‘newspeak’.<sup>72</sup> The new ideas and directed use of language helps further to shape material changes in conditions, which will in turn further shape the reality in question. To take an example: the concept of the consumer and the language of the market is now accepted and used by higher education managers and even by many practising teachers and researchers. How and when and why did this become general parlance and practice? The original concept of “student” has in many universities been rejected in favour of seeing the student as a “customer” or a “client”. The words are used in internal institutional discussions and papers, not only in government policy documents. Similarly, the phrases “delivering a module” or “facilitating” a class are often used instead of, say, “teaching students”. The language masks and then people’s perceptions and practices change. The one reinforces the other.<sup>73</sup> To pursue the example: the customer, because s/he pays for the service “delivered”, is, of course, always right; is entitled to a contract or charter which splits up what they get into bite-sized and measurable goods and services; needs to be wooed through glossy publicity and bonus offers on the internet into buying the product; gives “consumer feedback” through national student surveys as a result of which the service has to be changed if the university wants to remain “competitive”; can always complain or send it back if it is not good enough or not what they now want; wants access to the goods on offer day and night; demands choice; and can always change their mind, complain and get a refund, shop around and buy something else somewhere else instead. This commercial business language and practice is now used by governments, higher education quangos and university managements alike, and is changing how some (albeit not all) students and academics see themselves.<sup>74</sup> As we saw earlier, the 2010 Browne Report - a government-commissioned review - on

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<sup>72</sup> A word coined by George Orwell: Orwell, G., *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

<sup>73</sup> Richard Pring describes this process as follows: ‘The “vocalizing” and the “economizing” of the language through which education is described and evaluated (with its audits, performance indicators, cost-effectiveness of curriculum delivery, quality assurance, competency-based objectives, value-addedness, inputs and outputs, usefulness) *transforms* [my emphasis] our understanding of educational activities and of the values attributed to them.’ - Pring, R., ‘Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation’, in Williams, M., Dougherty, R. and Banks, F. (eds), *Continuing the Education Debate* (London: Cassell, 1992), p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Ch. 8, fn.26.



higher education conceived and expressed the notions of student and higher education almost entirely in this instrumental and business mode.

### **(viii) The role of universities**

Universities had a central role to play in serving this hegemonic process - but it was to be a battle.<sup>75</sup> Education is the ground on which ‘a major battle for the soul of society must be fought’, as the Conservative philosopher Roger Scruton puts it.<sup>76</sup> Thatcher had told the Federation of Conservative Students in 1975: ‘The time has come to counter-attack. [...] The universities and colleges of education are central features in the battleground of ideas.’<sup>77</sup> The Thatcherites needed to create conditions in which the previously-accepted liberal purposes of higher education could be reinterpreted to bring universities and students into the service of a government agenda. As if taking a leaf out of a text by Antonio Gramsci or Louis Althusser (to whom I turn in Chapter 2), the Tories recognised education’s key role as a state apparatus. Along with other aspects of the state, it had become tainted with the “wrong” ideology and needed to be “brought round” to the “right” way of thinking. For example, a briefing paper for Tory MPs from the Conservative Research Department Education Desk Officer, leaked around the time of the 1985 White Paper on schools, demonstrates the Government’s commitment to what needed to be done:

The present government is determined to undo the damage caused by the misconceptions of the 1960s. A series of policies is being painstakingly developed and gradually implemented - policies necessarily using many different instruments, but unusually coherent in their approach and with the potential to bring about a restoration of a common-sense approach to education in place of Labour’s dogma.<sup>78</sup>

Higher education institutions needed to be requisitioned to help bring about a fundamental shift in people’s political and social views, attitudes and practices. They were a crucial component to be used by politicians in the conversion process of others. Everyone - especially young people, whether studying, employed or unemployed - had to be re-educated, to be made to reject the excesses of the 1960s

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<sup>75</sup> A ministerial spokesperson termed the Thatcher Government’s actions as a deliberate ‘*Kulturkampf* against British universities’: see Anderson, P., *English Questions* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 194.

<sup>76</sup> Scruton, R., *The Meaning of Conservatism* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 147. Although an early supporter of Thatcherism, Scruton, like other Tory traditionalists (see Chapter 7), became opposed to the instrumentalist undermining of liberal higher education.

<sup>77</sup> Thatcher’s Speech to the Federation of Conservative Students’ Conference, 24 March 1975, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102663> [accessed 26 July 2013].

<sup>78</sup> Knight, C., op. cit., p. 175. The word “systematic” (rather than “coherent”) describes the process better. See also fn.65 above.

and 1970s and to turn instead to those values that would furnish neoliberalism with the rigidly instrumental social structures and attitudes it required for its success. People needed to be taught a business-oriented approach to life; the pleasures of productivity and competitiveness; and bourgeois/puritan values, such as hard work. Those converted to these values could then become the agents who further developed, reconfirmed and reproduced the new practices. To this end, higher education needed to be - ironically and contradictorily - at once less reliant on public funding and more responsive to government-dictated “employment needs”. Scrutinising higher education in this context enables us to understand the seemingly puzzling shift I outlined at the start; tells us something about the nature of ideology; shows how ideological change works; and brings into focus the ideological function of higher education itself.

**(ix) Evidence, method and structure**

In order to trace this hegemonic process, I start by setting out in the next two chapters the senses of “ideology” I am adopting and the contexts of my study. In Chapter 2, I consider in more detail Marxist interpretations of the concept and workings of ideology and how they might elucidate my initial question. Next I consider, in Chapter 3, the two main contexts of my study: first, Thatcherism and how it used a “common sense” approach in presenting its ideas and establishing their predominance; second, a brief history of the relationship of higher education to the state prior to 1979, drawing out those broad concerns on which Thatcher and her followers could later capitalise in the construction of their ideology in respect of higher education.

The second part of the thesis - from Chapter 4 onwards - narrates the unfolding ideological strategy by considering a substantial body of parliamentary documents, processes and debates. I have selected these sources as evidence because Parliament is where a government’s ideological projects are argued, debated and implemented. My analysis constitutes an *explication de texte* of the relevant parliamentary documents and discussions, since Parliament is where the terms of the political debate are set, where an ideology is constructed through linguistic activity in the legislative context, where ideology is in fact “materialised”.<sup>79</sup> Chapters 4-6 set out

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<sup>79</sup> See Ch. 2, fn.71.

the detailed changes and show how the emerging ideology was formed in theory and refined in practice through policy drafts and debates. In Chapter 7, I consider ways in which it was strengthened or challenged. I conclude, in Chapter 8, by evaluating the extent to which my application of these methods can further an understanding of how ideas and practices moved in the way they did in higher education under Thatcher and, more generally, the complex way in which an ideology is generated and comes to be accepted and put into practice. From my analysis of the arguments and debates, I show how a neoliberal ideology began to emerge and take shape for higher education, moving from a stage of zealotry amongst Thatcherite supporters to take hold more widely as a new consensus came to be constructed and disseminated through political and organisational forms. Even though ideological stances assumed in respect of higher education were not coherent at the start, or even into the mid-1980s, the ideology needed to appear as if it were coherent and would succeed, gathering its own remorseless momentum as it progressed. Particularly with the benefit of hindsight, we can see how this process operated and how a new “common sense” was made to prevail.

I shall argue that a successful challenge to the traditional liberal principles and structures of higher education was brought about by a combination of the New Right being able to gain support for the broad principles underlying their political agenda - their set of ideas - and by the way in which ideology worked to make those ideas acceptable and coherent. The interplay between these two factors, combined with the lack of effective resistance, enabled the New Right to pursue an agenda of radical ideological change and thus allowed not only Thatcher but her successors - the New Labour Governments from 1997 and, latterly, the Coalition Government of Tories and Liberal Democrats since 2010 - to embed an ever more radically instrumental view of higher education into its state apparatus and, by extension, out to society as a whole.

## Chapter 2    Marx and Marxists on ideology

### (i)    A framework

This is not intended as a detailed history of the concept or genealogy of ideology or a critical evaluation of the various meanings and uses attached to the term. This has been voluminously covered elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> In brief, the term “ideology” was first coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy in the aftermath of the French Revolution to refer to “the science of ideas” or “idea-logy”.<sup>2</sup> De Tracy was head of the *Institut de France*, founded by the Revolutionary Convention, with Napoleon’s patronage, to spread the ideas of the Enlightenment and the new revolutionary social order as the *idéologues* considered these could be established, studied and laid down in the same way as the empirical certainties of science. However, as Napoleon began to build an empire with himself at its head, the *idéologues* criticised his increasingly despotic rule; in turn, he attacked them, even blaming them for his eventual downfall. In this way, the term came to acquire the negative interpretation that ideas - other people’s ideas - were “merely” ideology and not “the real world” of human experience. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels took up ideology’s negative aspect, using this more recently acquired pejorative connotation to criticise prevailing German idealist notions. In reaction to - but building on - the work of G. W. F. Hegel, Marx and Engels wrote *The German Ideology* (1845-6), in which they rejected the Hegelian notion that ideas “come first” and have some sort of “independent” existence, claiming, rather, that “material practice” “came before” ideas, and not *vice versa*.<sup>3</sup> They gave a ‘critical edge’<sup>4</sup> to the notion of ideology, which they set at odds with “the truth” inherent in their developing theory of historical materialism. Not least because it is from Marx and Engels that much

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: McCarney, J., *The Real World of Ideology* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980); Geuss, R., *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Larrain, J., *Marxism and Ideology* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983); McLellan, D., *Ideology* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986); Meszaros, I., *The Power of Ideology* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989); Eagleton, T., *op. cit.*; Freeden, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> For the early history of the usage of the term “ideology”, see Freeden, M., *ibid.*, p. 4; McLellan, D., *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> McLellan (*ibid.*, p. 21) points out that the collection was never properly finished or edited by Marx and Engels, only being published in the 1920s. So Gramsci (as Larrain notes, *op. cit.*, p. 78) would not have seen their interpretation of ideology in the pejorative sense at the time he was writing in prison, although he would of course have been aware of the negative connotation it had already acquired.

<sup>4</sup> McLellan, D., *ibid.*, p. 10; Eagleton, T., *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45.

subsequent thinking about the concept of ideology and its applications derives, this is my starting-point.<sup>5</sup>

I am drawing on these and later Marxian interpretations of ideology in order to develop the two aspects which will elucidate my study: namely ideology as a set of ideas; and ideology as a distorting mechanism and a means through which people are brought to access and adopt that set of ideas and put them into practice. I am not examining everything that Marx and Marxists have said about ideology, or others' commentaries on them, in order to evaluate the validity or otherwise of usages of the term ideology within the history of Marxism. Rather, I am using strands of Marxist thought on ideology selectively to help frame a theoretically informed account of a set of events - changes to higher education in Thatcher's Britain - that otherwise appear contradictory and puzzling. As a means of navigating a way through the many interpretations of ideology in order to harness those appropriate for my purposes, I adopt Raymond Geuss's three descriptors of ideology: ideology in terms of its descriptive, pejorative and positive connotations.<sup>6</sup> This is not to imply that these descriptors simply follow consecutively in the genealogy of Marxist notions of ideology. Rather, I am using them as markers in my framework for the consideration of the two concepts of ideology to be applied to my case study.

## **(ii) The descriptive**

In the first of Geuss's categories, the 'descriptive', one way of viewing ideology is as 'an empirical study of human groups - call it "anthropology" ', as he puts it, '[...] and how they change over time'.<sup>7</sup> Terry Eagleton describes ideologies as 'belief-systems characteristic of certain social groups or classes' which provide a 'frame' for their views and can be seen as 'a body of meanings and values encoding certain interests relevant to social power'.<sup>8</sup> Although clearly descriptive, ideology in this mode is not simply a "value-free" scientific phenomenon, as even descriptions are located in a particular social context. I employ this sense of ideology in laying out the set of ideas that the New Right Tories wanted higher education to espouse; and I shall also be describing the traditions and assumptions inherent in higher education

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<sup>5</sup> Marx brought the concept of ideology into 'intellectual currency', as McCarney puts it (op. cit., p. i).

<sup>6</sup> Geuss, R., op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., pp. 43-45.

and various understandings of its role, in order to consider the interplay between these ideas and those of the Thatcher Governments. I shall address these matters largely in Chapters 3 and 4.

### **(iii) The pejorative**

The study of the “ideology in practice” in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 - and how it relates to ideology as a set of ideas - is more complex and uses Geuss’s notion of ideology in both ‘pejorative’ and ‘positive’ senses. Using the former, I analyse what was said and what happened in Parliament, and the reactions of different interest groups, as a way of showing how the proponents of an ideology present it as their version of the truth; and how their opponents, contrariwise, consider the situation presented as an ideological construct, as a dissimulation and distortion of reality, built on contradictions. I shall go on to consider how a Thatcherite ideology came to dominate and how opponents were brought to believe, or at least accept, it in Geuss’s positive sense.

In the pejorative sense, ideology appears to function not just by means of the strength of the ideas but by supporting a flawed or narrow or - not even pejoratively - simply a specific set of ideas, and making them look as if they are “truth claims”, with the result that people are led to accept a set of beliefs as if these were “the full story”.<sup>9</sup> For example, the New Right Tories wanted from the mid-1970s to bring about public acceptance of a radically new set of ideas and a new way of “doing politics”.<sup>10</sup> Even once in government, they needed to get their policies accepted. As I asked in Chapter 1, how were they to do this? If they had said, for instance, that they wanted to cut all public funding of higher education - a logical extension of the neoliberal position, that is that individuals as consumers should pay directly for their own higher education and that institutions would survive or fall in the free market - they would have been unlikely to get sufficient support at that time. So, as Chapters 4 and 5 will show, what they actually argued was that higher education had to take cuts like all other areas of public expenditure, that it was costing too much, and that there were in any case too many higher education institutions providing an inferior higher

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<sup>9</sup> Freeden, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Thatcher said in her memoirs: ‘[W]e intended to achieve a fundamental change of direction. We stood for a new beginning, not more of the same.’ - *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 15.

education. Ideology needed to be set to work as a mechanism or means by which New Right ideas could be introduced in acceptable terms.

Using the concept of ideology in a pejorative sense, Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* argue that in capitalism the dominant set of ideas, and therefore the ideology supporting it, is bound to be wrong because the ideas are expressions of the capitalist way of looking at the world; and that that view is wrong. They claim that, in one sense, ideology as a “concrete” set of ideas is both the product and the rationalisation of material economic interests, of the economic relations of production and the class system. In a second sense - partly inevitably, on account of how ideology works, and partly by contrivance (“according to plan”, so to speak) - they claim that these ideas also mask and mystify the reality which produces them. Ideology, then, works to promote and reproduce the material economic domination it represents; and is thus flawed, for it helps to legitimate a mistaken view of the world and an unjust form of power. Marx and Engels claim that those who control the economic base (the material production) also - and thereby - control ideas, which are then used to conceal and justify what is wrong, namely the unequal distribution of resources:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance [...]. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.<sup>11</sup>

Because the ideas of the ruling class are false, the way in which the ruling class controls, regulates, and disseminates those ideas - ideology - is also wrong. In sum, ideology covers things up and gives rise to what appear to be solutions. It is, as

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<sup>11</sup> Engels, F. and Marx, K., *The German Ideology*, ed. Arthur, C. J. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 64-65.

Eagleton puts it, ‘an imaginary resolution of real contradictions which blinds men and women to the harsh actuality of their social conditions’.<sup>12</sup> As McLellan explains:

What made ideas into ideology was their connection with the conflictual nature of social and economic relationships which characterized the labour process. [...] It was their connection with this class struggle and its social and economic basis that gave certain ideas their ideological force. Society was in fact riven by conflicts of interest, but in order for it not to fall apart these oppositions were covered up by ideas which represented attempts to portray society as cohesive rather than conflictual by justifying the asymmetrical distribution of social and economic power. [...] What made ideas ideological, therefore, was that they concealed the real nature of social and economic relationships and thus serve to justify the unequal distribution of social and economic resources in society. It followed that not all ideas were ideological but only those which served to conceal social contradictions. Hence, while all classes, including the working class, could produce ideology, it was only ideology in so far as it served to further the interest of the ruling class.<sup>13</sup>

It is as if things were the wrong way round: ‘[I]n all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*’.<sup>14</sup> But this supposes that ideology creates nothing more than an illusion, an inversion of a reality which is in itself distorted. As Freeden states, for Marx ‘the very notion of ideology served the one critical purpose of alerting us to its insidious nature and the need to unmask it’.<sup>15</sup> Its very purpose is to mask reality. The correct way of looking at things - a true experience of the material world - would be achieved by confronting the social contradictions of the capitalist mode of production through the class struggle.<sup>16</sup> So, to return to the higher education context, while the Government presented the 1981 cuts (for example) as an essential saving, its (simply) allegedly saving money was not the main ideological point: its purpose (Marx might have said) was to cloud the reality of the New Right Tories’ need to regain control of higher education.

For Marx and Engels, ideology operates - in a pejorative sense - as an accessory to the crime, so to speak, of the wrong way of looking at things. It helps the ruling class

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<sup>12</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> McLellan, D., *Ideology*, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

<sup>14</sup> Engels, F. and Marx, K., *The German Ideology*, op. cit., p. 47. For interpretations of the fraught concept of the *camera obscura*, see Mephram, J., ‘The theory of ideology in *Capital*’, *Radical Philosophy*, Volume 2, Number 2, 1972, p. 18, fn.31; and Freeden, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Freeden, M., op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> In his famous statement of the primacy of material practice, Marx wrote in the ‘Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*’ (1859): ‘The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness’: in McLellan, D. (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 389.



to get away with asserting partial truths and to legitimate their ideas by making them appear to be universally true. As Marx and Engels wrote:

[I]f we confine ourselves to saying that these or those ideas were dominant at a given time, without bothering ourselves about the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, if we thus ignore the individuals and world conditions which are the source of the ideas, we can say, for instance, that during the time the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc. were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. The ruling class on the whole imagines this to be so. This conception of history [...] will necessarily come up against the phenomenon that increasingly abstract ideas hold sway, ie ideas which increasingly take on the form of universality [...]. [E]ach new class [...] is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interests as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.<sup>17</sup>

This incomplete, false, partial ‘idea-ology’ is a phenomenon which is ‘supposed to deceive’.<sup>18</sup> This is because there is ‘a kind of dissembling or duplicity built into the very economic structures of capitalism, such that it cannot help presenting itself to consciousness in ways askew to what it actually is’.<sup>19</sup> Marx famously said about people’s belief in religion: ‘The demand to give up the illusions about their condition is a demand to give up a condition that requires illusion.’<sup>20</sup> People are drawn in to seeing things incorrectly or incompletely: for Marx, ideology is not so much ‘a question of logical or empirical falsity but of the superficial or misleading way in which truth is asserted’, as McLellan puts it.<sup>21</sup> Or, as Norman Geras has it, mechanisms are in force such that ‘capitalist society necessarily appears to its agents as something other than it really is’.<sup>22</sup> Ideology works to convince those within it that something is universally rather than contingently true; that is, that something is not what it actually is. This needs to be believed both by the dominant class and by those being dominated: a dominant ideology works to ‘persuade us to see the world as our rulers see it, not as it is in itself’.<sup>23</sup> What makes the ideas seem coherent and “timeless” is the tendency in ideology to universalise from a particular economic,

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<sup>17</sup> Engels, F. and Marx, K., *The German Ideology*, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

<sup>18</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>20</sup> McLellan, D. (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, op. cit., p. 64; McLellan, D., *Ideology*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Mepham, J., op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 43.

social and political context in favour of the proponent's own ends. Bhikhu Parekh describes how, for Marx, ideology helps to present this partial point of view:

[E]very narrow point of view offers a limited and distorted knowledge of its subject matter, and has an inherent tendency to universalise its assumptions and categories of thought [...]. [T]he knowing subject is a socially situated being who perceives the world from a specific social position characterised by specific conditions and forms of thought [...]. [E]very social point of view claims universal or absolute validity [...]. For [Marx] an ideology is a body of thought systematically biased towards a specific social group. It turns the latter's requirements into universal norms, its needs and interests into the sole criteria of human well-being, its view of reason into the sole criterion of rationality, the limits of its world into those of the world itself, and so on. In so doing, an ideology is forced to [...] give a biased and distorted account of its subject matter.<sup>24</sup>

Ideology in this pejorative sense works, as Eagleton summarises it, to make acceptable a set of ideas through 'processes whereby interests of a certain kind become masked, rationalized, naturalized, universalized, legitimated in the name of certain forms of political power'.<sup>25</sup> This enables an ideology to present itself as if it were a 'world view'.<sup>26</sup> Again, to repeat the central point here: what is contingent and local is presented as universal, such as in Thatcher's 'there is no alternative' claim. No doubt there were alternatives, but she had to make people believe that her set of ideas was "right". In this way, whether they shared it or not, people could be persuaded to start putting her view - and policies that derived from it - into practice.

In a Marxian sense, ideology helps to conceal the social contradictions and inequalities engendered by capitalism. In Marx's understanding of "real" as opposed to "logical" contradiction, capitalism is inherently contradictory. The principal relation between the capitalist and the wage-labourer 'lies at the origin of, and needs to be concealed by, ideology', so that the contradictions can continue to reproduce themselves, Jorge Larrain explains.<sup>27</sup> "Reality" may be hidden from even those actively engaged in perpetrating an ideology, as John Mepham demonstrates: 'In these terms the theory says that it is a feature of social life, and in particular the life of social production, that it is so structured as to render that social reality sometimes

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<sup>24</sup> Parekh, B., *Marx's Theory of Ideology* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 214.

<sup>25</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 43. Geuss stresses that this is not the same as ideology in a purely descriptive sense: Geuss, R., op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Larrain, J., op. cit., pp. 28-29 and pp. 122-168.

opaque to its participants.<sup>28</sup> Ideology can be seen as generating illusion and mystification but not necessarily in the sense of being deliberately false: ‘Marx’s theory postulates that ideology arises from the fact that the situation might be such as to provide a person with reasons for thinking in terms of categories which necessarily generate falsehood and illusion.’<sup>29</sup> It could be that those ‘who believe what they believe about social relations [...] are aware of the connection between such beliefs and the advancement of their own interests [because] it is in the interests of that person or group of persons that such beliefs be held’.<sup>30</sup> Whether Marx meant that such distorted truths arise (perhaps unwittingly) from an incomplete and incoherent view of the world, or whether illusions are more deliberately contrived, is an important distinction for some Marxists but is not a matter with which I am concerned here. I am not particularly concerned with the derivation of ideology, or the motivation of those pursuing a specific ideology, but rather with how an ideology is produced, functions and comes to succeed. Either way, the important point here for my thesis is that ideology functions - in this Marxian sense - to mask what its opponents would call reality, to conceal what is “really” going on.

According to Marxist scholars, in Marx’s later work ideology functions in a related but rather different manner. It is claimed that the later Marx still views ideology as distorting and concealing things but, as McLellan puts it, also ‘as reflecting something real, if decidedly partial, and also as being itself a real force’.<sup>31</sup> Eagleton similarly takes the view that, in Marx’s later work, there is a built-in structural way in which “reality” is falsified by ideology, which now has ‘a secure grounding in the material practices of bourgeois society’; whereas, in *The German Ideology*, ideology is considered as simply illusory and can therefore more simply be ‘unmasked’.<sup>32</sup> It is the more nuanced sense of ideology as the distortion or selective or partial presentation of reality that I am adopting here.

So, to turn to my case study and consider how ideology in this pejorative sense might usefully be applied to it: Thatcher and the New Right Tories had a vision of how things should be and, although that vision was bound to be partial, they either

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<sup>28</sup> Mepham, J., op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> McLellan, D., *Ideology*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 87.

genuinely believed that it was not, that it was the only one, or they wanted it to become so. Either way, they wanted it to be everyone's vision. The vision could be held together by various universalising notions which they either thought did make sense, or thought could be made to look as if they made sense (and thus come to make sense), to be everyone's "common sense", in order to progress their ideas. These included notions such as: "Great" Britain; freedom; democracy; the free exchange or sale of labour; the free purchase of goods; the virtue of hard work; the benefits of "standing on your own two feet" and not relying on publicly-funded services; privatisation and the personal buying of services like the utilities, housing, education and health and social care; low taxation; owning your own property; and heterosexual marriage and family life. As we have already noted, according to Marxists, if ideas are universalised and accepted as true without scrutinising the social, political and economic context in which they are produced - that is, their relation to economic material interests - then this is going to further the interests of the producers of those ideas, namely the ruling or dominant class. However, their ideas will necessarily be flawed, because they are either understood by the dominant class as though they were universal, without consideration of the conditions in which the ideas are produced, or are presented as such. For example, the New Right Tory Government's view in the early 1980s that public expenditure on universities should be cut was a part of the universalising notion that the state was spending too much. But the proposed remedy did not in itself make sense because it would in fact have cost the same or more to keep prospective students unemployed and to make staff redundant: the purported saving had not been costed. However, although true, to criticise the "remedy" as not properly costed is to miss the wider ideological point. That it was not costed was not simply an oversight: it was in the interests of those wanting to cut higher education precisely not to undertake any costings. Furthermore, as noted in Chapter 1, the specifics of individual policies did not matter as much as the way in which a proposal could be used to contribute to the message that the state was spending too much money on universities. Individual policies become clearer when one understands the overall ideological process within which the Thatcher Government was working.

Marx would have said that what was really taking place was the domination of one class by another; and that this could be masked or disguised by making it appear that

something other than that was going on because control was in the hands of the ruling class. For example, New Right Tories might have said that it was people's own choice as to whether or not they went to university: people needed to be made to suppose that those attending fee-paying public schools, which coached their pupils specifically to pass Oxbridge entrance examinations, were "naturally" more intelligent than they were; had fairly won their places at Oxbridge; and therefore deserved to go there. Privilege had to be disguised as the "natural" course of things. Similarly, cutting public spending in general and reducing university places in particular needed to be considered as good ideas *per se*, as part of the wider ideology of the free market and free choice, as the "only" solution.

In sum, ideology in Geuss's descriptive and pejorative senses allows one to examine what happened to higher education under Thatcher in two ways. First, it is a question of how a group becomes and remains dominant, resisting others' contentions of their ideas as mistaken or flawed, and claiming that it has the coherent - the right - set of ideas. Second, it is a question of how ideology works to distort any given situation, by promoting and universalising a particular set of interests and mystifying their relation to reality. I consider further below how ideology does this, how it distorts reality and uses contradictions for its proponents' own ends; how ideology helps to make its proponents' position appear as "common sense" and brings others to assume that set of beliefs which they then adopt and practise.

#### **(iv) The positive**

In terms of the Geussian positive sense of ideology, my question is this: irrespective of what views one holds oneself about any ideology in question, how can an ideology - such as a certain view of the purpose of higher education - be assembled and constructed, working as a promoter or active agent or carrier of ideas, which people then come to accept, adopt and promote? How does that process work in practice? How did the set of ideas with regard to higher education promoted by the Thatcher Governments in the 1980s come to be refined and strengthened by an ideological process, one involving both intellectual distortion and practical pragmatism? How, then, did the New Right actively use or take advantage of the way ideology functions in this positive sense in order to progress their radical political agenda, and how did others of an opposing view fail to promote their own ideology?

Lenin, Gramsci and Althusser need to be considered here. Although Marx had said that '[t]he philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it',<sup>33</sup> he did not provide a detailed strategy for bringing this to fruition.

Geuss identifies Lenin as the first theorist to construct an ideology in a positive sense. He considered how a practical and strategic Marxist/socialist ideology could be created and used most effectively to bring about an actual revolution; here ideology is 'something *to be* constructed, created, or invented', as Geuss puts it.<sup>34</sup>

Lenin was adamant that each "side" in the class war had to draw up their battle lines, and be guided by one or other of the only two ideologies:

[T]he *only* choice is: either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way, to turn away from it in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology.<sup>35</sup>

This uncompromising view requires that leaders of a political group work out their ideology in theoretical terms and then consider strategically and tactically how to promote and ultimately impose their ideology on others: this is the only means of countering the ideology of their opponents. Lasting power could not be seized by emotion or force alone. His strategic solution to bringing about the revolution was that a vanguard Party of 'professional revolutionaries' had to be formed to develop the theoretical basis and give political leadership to the workers' movement.<sup>36</sup> Just as bourgeois ideology controls centralised national institutions or functions (such as the media) in order to disseminate its views, so the same methods can in principle be used to promote socialist ideology: if socialism is to win through, there has to be, or to seem to be, no alternative. Metaphorically speaking, the New Right approached its campaign in Leninist fashion, in so far as its approach towards bringing down socialism was similarly deliberate and strategic, in sharp contrast to the consensus politicians of the post-war era.

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<sup>33</sup> 'Theses on Feuerbach, XI', in McLellan, D. (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>34</sup> Geuss, R., op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> Lenin, V. I., *What Is To Be Done?* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1973), p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152. For a detailed study of the development of Lenin's theoretical ideas and his practical solutions, see Harding, N., *Lenin's Political Thought, Volume 1: Theory and Practice in the Democratic Revolution; Volume 2: Theory and Practice in the Socialist Revolution* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1977).

Mepham argues that, for Marx, the construction of an ideology and its dissemination works only to the extent that the ideas have ‘a sufficient degree of effectiveness both in rendering social reality intelligible and in guiding practice within it for them to be apparently acceptable. It is the relation between ideology and reality that is the key to its dominance.’<sup>37</sup> As we shall see from the development of Thatcherism, its proponents needed to convince themselves, and then others, that what they thought was not just coherent, but was in fact true. It thus appears that Marxists and New Right Tories have something in common: they agree that there is some set of coherent ideas available, that there are truths about how the world is and that they are the ones who have discovered them. Both insist that their own beliefs are not ideological, because true; and that it is their opponents who are ideological, because what they think is not true. Both are in this sense ideological, although of course, for Marx, what constitutes the “set of coherent ideas” is historical materialism and the class struggle, while for the New Right Tories in the 1980s, it is their vision of “Great” Britain, the free market and minimal public services. Both hold a powerful set of ideas which for them are true (and for their opponents false) and they need to bring others to espouse them. As we shall see from Chapter 3 onwards, the New Right Tories needed to embark on and win a “battle of ideas” in which education – and, in my case study, higher education - plays a central role. To achieve this, they would need to harness ideology working to make their ideas seem to be “the truth”: it had to seem to make sense to adopt them. But this is not to be understood in any conspiratorial sense. As I shall go on to show, ideology did not work this explicitly but had to be constructed.

Two interrelated aspects of Gramsci’s work will help further to elucidate this. First, Gramsci considered that the power of the bourgeois state and the ideology it wielded was exercised in multiple lived experiences of everyday life; in Eagleton’s words, as ‘lived, habitual social practice - which must then presumably encompass the unconscious, inarticulate dimensions of social experience as well as the workings of formal institutions’.<sup>38</sup> Second, Gramsci considered how this process helped a dominant class to win consent, and ultimately attain hegemony, by using a range of means at their disposal; how those governing govern, not simply by force but by also

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<sup>37</sup> Mepham, J., op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 115.

winning the consent of the governed. Ideology here adopts an intermediary role, offering a mechanism through which people can be persuaded to think and act differently; and this opens up space for those aspiring to domination. Thus, while Thatcher's *modus operandi* was clearly - and deliberately - far from consensual, she had to win - and sustain - agreement to her ideas and policies. She was intent on creating a new baseline by shifting the assumptions underpinning social practices - partly by reworking elements of existing beliefs and practices.

Through what mechanism could this kind of ideological change be achieved? Although Gramsci's interest was in bringing about a socialist revolution, the process he discusses describes no less the Thatcherite "revolution". He does not deny the primary importance ascribed by Marx to the mode of production in defining and controlling people's lives but considers why the domination of the ruling economic class has not - and would not - come to an end of its own accord. It was because, he claimed, ideology has such a powerful role, inhabiting and reflecting all aspects of society, whose structures can be made to function in support of the dominant system.<sup>39</sup> 'The superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare.'<sup>40</sup> The situation, he had written earlier, 'is complicated by all these political superstructures, created by the greater development of capitalism. This makes the action of the masses slower and more prudent, and therefore requires of the revolutionary party a strategy and tactics altogether more complex and long-term [...]'.<sup>41</sup> Relationships are forged between the state and its 'apparatuses', that is the institutions and cultural forms which reflect and strengthen the predominant ideology of the ruling class.<sup>42</sup> While that power is based on economic material interests - 'the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic

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<sup>39</sup> Gramsci summed up this interrelationship in the phrase: 'material forces are the content and ideologies are the form': *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds Hoare, Q. and Nowell Smith, G. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 377.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>41</sup> Gramsci, A., *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926*, ed. Hoare, Q. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1978), pp. 199-200.

<sup>42</sup> The state operates, Gramsci wrote, on two major levels: '[T]he one that can be called "civil society", that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private", and that of "political society" or "the State". These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "juridical" government.' - *Prison Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 12. For a discussion on the differences Gramsci drew between the state and civil society, see Showstack Sassoon, A. (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci* (London: Writers and Readers, 1982), pp. 94-115.



activity'<sup>43</sup> - it is not immovable because it can also be “accessed” through the workings of ideology in other structures.<sup>44</sup> Where Marx had concentrated mainly on the “raw” domination exercised by the mode of production, Gramsci argues that, in addition to ‘the economic conditions of production’, there are other subtler - and more resilient - forms of ideological control through which people act and which strengthen the repressive structures of capitalism; but which might also permit another “reality” to be achieved. Playing on Marx’s words, Gramsci argues that ‘it is on the level of ideologies that men become conscious of conflicts in the world of the economy’.<sup>45</sup> So, for instance, to return to Thatcher and the New Right: they wanted others to believe that the free market was the one and only model by which people should live, but they realised (see Chapter 3 onwards) that it was going to be within and through the superstructures of civil society that the ideological battle would have to be fought.

Through his key notion of hegemony, Gramsci explores how domination is achieved through the consent of the governed, gained through all aspects of social life, comprising ‘the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules’, including the organs of the state: ‘the state apparatuses’.<sup>46</sup> These constitute, as Carl Boggs puts it, ‘an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc. that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it’.<sup>47</sup> For Gramsci, an ideology achieves its domination ‘not just by its receipt of a majority vote, but because it is propagated and supported by the institutions of civil society and the state’.<sup>48</sup> The established religion of Christianity, for example, is one form of ideological control which justifies existing civil structures (such as the family and established hierarchies of obedience and patterns of ownership) as “God-given” and its values

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<sup>43</sup> Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>44</sup> The later Marx alluded to how ideology might serve groups other than exclusively the ruling class: ‘[A] distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic - in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.’ - ‘Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*’, in McLellan, D. (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, op. cit., pp. 389-390.

<sup>45</sup> Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>47</sup> Boggs, C., *Gramsci's Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> Levitas, R. (ed.), op. cit., p. 17.

are put to use to rationalise political and social control.<sup>49</sup> People's relationship to the state is mediated by organising and operating ideological control so that people feel they are consenting to this control and come to see and accept the dominant ideology as "normal", as "common sense".<sup>50</sup> The predominant ideology is thus internalised, its manifestations appearing as "the natural order of things". In this way, ideology mystifies the truth and 'manufactures consent'<sup>51</sup> for its cause, engendering in people a passive acquiescence in their own exploitation, to which they regard themselves as freely giving consent. Existing beliefs and values can be reworked and put to use in helping to create the new ideology. It is not that ideology necessarily proceeds through intellectually, or even rhetorically, tricking people. Rather, it is constructed by taking a plausible belief (such as, as Thatcher would claim in the 1970s, that university standards are falling because there are too many students and therefore we need to cut university provision) and reworking it to fit the preferred ideological direction. To take another example: as we shall see later, Labour MPs' celebration of vocational higher education and the polytechnics could be used by the Thatcher Governments to reinterpret higher education's major purpose as instrumentally serving the state's needs. Manufacturing consent is thus a matter not of imposing by sleight of hand a new set of beliefs and attitudes, but rather of *either* engaging with existing ones (which the "old" ideology has never quite dispelled or does not need to) *or* inserting into the debate a new belief which reconfigures its terms. This is how, according to Gramsci, even a seemingly educated person can become a 'trained gorilla',<sup>52</sup> who performs within the bounds of standardisation and control (misrepresented as efficiency or loyalty), oiling the ideological machine and helping to obscure and reinforce the social contradictions of class and economic relations. Free-thinking liberals might think that their movement within the institutions of civil society is independent and "value free" but they would be failing to see that it is through this that ideological domination is achieved and furthered. In the Marxist tradition, Istvan Meszaros maintains that ideology 'affects no less those who wish to

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<sup>49</sup> Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>50</sup> Gramsci criticises the use of 'common sense' as 'an ambiguous, contradictory and multiform concept', so that 'to refer to common sense as a confirmation of truth is a nonsense'. Furthermore, 'common sense cannot constitute an intellectual order, because [it] cannot be reduced to unity and coherence even within an individual consciousness, let alone collective consciousness': Gramsci, A., *ibid.*, p. 423 and p. 326.

<sup>51</sup> Freedman, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Gramsci, A., op. cit., p. 302. Gramsci is using a phrase coined by Frederick Taylor, American engineer and manager, to describe workers' repetitive tasks on the assembly line.

deny its existence than those who openly acknowledge the interests and values intrinsic to the various ideologies'.<sup>53</sup> A dominant ideology makes one version of reality come increasingly to hold sway, not just in economic terms, but in wider social and cultural forms, everyday practices, behaviour, language, and so on. Through such hegemonic means, according to Gramsci, advanced capitalism has found ever more subtle ways of exercising power through institutionalised and psychologically internalised norms and a successful assimilation of those who might have been expected to resist. This is how, as I shall demonstrate, well-meaning MPs in Parliament and officers in quangos and other higher education bodies who tried to point out the inconsistencies or contradictions in Thatcher's policies, could - in the main - be silenced, appeased or - even better - won over to the new - and increasingly dominant - ideology.

How might the ideological "high ground" be captured? As Anne Showstack Sassoon puts it, for Gramsci, the hegemony of a class 'consists in its ability to represent "the universal" interests of the whole of society and to unite to itself a group of allies'.<sup>54</sup> Or, as Chantal Mouffe expresses it, Gramsci's hegemonic class is able 'to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own by means of ideological struggle'.<sup>55</sup> She represents Gramsci's claim that a class 'must genuinely concern itself with the interests of those social groups over which it wishes to exercise hegemony', in order to exercise leadership, by transforming, neutralising, gradually absorbing even initially hostile and seemingly irreconcilable elements.<sup>56</sup> Ralph Miliband sets out how, for Gramsci, hegemony or consent

means the capacity of dominant classes to persuade subordinate ones to accept, adopt and 'interiorise' the values and norms which dominant classes themselves have adopted and believe to be right and proper. This might be described as the strong meaning of hegemony-as-consent. A weaker version is the capacity of dominant classes to persuade subordinate classes that, whatever they might think of the prevailing social order, and however alienated they might be from it, any alternative would be catastrophically worse, and that in any case there was nothing much they could do to bring about any such alternative. Weaker though this second version might be, it is not much less effective than the first one in consolidating the social order. In either version, however, hegemony is not something that can ever be taken to be finally and irreversibly won: on the contrary, it is something that needs to be constantly nurtured, defended and

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<sup>53</sup> Meszaros, I., op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> Showstack Sassoon, A. (ed.), op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>55</sup> Mouffe, C. (ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 181.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. See Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 59 and p. 161.

reformulated.<sup>57</sup>

Applying this interpretation to my case study, we shall see in later chapters how the terms of the neoliberal hegemony Thatcher was striving for had to be fought out and modified along the way, in a Gramscian process of obtaining consent. For, as Geuss claims, differences within a group can actually help to strengthen an ideology;<sup>58</sup> and contradictions used to construct a “common sense” view of the world, through what Hall terms Gramsci’s identification of ‘the necessarily fragmentary, contradictory nature of common sense’.<sup>59</sup> There were uncertainties, contradictions and dissonances within Thatcherism but the very struggle for hegemony, and the processes necessary to persuade not only opponents but also supporters, served to strengthen the neoliberal position (as we shall see later).

Building on contradictions and working through a process of consent, then, one ideology can overturn another. Like Lenin, Gramsci saw the need to bring strategies into play in the development of ‘a politically-strategic Marxism’.<sup>60</sup> A lasting revolution, in all social and political forms and values, would require destroying the network of existing ideological superstructures and building up an alternative in their place. Gramsci thus developed Marxism as a means ‘to open the way to a “revolutionary”, i.e. political, use of historical materialism’, as one commentator puts it,<sup>61</sup> Gramsci being

the first Marxist to insist upon the role of consciousness in shaping revolutionary change. As the *Prison Notebooks* repeatedly stressed, material forces acquire meaning only through human definition and engagement [...]. In Gramsci’s dialectical conception of history, then, we find a theory of human activity as shaped or ‘determined’ by social structures and which is also the subject, creator of new forms that challenge and overturn those same structures.<sup>62</sup>

The material base shapes the superstructures but through the latter, people’s social and political activities can influence the development of history - and even replace

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<sup>57</sup> Miliband, R., ‘Counter-hegemonic struggles’, in Miliband, R. and Panitch, L. (eds), *The Socialist Register* (London: Merlin Press, 1990), p. 346.

<sup>58</sup> Geuss, R., op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> Hall, S., *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso in association with *Marxism Today*, 1988), p. 167.

<sup>60</sup> Boggs, C., op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> Paggi, L., ‘Gramsci’s general theory of Marxism’, in Mouffe, C. (ed.), op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>62</sup> Boggs, C., op. cit., p. 31. See also Femia, J. V., *Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 77-78, who commented that ‘[f]or Gramsci, the essence of Marxism (and the dialectic) [...] resides [...] in the dialectical, or reciprocal, relationship between human will and material reality, superstructure and base, theory and practice.’

one dominant ideology with another. For Gramsci, then, ideologies are a fact of life, of everyday practice, and need to be recognised for what they are and as a means of persuading people to think and act differently: ‘To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is “psychological”; they “organise” human masses, and create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.’<sup>63</sup>

Human agency is needed to bring about change. Crucial in promoting a dominant ideology, or bringing about a counter-hegemonic challenge, Gramsci argues, are education and the intellectuals. As the editors of the *Prison Notebooks* explain, Gramsci identifies two groups: the ‘traditional’ or ‘professional’ intellectuals who are deemed to be so by virtue of their work and position in society; and the ‘organic’ intellectuals who are ‘the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class’.<sup>64</sup> I am only interested for my purposes in Gramsci’s concept of the ‘professional intellectuals’, using this category to encompass those working in higher education and its agencies, the politicians and those in think-tanks. According to Gramsci, everyone is a carrier of the bourgeois ideology in which they live and work, and the professional intellectuals work in a particularly nefarious part of the superstructure.<sup>65</sup> They are the paid agents of the dominant ideology in which they exercise a mediating function in passing on its norms to others and regulating their actions:

The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production [...] is, in varying degrees, “mediated” by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the “functionaries”[...]. The functions in question are precisely organisational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group’s “deputies” exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.<sup>66</sup>

These intellectuals (and the related fields of ecclesiastics, doctors, etc.) acquire vested interests and privileges in return for agreeing to ideological conformity. Some ‘professional’ intellectuals might consider themselves to be “free agents”, acting outside the ideology and class context in which they live; but they would be wrong, as, for Gramsci,

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<sup>63</sup> Gramsci, A., *Prison Notebooks*, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Editors’ introduction, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

the intellectuals of the historically (and concretely) progressive class, in the given conditions, exercise such a power of attraction that, in the last analysis, they end up subjugating the intellectuals of the other social groups; they thereby create a system of solidarity between all the intellectuals, with bonds of a psychological nature (vanity, etc.) and often of a caste character (technico-juridical, corporate, etc.).<sup>67</sup>

Gramsci argues that the ‘traditional intellectuals’ need to be won over:

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer “ideologically” the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.<sup>68</sup>

Intellectuals and other agents - the ‘functionaries’ - have an important role to play in constructing consent to a new ideology, a new way of looking at the world, that could be facilitated by a changed relationship between higher education and the state.

Gramsci’s identification of the role of the institutions of civil society - the superstructures - and of the intellectuals in mediating a dominant ideology and helping to manufacture consent is taken further in Althusser’s development of the role of education as an ‘ideological state apparatus’ (ISA). He considers that the superstructures are particularly influential in upholding and - crucially - reproducing ideological domination through, as Freedman summarises it, ‘the multiplicity of ideological apparatuses as against the singularity of the illusion that Marx and Engels had decried’.<sup>69</sup> Althusser argues that

a revolution in the *structure* does not *ipso facto* modify the existing superstructures and particularly the *ideologies* at one blow (as it would if the economic was the *sole determinant factor*), for they have sufficient of their own consistency *to survive beyond their immediate life context*, even to recreate, to ‘secrete’ substitute conditions of existence temporarily.<sup>70</sup>

Althusser maintained that ‘an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material.’<sup>71</sup> As Paul Ricoeur notes, Althusser links ideology explicitly to a political function: the capitalist economic base has produced the system but it is ideology which maintains and reproduces it and it does this by exercising its power through the agency of various reinforcing ideological

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Freedman, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>70</sup> Althusser, L., *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1969), pp. 115-116.

<sup>71</sup> Althusser, L., ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 40.

superstructures, such as the political structure itself and education.<sup>72</sup> Althusser, like Gramsci, locates state repression in institutions and cultural forms (such as religion, education, the family, the communications media) - the ISAs - which mediate state power. Althusser sees ideology as 'that which helps to "cement" together the social function and [to] adapt individuals to its requirements', as Eagleton puts it.<sup>73</sup> Education both reproduces the labour skills required and teaches people how to keep on obeying - or running - the system, and is therefore, for Althusser, the most powerful ISA:

I believe that the ideological State apparatus which has been installed in the *dominant* position in mature capitalist social formations [...] is the *educational ideological apparatus*.<sup>74</sup>

This is because, first, it reproduces the labour power (both workers and bosses) required to keep capitalism going and, second, it teaches 'rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination'.<sup>75</sup> He continues:

[T]he reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words' [...]. All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, not to speak of the 'professionals of ideology' (Marx), must in one way or another be 'steeped' in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously' - the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), of the exploiters' auxiliaries (the managers), or of the high priests of the ruling ideology (its 'functionaries'), etc.<sup>76</sup>

Ricoeur summarises how, for Althusser, ISAs support the basic repressive power of the state over individuals and are key to its reproduction:

A system of oppression survives and prevails thanks to this ideological apparatus which both places individuals in subjection and at the very same time maintains and reproduces the system. Reproduction of the system and ideological repression of the individual are one and the same. [...] We have to join two ideas: a state functions not only by power but also by ideology, and it does so for the sake of its own reproduction.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ricoeur states that Althusser, in his later work, 'identifies the political structure as a particular ideology': Ricoeur, P., 'Althusser's Theory of Ideology', in Elliott, G. (ed.), *Althusser: a Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 49-51. This extends Gramsci's position that ideological hegemony is located in the structures of civil society.

<sup>73</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>74</sup> Althusser, L., 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>77</sup> Ricoeur, P., op. cit., p. 52.

Ideologies are - as Ricoeur sums up Althusser's analysis - 'a vital illusion'.<sup>78</sup> As Freeden comments: 'Ideology does that by obscuring from a society the illusory and [...] distorted nature of that representation.'<sup>79</sup> People are in some sense "trapped" within the unconscious ideologies in which they live. Alluding to Freud, Althusser says that '*ideology is eternal*, exactly like the unconscious'.<sup>80</sup> In Althusser's world then, no individual or society can escape ideology; indeed, 'there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects'.<sup>81</sup> Ideology works 'in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or "transforms" the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing [...]'.<sup>82</sup> An understanding of this can be used to come to a "real", as opposed to a mystified, consciousness about what is going on:

[M]en live their actions [...] in ideology, *by and through ideology*; in short, that the 'lived' relation between men and the world [...] passes through ideology, or better, *is ideology itself*. This is the sense in which Marx said that it is in ideology (as the locus of political struggle) that men *become conscious* of their place in the world and in history, it is within this ideological unconsciousness that men succeed in altering the 'lived' relation between them and the world and acquiring that new form of specific unconsciousness called 'consciousness' [...]. This relation [...] only appears as '*conscious*' on condition that it is *unconscious* [...]. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world'.<sup>83</sup>

Althusser later sets this out more clearly:

[I]t is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation which is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world.<sup>84</sup>

In some way, through the mechanism of ideology, people fool themselves and are fooled (as Ian Gilmour's insider stories of Thatcher's Cabinet proceedings demonstrate<sup>85</sup>). People are brought to believe, or at least accept, that all sorts of "illusions" - or incomplete truths - are in fact the whole truth; and they will then live this out. The discourse of ideology makes it seem to be describing the way things actually are, whereas it is partially selecting or simply falsifying evidence to describe the way its proponents want or think things should be. For Althusser, even the oppressors want to deceive themselves. As Geuss puts it: 'the bourgeoisie,

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>79</sup> Freeden, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>80</sup> Althusser, L., 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Althusser, L., *For Marx*, op. cit., pp. 233-234.

<sup>84</sup> Althusser, L., 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma*, op. cit. See Ch. 4, fn.16.



paradoxically enough, has an interest in being self-deceived'.<sup>86</sup> According to Althusser, ideology distances us from the reality of the situation:

[A]ll ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.<sup>87</sup>

Whereas Gramsci offers a positive way forward, Althusser's human beings are agents, 'social subjects',<sup>88</sup> bearers of the diseased structures in which they live, often unaware of ideology's pernicious effects, playing parts assigned to them by the mechanism of the process.<sup>89</sup> Ideology serves to achieve ends whether they are intended or not. Agents assume their positions in the division of labour and are inculcated with the appropriate beliefs through which to carry out their function in society, under the illusion that they do this freely.<sup>90</sup> These ideological agents help to secure and reproduce the power of the ruling class through institutional forms and practices - and the most dominant of these is education. These agents are both subjected themselves and subject others in turn to the dominant ideology. As Eagleton puts it: 'Ideology is now not just a distortion or false reflection, a screen which intervenes between ourselves and reality or an automatic effect of commodity production. It is an indispensable medium for the production of human subjects.'<sup>91</sup> In addition, it 'adapts individuals to their social functions by providing them with an imaginary model of the whole, suitably schematized and fictionalized for their purposes'.<sup>92</sup> In sum, ideology makes subjects of us all.

For Althusser, then, ideology has a powerful practical and psychological role in persuading people (both oppressors and oppressed) to believe and act in certain ways in support of a particular cause or dominant power. With Lenin, Gramsci and

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<sup>86</sup> Geuss, R., op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>87</sup> Althusser, L., 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', op. cit., pp. 38-39.

<sup>88</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>89</sup> McLellan and Freedman, for example, explain how Althusser uses the word 'subject' deliberately ambiguously to mean someone acting at the same time as an independent person and as someone subjected to another's higher authority: McLellan, D., *Ideology*, op. cit., p. 32; Freedman, M., *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>90</sup> Benton, T., *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism: Althusser and his Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 48.

<sup>91</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Althusser, as with Thatcher and the New Right, if the “wrong” ideology can subject people, then surely so could the “right” ideology be brought to the fore to help bring about change and enable people to see through to “the truth”, that is the formulation of what the proponent considers to be the “correct” - universalised - position.

**(v) The application of Marxist notions of ideology**

To sum up: I claimed earlier that the way in which British higher education has changed since 1979 has to be understood as the outcome of an ideological process; that is, the Thatcher Governments set out to overturn the post-war consensus of a progressive social agenda and, in so doing, capitalised on pragmatic circumstances and contradictions to help them build an ideological hegemony reflecting neoliberal values. The concepts of ideology I have outlined provide a means of explaining how this works: people could be brought to accepting the New Right’s set of ideas by the latter’s strategic use of ideology to mask other “realities” and make people accept a neoliberal ideology as the correct interpretation of the situation, and that it was simply “common sense” to follow it. Geuss’s three descriptors of ideology - as descriptive, pejorative and positive - help to elucidate Marxist interpretations of the way ideology works. I am drawing on the importance Lenin ascribed to building a practical and strategic ideology simply to show how the New Right confronted an existing ideology - the post-war social democratic welfare state - and in revolutionary terms how they constructed the means to overthrow it. Gramsci’s work illuminates my study because he showed how a dominant ideology could be constructed through consent, playing deliberately on contradictions, and working through a whole range of social structures and practices to achieve ideological hegemony. I shall demonstrate, in particular in Chapters 3 and 4, how sets of contradictions in social, political and historical aspects of British higher education were used by the Thatcher Governments to bring people to consent to their set of ideas. I am also drawing on the ideas of Althusser for whom education was the most pernicious ISA through which the dominant ideology could be secured. The application of these Marxist theories will elucidate how the Thatcherite ideology functioned in working to change the relationship of higher education to the state.

By way of context, I next consider some understandings of Thatcherism, together with a brief survey of higher education prior to 1979.

### **Chapter 3    Building an “ideology of common sense”**

#### **(i)    Setting the contexts**

This chapter examines the two central political, social and historical contexts of my study, namely Thatcherism and higher education. From these, I draw out key pointers to the issues that shaped the relationship between higher education and the state in the 1980s, evidenced from my study of the relevant documents, texts and debates in subsequent chapters.

I share some of Mark Neocleous’s reasons for reconsidering Thatcherism, even though, as he pointed out in 1999, it is a rather long time after the event to be rehearsing discussions about Thatcherism - and now even more so, although Thatcher’s death in 2013 prompted some renewed interest.<sup>1</sup> I am not attempting to evaluate the many different interpretations of Thatcherism: whether it constituted a definitive break with the “old regime” or whether, basically, it reflected continuity; whether it can ultimately be termed a coherent and successful phenomenon, ideology or hegemonic project or whether it was simply a mishmash of ill-thought out and patchily-executed policies.<sup>2</sup> Rather, my interest in it arises from the way in which it succeeded (and especially in light of its legacy) in disrupting hitherto accepted norms of British party politics, institutions and society. It destabilised - as Neocleous puts it - political vocabulary, practices and understandings.<sup>3</sup> Recognising that dislocation as an ideological process can help explain the central movement of ideas and practices identified in Chapter 1: how and why the shift in the 1980s to an explicitly ideological relationship between British higher education and the state, and one that privileged a narrowly instrumental view, took place and took hold. The way that process, that disruption, was achieved through the workings of what may broadly be described as Thatcherism demonstrates the dual models of ideology I am using: first, that Thatcherism promoted a broadly neoliberal set of ideas; second, how circumstances were used pragmatically - often in a distorting and contradictory

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<sup>1</sup> Neocleous, M., ‘Radical conservatism, or, the conservatism of radicals: Giddens, Blair and the politics of reaction’, *Radical Philosophy*, Number 93, January/February 1999, pp. 24-34.

<sup>2</sup> See the debates between Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, on the one hand, and Bob Jessop, Kevin Bonnett, Simon Bromley and Tom Ling, on the other, in *New Left Review* in the 1980s, reproduced in Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), *op. cit.*, and in Jessop, B. et al. (eds), *op. cit.* See also Bill Schwarz’s commentary on these debates (*op. cit.*, pp. 116-152).

<sup>3</sup> Neocleous, M., *ibid.*, p. 24.

fashion - to build this as an “ideology of common sense”,<sup>4</sup> as I outline in sections (ii) to (vi) below. And that, or so I shall go on to argue, enables us to understand how governments gained acceptance - however grudgingly - of their higher education policies in the 1980s and beyond.

In order then to consider how that process - the development of an ideology of common sense - worked in higher education, we need to set the scene by charting, in section (vii), the latter’s relationship to the state, drawing out key preoccupations prior to 1979. As noted in Chapter 1, some educationalists’ accounts demonstrate aspects of continuity in higher education’s history up to and including the 1980s, while others point to 1979 as marking the beginning of a more radical process. Mindful of both positions, what I seek to emphasise in my brief historical survey are the matters that set up the opportunities that the Thatcher Governments could exploit ideologically. This will enable us, in subsequent chapters, better to understand how and why higher education could itself contribute to the construction of a Thatcherite ideology.

## **(ii) Thatcherism**

My first claim is that the broad project on which the Thatcher Government embarked from 1979 was explicitly and deliberately radical and ideological from the outset in terms of intent. Initially, this is more overt outside higher education: cutting income tax, tackling inflation, cutting public sector borrowing and expenditure, and defeating trade unions and vested professional interests were some of the pre-requisites to be tackled before the reworking of the more resilient state apparatuses - such as education, health and welfare services - could be attempted.<sup>5</sup> My use of the term ideological here draws again on Geuss’s descriptive and positive applications.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ch. 2, fn.50 for Gramsci’s critique of “common sense”.

<sup>5</sup> The unpublished report ‘Stepping Stones’ (November 1977, drafted by business man John Hoskyns, Thatcher’s Policy Adviser, 1975-1979) considered how to break the power of the trade unions, and radical plans were also prepared by Nicholas Ridley in 1978: see Young, H., op. cit., pp. 358-368. For examples of the radical actions taken once in government, see Young, H., op. cit., pp. 146-151, 195-230, 316-341, 529-542; Gamble, A., op. cit., pp. 108-123, 192-233; Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 43; Anderson, P., op. cit., pp. 274-275. Young describes the clashes with the trade unions, the miners’ strike 1984-1985 representing the strongest opposition to Thatcherism, but it was eventually defeated at a cost to the Government of approximately £2.5 billion. One minister described a ploy to weaken trade unions as a ‘demonstration effect’: that is, Thatcher repeatedly held out against public sector union claims and strikes, even if it cost more money than it saved. Thatcher’s press secretary, Bernard Ingham, summed up what these disputes were really about, ideologically: ‘It took the steelworkers thirteen weeks and the civil servants twenty-one weeks to realise that we meant

My second claim is that the contradictions and inconsistencies that came to the fore in the Thatcher Governments' implementation of their neoliberal ideas, together with those in their opponents' positions, required her Governments to work to a large extent pragmatically, using whatever opportunities came to hand along the way. What mattered is that, in order to gain consent, policies had to be presented as coherent, and this is where the pejorative notion of ideology as distortion is illuminating. It was this dual *modus operandi* - the radical set of ideas and the way in which they were presented and tested - that helped to build the hegemonic project in general and its higher education version in particular: namely to change its ideological relationship to the state.

**(iii) 'We must have an ideology.'**

The New Right's project gathered momentum from the mid-1970s onwards, when Thatcher became leader of the Tory Party. Its expression was explicitly revolutionary: it was, as Thatcher insisted, 'time to begin the march back to freedom'.<sup>6</sup> At a meeting of the newly-formed Conservative Philosophy Group (whose founder-members included Roger Scruton) in 1975, she said (following Hayek's example): 'We must have an ideology. The other side have got an ideology they can test their policies against. We must have one as well.'<sup>7</sup> This rhetoric, this "call to arms", was novel for a Conservative Party that did not traditionally express or take an ideological, dogmatic or adversarial stance. In some ways of course, the incoming 1979 Thatcher Government was simply expressing the Conservative Party's traditional belief that they were the country's rightful political and moral leaders and needed to regain that control.<sup>8</sup> There were also policy continuities with

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business.' However, the pay of the 'functionaries' (using Gramsci's term) of the strong state rose. For example, a police constable's pay went up by 25% more than average earnings and 30% more than prices during the first Thatcher administration: see Young, H., op. cit., p. 229, p. 238 and p. 353.

<sup>6</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech to Christian Democratic Union Conference, 25 May 1976, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103034> [accessed 26 July 2013].

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Young, H., op. cit., p. 406. Hayek stressed the need to engage in 'the struggle of ideas': see *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 404.

<sup>8</sup> Contrast Thatcher's expression of her 'Conservative revolution' (Speech to Federation of Conservative Students Annual Conference, 6 April 1984, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105653> [accessed 26 July 2013]) with Ian Gilmour's more traditionally Tory stance: 'Nothing is more divisive than ideology. [...] Ideology is therefore a threat to national unity, and as such is abhorrent to Conservatives. [...] [T]he fundamental concern of Toryism is the preservation of the nation's unity, of the national institutions, of political and civil liberty, and not the achievement of some ideological victory.' - Gilmour, I., *Inside Right*, op. cit., pp.

both Labour and Conservative Governments of the 1970s, who had increasingly been expressing the view that post-war social democratic commitments - notably to full employment and an expanding welfare state - were untenable.<sup>9</sup> In others, however, Thatcher's project was qualitatively different. Its aim was to halt and then reverse the post-war movement of her own Party towards the middle ground; to break the post-war social democratic consensus - and indeed, the very idea of political consensus on which that depended; and to put neoliberalism in place.<sup>10</sup> Thatcher and the New Right had become conscious that they needed to use an explicitly ideological and strategic approach, if they were to change the political landscape of Britain.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, in order to build consent (and avoid making detailed policy proposals), Thatcher presented her politics as conviction rather than ideology: 'I stress vision, not blueprint; values and principles, not doctrines.'<sup>12</sup> Although she professed to distrust theory, the underlying ideological and strategic question was how to set about achieving a radical shift towards neoliberal beliefs and practices. The vision, values and principles would need to appear as "common sense".

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132-143, noting Disraeli's identification of the Tory Party as the country's 'natural leaders' (ibid., p. 84). See also Ch. 1, fn.22.

<sup>9</sup> Labour Governments in the 1960s and 1970s - especially Callaghan's - were moving away from a Keynesian approach to economic policy and towards monetarism as the solution, as curbing inflation began to predominate as the major issue: see Young, H., op. cit., p. 154; Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 7 and p. 99; Anderson, P., op. cit., p. 177; Riddell, P., op. cit., p. 2; Stedman Jones, D., op. cit., pp. 241-242. As Joseph put it, commenting on the Wilson Government's strategies: 'We are all monetarists now.' - *Stranded on the Middle Ground? Reflections on Circumstances and Policies* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1976), p. 17. In this respect, Labour did the groundwork for the New Right. As Daniel Stedman Jones comments (op. cit., p. 258): 'The Thatcher government's strategy grew incrementally during her first administration. But it began from the base of the Labour Party's tempered introduction of monetarism.' In his inaugural speech as Labour leader in 1976, Callaghan maintained that 'the cosy world [...] where full employment would be guaranteed [...] is gone [...]. We used to think you could spend your way out of a recession [...] by cutting taxes and boosting government spending. I tell you [...] that option no longer exists [...].' Friedman welcomed this speech as '[t]he most hopeful sign I have seen in Britain [...], one of the most remarkable talks - speeches - which any government leader has ever given': quoted in Newman, A., 'Don't let the Labour Right tell fairy stories about the 1980s', *Left Futures*, 2 June 2011: available at <http://www.leftfutures.org/2011/06/dont-let-the-labour-right-tell-fairy-stories-about-the-1980s/> [accessed 24 September 2011].

<sup>10</sup> Thatcher considered that 'the Tory Party [had] merely pitched camp in the long march to the left': *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 7. Joseph described 'the middle ground' as 'a guarantee these days of a left-wing ratchet': *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Various commentators describe this as a self-consciously radical and strategic approach: Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), op. cit., pp. 10-11; Schwarz, B., op. cit., p. 118; Anderson, P., op. cit., p. 178; Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 6; Neocleous, M., op. cit., p. 24; Robinson, A. and Tormey, S., op. cit., p. 8. Ralph Miliband identifies Thatcher as being 'quite consciously bent on something like a counter-revolution in British life and politics': Miliband, R., 'Class war Conservatism', *New Society*, 19 June 1980, p. 278. See also Ch. 1, fn.70.

<sup>12</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech to Greater London Young Conservatives (Iain Macleod Memorial Lecture), 4 July 1977, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103411> [accessed 26 July 2013].

First it needed to be stated - to the Conservative Party as much as to anyone else - that there was a crisis and a battle to be won.<sup>13</sup> Thus, speaking in 1974, Joseph proclaimed that he was explicitly setting out to fight about ideas as this was ‘essential to a political party’s intellectual health’.<sup>14</sup> Speaking to the Oxford Union in December 1975, he argued that the Conservative Party had lost power ‘because we ceased to fight the battle of ideas’.<sup>15</sup> Thatcher emphasised this again in 1978, drawing (somewhat ambiguously) on Marxist theory:

We should look more to ideas and realise that people respond to them often more than they respond to appeals to their material interests. Communists know the power of ideas, despite their doctrine of historical materialism. We too should show we are aware of their importance, despite our material success.<sup>16</sup>

What were the ideas they wanted people to adopt and how could the New Right make them dominant?

Reflecting Mont Pelerin doctrines, a central idea presented as universal by Thatcher and others in tracts and speeches in the 1970s was to free people from the clutches of the state and give them back their “freedom”.<sup>17</sup> Free market economics was presented as not just the most efficient system for the economy but also as a means to, and guarantee of, all other freedoms. Joseph’s insistence ‘that a free society requires a free economy as its basis’ echoes Friedman’s statement that ‘economic freedom, in and of itself, is an extremely important part of total freedom’.<sup>18</sup> This freedom makes humanity what it is, as Thatcher opined: ‘Because we see man as a spiritual being, we utterly reject the Marxist view, which gives pride of place to economics. [...] Money is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.’<sup>19</sup> So despite

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<sup>13</sup> See Ch. 1, fn. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph, K., *Reversing the Trend* (Chichester and London: Barry Rose Publishers Limited, 1975), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph, K., *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech to the Bow Group, 6 May 1978, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103674> [accessed 26 July 2013].

<sup>17</sup> See Ch. 1, fn.19 and [www.montpelerin.org](http://www.montpelerin.org) (op. cit.).

<sup>18</sup> Joseph, K., Maude, A. and Percival, I., *Freedom and Order* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1975), p. 7; Friedman, M. with the assistance of Friedman, R., *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech 4 July 1977, op. cit. Thatcher misrepresented Marx who had in fact written that it was under capitalism - not communism - that ‘money becomes an end instead of a means’: see *Grundrisse* in McLellan, D. (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, op. cit., p. 363. She clearly believed that monetarism was a means to a more important end when, speaking in 1981, she stated: ‘Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and the soul.’ - Interview for *Sunday Times*, 3 May 1981, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104475> [accessed 26 July 2013].

fore-fronting monetarism, she claimed that freedom was the all-important goal. The free market was presented as more democratic and morally better than central state planning and intervention, which offered no choice to the individual. The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), founded by Joseph in 1974, presented its case ‘in moral as well as economic terms, emphasizing the links between freedom, the standard of living and a market economy based on private enterprise and the profit discipline’.<sup>20</sup>

Friedman’s view was that ‘[f]reedom to own property is [an] essential part of economic freedom’, as is ‘freedom to use the resources we possess in accordance with our own values’, giving us ‘freedom to enter any occupation, engage in any business enterprise, buy from and sell to anyone else’.<sup>21</sup> Angus Maude wrote in 1975 that ‘it is only from the freedom of choice of the consumer as an individual that real progress comes. This is not only true of industry and commerce. It is true of society as a whole.’<sup>22</sup> Two years later, Thatcher emphasised that people

must be free to choose what they consume, in goods and services. [...] A man must choose between spending and saving, between housing himself or depending on the state to house him at his fellow-citizen’s expense, between paying for his children’s education and accepting whatever the state provides.<sup>23</sup>

The over-bureaucratic, over-spending, “nanny” state was curtailing people’s freedom, and this had to be changed. Once allowed their independence, people would be free to spend their money as they wished; and thus free in every other way. The market was the model for a sound way of life, replacing the weaknesses of collectivism: ‘The disciplines of the market - competition, profit, loss, bankruptcy - which transform self-interest into service are destroyed by socialism, and no effective alternative disciplines replace them.’<sup>24</sup> In beguilingly simplistic terms, Thatcher stated:

Let me give you my vision. A man’s right to work as he will, to spend what he earns, to own property, to have the State as servant and not as master - these are the British inheritance. They are the essence of a free economy. And on that freedom all our other freedoms depend. [...] Every family should have the right to spend their money, after tax, as they wish, not as the Government dictates. Let us extend choice, the will to choose and the chance to choose.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Denham, A., *Think-Tanks of the New Right* (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1996), p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Friedman, M. and Friedman, R., *Free to Choose* (London: Penguin, 1980), pp. 90-91.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph, K. et al., *Freedom and Order*, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech 4 July 1977, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph, K. et al., *Freedom and Order*, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech to Conservative Party Conference, 10 October 1975, available at <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102777> [accessed 26 July 2013].



This ideal world, this ideology, was based on the centrality of the purchasing power of the individual as an autonomous actor. Thatcher and the New Right therefore needed to bring about three inter-related fundamental shifts: from public to private ownership; from a perceived reliance on the state to individual responsibility and private enterprise; from citizen rights to market values. They needed to change people's understanding of the post-war settlement as 'the natural and irreversible order of things', as Joseph remarked, and put their own in its place.<sup>26</sup> How were they to persuade people to do this?

**(iv) Free economy:strong state**

As noted in Chapter 1, if the Thatcher Governments had been able to promote a single coherent set of ideas in immediately acceptable terms to the electorate and MPs, they might have done so. Certainly they would not have needed to make use of an ideological process to effect their plans. Jessop points out that the Thatcher Governments' 'coherence of strategy' does not presuppose 'logical consistency out of time and place'; rather, we need to consider the operation of Thatcherism in terms of 'how far different elements fit together over time and in different areas in pursuing the primary strategic goals'.<sup>27</sup> Elements would need to work well enough together, to appeal to at least some common interests, in order to serve the construction and imposition of the ideology of common sense. So what were these elements, tensions and contradictions?

They are well expressed by Gamble's slogan, 'free economy:strong state', which he describes as 'the combination of a traditional liberal defence of the free economy with a traditional conservative defence of state authority',<sup>28</sup> with the aim of creating 'the conditions for a free economy by limiting the scope of the state while restoring its authority and competence to act'.<sup>29</sup> To achieve this state of affairs, it was useful for the New Right to adopt aspects of the Conservative tradition, notably the advocacy of authority, discipline, social order and hierarchy and strong national defence, a tradition forcefully represented by Scruton:

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph, K., *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Jessop, B. et al. (eds), op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

It is through an ideal of authority that the conservative experiences the political world. [...] He must first seek to rule, and must therefore pursue the power that will enable him to do so. [...] [F]or the conservative, power [...] is not the means to 'social justice', or 'equality', or 'freedom'. It is power to command and coerce those who would otherwise reform or destroy, and its justification must be found within itself, in an idea of legitimacy or established right.<sup>30</sup>

It was justifiable for governments to intervene (by using the law) in social spheres, even in "private" individual matters such as the family, education, abortion, if the continuity and tradition of the nation's customs, interests and institutions was at risk. As Scruton said: '[I]t is as deep an instinct in a conservative as it is in a socialist to resist the champions of "minimal" government.'<sup>31</sup> The New Right Tories thought that authority had broken down, or was at least seriously under attack, particularly since the 1960s and especially in education, Thatcher expressing the view, for example, that

[a] large part of the problem we are having now has come from a weakening of authority [...]. [W]e are reaping what was sown in the 1960s. The fashionable theories and permissive claptrap set the scene for a society in which the old virtues of discipline and self-restraint were denigrated [...]. [W]e have got to recover from the effect of the 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

People had to be taught the right kind of attitudes, by changing the values and habits which had underpinned the creation and expansion of the welfare state, post-war moves towards greater social equality and, in particular, young people's challenge to the *status quo*. Teachers and students had to be put on the "right" path, as Thatcher later pontificated in 1988 - the year she had 'just in time' requisitioned the education state apparatus to her ideological purposes through the Education Reform Act:

Some academics and intellectuals do not understand and are putting out what I call poison. Some young people who were thrilled to bits to get to university had every decent value pounded out of them. Luckily, it takes a long time to destroy fundamentally what people feel and I just got it in time. Had we had another 10 years of that, it would have gone beyond repair.<sup>33</sup>

The education system needed to be brought into use not to extend equality but to help curb social mobility and disturbance, and teach people their place so that

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<sup>30</sup> Scruton, R., *The Meaning of Conservatism*, op. cit., pp. 19-25. Anthony Arblaster considered that Thatcher shared these views, 'even if, for electoral reasons, she [could not] be quite so blunt about it': Arblaster, A., 'Scruton: Intellectual by Appointment', *New Socialist*, November 1985, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Scruton, R., *ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Hayes, M., op. cit., pp. 84-85.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Thatcher in the *Sunday Times*, 8 May 1988, in Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 135. See also Thatcher, M., *Let Our Children Grow Tall: Selected Speeches 1975-1977* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1977), p. 32, in which she accuses teachers at the Polytechnic of North London (PNL, see Ch. 1, fn.65) of 'ruthlessly attacking the minds of the young'.

neoliberalism could thrive.<sup>34</sup> As Richard Johnson puts it: ‘An education based on business criteria makes its own closures on knowledge and on the social future.’<sup>35</sup> The social democratic post-war gains had to be reversed and the predominance of the market restored. Education had to be seen as a private, and not a public, good. Thus the main issue, as Gamble identified it, facing neoliberals was ‘creating the conditions in which markets can function by removing whatever obstacles exist or may arise to their operation’.<sup>36</sup> Or, as Daniel Stedman Jones puts it: ‘The central function of the neoliberal state was the proactive construction and protection of the conditions for the market economy.’<sup>37</sup> As Johnson argues: ‘The free market requires the strong state as an initial condition.’<sup>38</sup> Crucially, if the “natural course” of the free market order was challenged, it would have to be policed to make it work; if something stood in the way, then the law would need to be used to remove it. The authority of the state had to be reasserted, ironically, through the use of central government resources, direction and control to preserve a free economy and, thus, a free society.

The apparent paradox or contradiction of the free economy:strong state model was not a hindrance but, on the contrary, a successful “marriage of convenience”, a mechanism through which the New Right could muster support from various quarters to bring its ideology into the dominant position. It needed not only to remove the obstacles to the successful operation of neoliberalism, but to make things change in a way that would last, and this would be achieved not so much through an acceptance of the theory but through its everyday practice. Clashes with those who resisted were not simply to be policed but were also to be welcomed, because they helped to build the strategy: the assertion of authority could be “marketed” as determination to achieve the all-important objective of securing “freedom” for all.

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<sup>34</sup> A leaked DES report in 1983 said: ‘We are in a period of considerable change. There will be unrest, but we can cope with the Toxteths [...] but if we have a highly educated and idle population we may possibly anticipate more serious conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place.’

- quoted in Robinson, A. and Tormey, S., op. cit., p. 2. See also Ch. 1, fn.63.

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, R., ‘A new road to serfdom? A critical history of the 1988 Act’, in Department of Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, *Education Limited: Schooling, Training and the New Right in England since 1979* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1991), p. 80.

<sup>36</sup> Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 46. David Harvey also commented that ‘[t]he neoliberal project is to disembed capital from [...] constraints [such as state-led planning and ownership of key sectors]’: Harvey, D., op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Stedman Jones, D., op. cit., p. 335.

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, R., *ibid.*, p. 81.

**(v) Towards the construction of an “alternative logic”**

How were the Thatcher Governments going to persuade people, including those who worked in the state apparatuses, such as higher education, that everyone needed not only to conform to neoliberalism but to participate in its material and social construction? As I have indicated, the first stage was to get different elements in their own party to fit together, or seem to fit together, or at least be prepared to work together. They also needed to upstage the Labour Party and get “ordinary people” on board, by constructing - in Gramscian mode - an alternative logic with popular appeal, so that people would get used to a new norm. Such a call - an Althusserian ‘interpellation’ or ‘recruitment’ of the individual<sup>39</sup> - was assisted by circumstances. By the end of the 1970s, Labour Governments had antagonised some of their traditional supporters by failing to achieve - and, in some cases, by putting into reverse - post-war social democratic goals. For example, the comprehensivisation of schools had not resulted in the children of manual workers being substantially more likely to go to university.<sup>40</sup> Given the limitations of post-war governments’ attempts (and particularly Callaghan’s Labour Government in “the winter of discontent”) to solve Britain’s deep economic and social problems, voters became attracted to Thatcher’s proposed solutions. If people simply worked harder, accepted social control, and adopted free market economics and values, then they and Britain would be saved and - importantly - would prosper, or so the story went. Thatcherism’s initial appeal, combined with the Left’s failure to counter it with a strong ideological alternative, was enough to allow Thatcherism to get the toehold it needed.<sup>41</sup> ‘We were the ones in touch with the popular mood’, Thatcher claimed later.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Althusser, L., 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', op. cit., pp. 44-51.

<sup>40</sup> Chitty, C., *Towards a New Education System: the Victory of the New Right?* (Lewes, Sussex: Falmer Press, 1989), pp. 53-54.

<sup>41</sup> Perry Anderson (op. cit.) and Gregory Elliott (in *Labourism and the English Genius: the Strange Death of Labour England?* (London: Verso, 1993)) analyse the ways in which the post-war Labour Party was ideologically weak and suffered from internal strife, leading to the purging of the leftwing element Militant and the breakaway of other members to form the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981. Labour MP Barry Sheerman, speaking in 2013 on the occasion of Thatcher’s death, confirms this: ‘Mrs Thatcher was not only talented as a leader, but lucky. I was on the Opposition Benches knowing what a shambles the Opposition were. We spent more time fighting each other within the Labour party than we had time to fight the Government. It is not good for democracy to have such a weak Opposition as we had post 1979. [...] [P]eople were let down by the Opposition because we could not get our act together to defeat her.’ - *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates (hereafter, HC Deb or, in the case of the House of Lords, HL Deb), 10 April 2013, vol.560, c.1663, available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130410/debtext/130410-0002.htm#13041013000082> [accessed 15 April 2013]. Furthermore, the Falklands War boosted Thatcher’s standing at a time of low polls, costing £1,000 million, precisely at the time of the university cuts: see HC Deb, 22 June 1982, vol.26, c.148. The Association of University Teachers

Hall sees Thatcherism as having a particularly powerful ideological dimension in terms of constructing consent to a right-wing agenda.<sup>43</sup> Seeing it as a form of ‘authoritarian populism’,<sup>44</sup> he analyses it as a specific ‘historical conjuncture’, in a Gramscian sense.<sup>45</sup> Different forces and contradictory elements could come together and come to be “lived”. People’s perceptions of what is going on could be changed through the mediation of what might appear initially to be an ideology at odds with their socio-political conditions and traditions or their class or material interests. The mismatch between elements of neoliberalism’s theory and practice, and the paradox of the free economy:strong state, might initially appear to be a weakness. But as Ruth Levitas points out, ‘given the lack of logical coherence required by common-sense ideologies, contradictions may be a strength rather than a weakness, enabling the New Right to switch the grounds of its legitimations at will’.<sup>46</sup> This way of working has a “built-in” flexibility which allows the ideology to be crafted according to circumstances. Thatcher could play on the contradictions, could operate ‘directly on the real and manifestly contradictory experience of the popular classes under social-democratic corporatism’.<sup>47</sup>

A new way of addressing people would translate, as Hall puts it, ‘economic doctrine into the language of experience, moral imperative and common sense’, to turn ‘a theoretical ideology into a populist idiom’.<sup>48</sup> “The national interest” was asserted through the use of universal terms such as “freedom” and the use of myths - such as “Great” Britain - to woo popular consent.<sup>49</sup> The New Right needed to persuade people as individuals to jump onto the neoliberal bandwagon, to believe that each

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(AUT) realised that press coverage of the university cuts was even less at this time than it might have been: see paper AUT/HQ/341, May 1982, UCU archives.

<sup>42</sup> Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Jessop, B. et al. (eds), op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>44</sup> Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), op. cit., p. 10 and p. 22, who acknowledge Ernesto Laclau’s work on the concept of ‘populism’: see Laclau, E., *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: Verso Editions/NLB, 1982).

<sup>45</sup> Hall, S., *The Hard Road to Renewal* (London: Verso in association with *Marxism Today*, 1988), p. 163.

<sup>46</sup> Levitas, R. (ed.), op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Scruton said: ‘No-one, least of all a conservative, is likely to believe that a government is possible without the propagation of myths.’ - quoted in Hayes, M., op. cit., p. 13. Enoch Powell similarly maintained (after Plato): ‘The greatest task of the statesman therefore is to offer his people good myths.’ - ‘Speech at Trinity College, Dublin’, 13 November 1964, available at <http://enochpowell.info/Resources/July-December1964.pdf> [accessed 16 November 2012].

could have access to the benefits of the free market and thus to all other freedoms, to forget (or never be brought to realise) that capitalism was based - necessarily - on a radically unequal distribution of resources. As Scruton put it, the rhetoric needed ‘to establish in the public mind the inseparability of market freedom and economic leadership and to integrate the philosophy of the market into the underlying principle of order’.<sup>50</sup> Thatcher commented: ‘I did not feel I needed an interpreter to address people who spoke the same language.’<sup>51</sup> The terms of the debate needed to be controlled through discourse masking and neutralising objections.<sup>52</sup> “The man in the street” (rather than “the worker”) needed to identify with a new kind of terminology rather than that of the Left which had traditionally represented popular causes, through terms such as “class” and “unions”, now made to sound “old-fashioned” and irrelevant to everyday experience. Thatcher did not consider she needed to bargain with organised interests but could make it look as if people’s concerns were being addressed above class and sectional interests.<sup>53</sup> She was on the side of ordinary people: ‘What I am desperately trying to do is to create one nation with everyone being a man of property.’<sup>54</sup> Everyday language and experience was ‘the material grounding for the construction of consent’.<sup>55</sup> For example, with the Government able to pass the necessary legislation, council-house tenants could be wooed into buying public housing at a substantially lower cost than on the open mortgage market (ironically) and public utility shares could be sold cheaply to the public, thus achieving privatisation at a stroke.<sup>56</sup> As Oliver Letwin later wrote: ‘What makes this feature of privatisation particularly interesting is that it constitutes a stealing of the clothes of the left by the right.’<sup>57</sup> Once people literally “bought into” the Thatcherite project, it would become possible to effect ever more radical change. A new way of

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Hayes, M., op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>51</sup> Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>54</sup> Thatcher in 1983, quoted in Hayes, M., op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>55</sup> Harvey, D., op. cit., pp. 40-41. Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), op. cit., p. 38, make the same point.

<sup>56</sup> The number of individual shareholders grew from three to nine million from 1979 to 1987: see Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 245. A million council houses were sold: see Anderson, P., op. cit., p. 305.

<sup>57</sup> Letwin, O., *Privatising the World* (London: Cassell, 1988), p. 48. Letwin (a Cambridge academic and frequent participant at the Conservative Philosophy Group) was one of Thatcher’s advisers before the 1987 election, having earlier been one of Joseph’s. He describes (p. 106) the tactics used to persuade people to buy shares, such as the advertising campaign to privatise British Gas, as ‘exercises [...] conducted with the precision of military manoeuvres by armies of professionals’. He identifies the success of the political shift by noting the different language used by the Labour Party in its 1987 Manifesto, for example, where the phrase ‘social ownership’ replaces the earlier usage of the word ‘nationalisation’.

appealing to people's needs, through private ownership rather than public provision of services, could be put in place. People would lose interest in the old values and accustom themselves to the new. A new logic, located deliberately on 'the terrain of contradictions',<sup>58</sup> could be brought into play and then made to stick. If "ordinary" people could be brought to accept the ideological change, then the state apparatuses would have to fall in behind. Having adopted Thatcherite values, people would want different things. They would not want a "useless" liberal higher education, nor would they want their taxes to pay for others' access to it. Higher education (and other ISAs) would have to conform to the changed circumstances. Hall describes such crafting as a Gramscian 'process of transformism' which changes the terms of the debate 'in disorganizing the labour movement and progressive forces [...], in reorganizing the political terrain and in changing the balance of political forces in favour of capital and the right'.<sup>59</sup> There had indeed to seem - both to the Tory Party and to the wider public - to be no alternative. And once initial obstacles were cleared away and basic new "truths" laid down, the construction sites for this struggle for ideological hegemony would be found in the state apparatuses, including, and perhaps especially, education.

#### **(vi) Building the theory and promoting the message**

Even before its structural reformation, higher education was able to contribute to the neoliberal mission. It could provide authors, locations, speakers and audiences for researching and evangelising the ideas from which the ideological project could be launched.

First, the fundamental intellectual message was explicitly propagated by New Right politicians, particularly Thatcher herself and Joseph, who from the 1970s onwards took it to influential groups, including those who studied or worked in universities, in business and in the Tory Party itself. In April 1974, just after the Tory Prime Minister, Edward Heath, had lost the general election, Joseph described his adoption of a rejuvenated kind of Conservatism in terms of an ideological 'conversion', which others needed to join.<sup>60</sup> He made scores of speeches around Britain from the mid-

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<sup>58</sup> Larrain, J., op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>59</sup> Hall, S. and Jacques, M. (eds), op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph used this religious metaphor again in 1974 when he said: 'I had tried to convert [Edward Heath] and failed': quoted in Schwarz, B., op. cit., p. 121. The CPS website describes Joseph's task at

1970s to 1979, and at over 150 meetings at higher education institutions.<sup>61</sup> In Birmingham in October 1974 he said: ‘We must fight the battle of ideas in every school, university, publication, committee, TV studio even if we have to struggle for our toehold there [...]. We shall need intellectual as well as moral courage.’<sup>62</sup> As Thatcher was to acknowledge: ‘It was Keith who really began to turn the intellectual tide back against socialism. He got our fundamental intellectual message across, to students, professors, journalists, the “intelligentsia” generally.’<sup>63</sup> And again, speaking in 1988, she describes his role in building the ideology:

Now we have a record to point to; but at that time we just had beliefs, faith in what could be done. Keith made that faith into something that intelligent people were willing to share. And their acceptance spread the message through the press and other media to everybody. If Keith hadn’t been doing all that work with the intellectuals, all the rest of our work would probably never have resulted in success.<sup>64</sup>

Joseph saw his task as overturning - as he put it to the Oxford Union in 1975 - the ‘nihilistic left-wing influence over thought and education’.<sup>65</sup> Things had to be turned round, if neoliberalism were to take its rightful place, because

a whole range of difficulties [has been] created by the anti-profit, anti-private industry climate which has prevailed in parts of government, media, universities and trade unions. [...] In Britain, a large proportion of political and intellectual opinion-formers is convinced that we can dispense with profits.<sup>66</sup>

People - especially the middle class - needed to hear and heed his message: ‘A large part - perhaps a majority - of the intelligentsia are either ignorant of or hostile to the mechanisms of the market.’<sup>67</sup> Speaking in Norwich in 1976, he enthusiastically celebrated the irrational, almost magical, powers of the market, claiming that

the blind, unplanned, uncoordinated wisdom of the market is overwhelmingly superior to the well-researched, rational, systematic, well-meaning, co-operative, science-based, forward-looking, statistically respectable plans of governments, bureaucracies and international organisations preserved from human error and made thoroughly respectable by the employment of numerous computers.<sup>68</sup>

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its inception as needing to ‘convert the Tory Party’: see <http://www.cps.org.uk/> [accessed 30 June 2012]. See also Ch. 1, fn.58.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph, K., *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 8; Halcrow, M., *Keith Joseph – a Single Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 98.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Joseph, K., *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph, K., *Reversing*, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph, K., *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.



This was a doctrine claiming not to be a doctrine, appearing to rely “simply” on intuitive laws of nature and common sense. It was made to appear as if it could be justified in its own terms, as if it had some kind of inbuilt rationality. It was being claimed that the free market was both “natural” and scientifically certain. Joseph believed that

in a sense the market is a state of nature, with empirically observable laws, like the laws of nature. Indeed inasmuch as economics is a social science, it studies laws of human nature [...]. [W]e can no more override the laws of the market [...] than we can repeal the law of gravity, mechanics, physics.<sup>69</sup>

The intelligentsia had to be brought to adopt this belief in the market as it was the only solution to Britain’s problems.

Some, at least, were already on board, indeed steering the ship. A second way in which higher education contributed to the neoliberal mission was by providing the New Right politicians with ideologues. These thinkers, in universities and other influential organisations (Gramsci’s ‘professional intellectuals’), developed and debated New Right ideas, giving legitimacy and academic respectability to Thatcher’s political instincts, and backing up her proclamations. Ironically, given her dislike and distrust of universities, Thatcher used think-tanks and special advisers (both when she was in Opposition and in Government) who constituted an inner circle of ideologues outside cabinet and parliamentary processes. The building of the ideology was further prosecuted by others operating outside party politics within a variety of other institutional and social structures, notably the right-wing “tabloid” press. Right-wing economic journalists took the message out to the “serious” press and appeared regularly in the 1970s and 1980s on the growing number of TV “chat” shows to explain what monetarism was all about.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Joseph, K. et al., *Freedom and Order*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> I am drawing on Andrew Denham’s work (*Think-Tanks*, op. cit.), although he does not cover higher education, and Clyde Chitty’s on the think-tanks’ education initiatives (op. cit., pp. 10-12). See also Jones, K., op. cit.; Halcrow, M., op. cit; Knight, C., op. cit. The latter describes (p. 19) an ‘invisible college’ of right-wing educationalists intent on bringing about ‘an educational counter-revolution’. These included: Brian Cox and Tony Dyson (university English teachers, previously Labour supporters) who edited the ‘Black Papers’ series from 1969 onwards, condemning perceived threats to education standards and discipline, celebrating the “excellence” of the public schools, and urging a move away from comprehensives back to grammar schools; Rhodes Boyson (a former “hardline” headteacher and ex-member of the Labour Party) and Harry Greenaway (Tory, and Head of a school English department), who sponsored Boyson to join the Conservative Party in 1967; Hugh Thomas (a former academic, and Chair of the Centre for Policy Studies [CPS] after Joseph) who supported Thatcher’s anti-establishment stance, having written in 1959 in favour of abolishing public schools. Other British academics who worked with Thatcher included Alan Walters (Thatcher’s economic adviser from 1981, previously at Birmingham University, the London School of Economics [LSE],

The first influential New Right think-tank was the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) founded in 1955. New Right ideologues built on Thatcher's election as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975, and other key institutes were founded, such as the Adam Smith Institute in 1976 (with Madsen Pirie as President, aided by fellow St Andrews graduate Eamon Butler). The explicitly ideological brief of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) was to

work towards influencing policy, rather than just producing research briefs [...]. We shall work to shape the climate of opinion [...]. We shall see in greater detail what people are doing in other lands. We shall look at the success stories and ask why they succeeded. But the main thing is that we shall argue. In the first instance, we shall argue the case for the social market economy.<sup>71</sup>

With some membership shared between it and the Party, the CPS was a launching-pad for the development of New Right ideas amongst academics and for the transfer and assimilation of those ideas into the Conservative Party and then out to the public. With Joseph as the first Chair and Thatcher as President, the first Director of Studies Alfred Sherman (a journalist and, crucially and ironically, a former socialist) brought ideological commitment to the exercise. The New Right gave a home to those Tory academics who were critical of the universities in which many of them were based, either because these had historically adopted an overly-conservative, gradualist approach to reform or because they had given succour to socialist students and staff or “the chattering classes” opposed to an “enterprise culture”. Although the think-tanks did not produce as many publications on higher education as on schools, they provided ideological “backbone” to the New Right in opposition and then in government, even if government action might not always go as far or as fast as they wished. Hayek had claimed that ‘we can beat the Socialist trend only if we can

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and latterly at Johns Hopkins, USA); Patrick Minford at Liverpool University; and Brian Griffiths, an economist at City University. Once in government, Thatcher strengthened the Number 10 Policy Unit (originally set up by Harold Wilson and retained by Callaghan), especially from 1983. It was headed first by Hoskyns (whose heated clashes with Thatcher are described in Charles Moore's biography), then by Ferdinand Mount, and then by Griffiths. See also Stedman Jones, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 134-179, on how a ‘transatlantic network’ of business people, journalists, politicians and academics exchanged, developed and spread ideas on neoliberalism from the 1940s onwards.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Denham, A., *Think-Tanks*, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The language reflects how Thatcherism in its early phase was influenced by the West German post-war ‘economic miracle’, achieved through ‘ordo-liberalism’ (a free market in an ordered society), sometimes then referred to as ‘the social market’: see Runciman, D., ‘Rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat-a-tat’, *London Review of Books*, Volume 35, Number 11, 6 June 2013, pp. 13-18.

persuade the intellectuals, the makers of opinion'.<sup>72</sup> New Right academics helped to build a counter-force of intellectuals to propagate the project as a whole.

This recruitment of academics and thinkers enabled the New Right to build its ideological strategy, in the main, outside the party political machinery, and thus unencumbered by the “one-nation” Conservatism which had held sway for decades. In quasi-Leninist mode, one CPS Chair described how they could operate: ‘We act as outriders, scouts, as a vanguard - who can [...] if necessary be disavowed.’<sup>73</sup> As the ideas were developed in independent organisations - universities and think-tanks - they did not need initially to win internal Party agreement.<sup>74</sup> Ideologues could explore radical views more openly than politicians with elections to worry about; and academics could use their university facilities to work in collaboration with politicians, yet appear to be independent. Joseph pointed out how ‘people experience events from a particular angle, and see them to some extent indirectly, through the prism of their viewpoint, which is shaped by opinion formers, who include politicians, communications media and teachers’.<sup>75</sup> While he was here alluding to the way in which he considered socialist teachers and others were corrupting the youth, what he said in fact aptly characterises the New Right’s own methods in using right-wing academics to propagate its ideology, however different that was in terms of content. As if mindful of Gramsci and Althusser, the New Right recruited academics as the ‘professional’ intellectuals or agents of the ideology.

Before we can see the results of their groundwork, however, we need to consider the second relevant context: the relationship of higher education to the state prior to 1979.

### **(vii) The relationship of higher education to the state**

Having identified how Thatcherism could be presented as an ideology of common sense, let us turn to how British higher education was in a position to help in this

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<sup>72</sup> Thatcher quoted this in a letter to the IEA in 1980, praising their propagation of the ideas which had ‘commanded increasingly wide acceptance in the universities and the media’: see Knight, C., op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>73</sup> Lord Thomas of Swynnerton, quoted in Denham, A., *Think-Tanks*, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> Thatcherites purported that Heath’s Selsdon Conference of the Shadow Cabinet in 1970 agreed to a radical free market programme to be implemented if elected, although Heath supporters disputed this: see Stedman Jones, D., op. cit., p. 177 and p. 369.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph, K., *Stranded*, op. cit., p. 26.

mission. Just as the seeming contradictions of the free economy:strong state could be put to work to further Thatcher's neoliberal project, so aspects of higher education's history and traditions would be opportunities to be exploited in the 1980s to help build and embed the Thatcherite ideology in this state apparatus.<sup>76</sup>

From a 1979 vantage point, I survey three broad and inter-related aspects which Thatcherism could put to ideological use: first, that an élite and liberal university sector had been expanding into a higher education system more accessible to a greater number - and wider range - of people; second, that greater governmental emphasis was being given to encouraging applicants to take science, technology and vocational courses, in order to meet the country's perceived economic and employment needs; and third, that higher education was being enjoined to be more responsive to social and national needs in a system funded and co-ordinated by the state.

Let us briefly consider the development of these three broad themes up to 1979. Prior to 1945, only 3% of the pre-war age group entered university.<sup>77</sup> In the kind of liberal model favoured by Newman and Mill, many universities saw their role as the cultivation of the minds of the élite, together with the conduct of research. Graduates would assume their rightful positions of leadership in high public office and the professions.<sup>78</sup> Instituted by Royal Charter, universities were independent of government. British academics were thus not civil servants, neither employed by, nor

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<sup>76</sup> As Marx puts it: 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past': Marx, K., *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in McLellan, D. (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>77</sup> Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., op. cit., p. 13; Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> The main aim of the medieval universities had been to produce theologians, lawyers and doctors of medicine, grounded in the (then) liberal arts: see, for example, Hamlyn, D. W., 'The concept of a university', *Philosophy*, 71, 1996, pp. 205-218. What is now considered by many liberal educationalists to be the standard practice of combining university teaching with research came much later, following the German lead in the nineteenth century. The idea/ideal of a liberal university education became predominant in Britain, with Oxbridge and arts subjects assuming privileged positions at the top of the university hierarchy. In 1935, half of university students overall were in arts faculties. At Oxford, 80% studied arts, whereas at Cambridge it was 70%: see Ashby, E., *Technology and the Academics* (London: Macmillan, 1963); Halsey, A. H., op. cit.; Rothblatt, S., *The Modern University and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Carswell, J., op. cit., pp. 8-9. Peter Scott comments that 'Newman [...] clearly regarded a liberal education as the intellectual means by which the political and administrative elite should be educated to fill the commanding positions in society': see Scott, P., *The Crisis of the University* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 49. Perry Anderson describes the traditional liberal university education as 'a training for rule, not for trade': see Anderson, P., op. cit., p. 147.

answerable to, the state. Save for being subject to the law of the land, universities were autonomous institutions with academic freedom.<sup>79</sup> One Tory (later) characterised them as ‘self-governing corporations, articulating for themselves the ends for which they existed, and pursuing these ends according to their own inner, self-moving dialectic’.<sup>80</sup> Universities had a status within the British Establishment and their value was, broadly speaking, taken for granted by the rest of society.

With the beginnings of the welfare state and social movements towards greater equality after the Second World War, there was a growing expectation that access to secondary and tertiary education should be a democratic right for all. The 1944 Education Act - whose architect was the reforming Tory Minister R.A. Butler - established the principle of equality of access to educational opportunity, specifically the entitlement to state-funded secondary level education, albeit in a stratified and selective system which retained the separate public schools.<sup>81</sup> To fund those few students entering the élite university system but unable to pay for themselves, a patchwork of different support systems had grown up. A small number of students obtained awards directly from universities (mainly Oxbridge), or the highly competitive and discretionary state scholarships, or less remunerative local county scholarships, or industrial sponsorship for vocational degrees, or grants pledging students to the teaching profession, or support from charitable organisations. Post-war, a special grant scheme supported ex-service personnel to study at university, most opting for technological and vocational degree subjects, some over a compressed two-year timescale.<sup>82</sup> Even though universities expanded, there was increasing pressure from applicants for university places, at the same time as government was recognising the need for a more highly educated workforce to match international competitors.

But how should universities be funded and administered by the state, given the need to safeguard their autonomy? Instituted in 1919, the University Grants Committee

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<sup>79</sup> For a history of academic freedom and university autonomy, see Tapper, E. R. and Salter, B. G., ‘The changing idea of university autonomy’, *Studies in Higher Education*, Volume 20, Number 1, March 1995, SRHE, pp. 59-71.

<sup>80</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds into Glass: the Government and the Universities* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, Policy Study Number 89, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, *The Education Act 1944* (London: HMSO, 1944).

<sup>82</sup> Robinson, E., *The New Polytechnics* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), pp. 18-19.

(UGC) was a non-statutory body advising universities and government on the amount and distribution of the comparatively little financial support from the state to the small number of universities in existence at that time.<sup>83</sup> As universities grew, up to and beyond the Second World War, national public funding came to form the major source of university finance.<sup>84</sup> From its initial role as simply the disbursing of funds, the UGC came to be perceived also as an independent check - a “buffer or shock-absorber” between government and the universities - on how that public money was spent, safeguarding the universities from direct political intervention.<sup>85</sup> In 1946 its terms of reference were augmented to include advising government on “national needs” and planning student numbers and subject mix.<sup>86</sup>

In the 1950s, it was becoming apparent that, given the booming post-war birth rate, universities would not be able to meet the growing demand for undergraduate student places. There was also pressure to modernise British industry through the education and training of more technicians, professionals and managers needed to meet “the technological revolution”.<sup>87</sup> The 1956 White Paper recognised the growth and importance of the technological diplomas and degrees taught in technical colleges (and awarded largely by the University of London externally), designating the most prestigious as the Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs).<sup>88</sup> The remaining colleges were local and regional in focus with the ability to take both full- and part-

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<sup>83</sup> The UGC recurrent grant in the inter-war years represented about 30% of university income, with the rest of universities’ funding coming from student fees, charitable donations, endowments, civic support and various revenues: see Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>84</sup> Carswell, J., op. cit., pp. 14-19.

<sup>85</sup> University Grants Committee, *Report of the University Grants Committee to the Secretary of State for Education and Science*, Cmnd. 3820 (London: HMSO, November 1968) dates the first use of the term to 1948.

<sup>86</sup> Tapper, E. R. and Salter, B. G., ‘The changing idea’, op. cit., p. 62; Scott, P., *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education* (Buckingham: SRHE and the Open University Press, 1995), p. 16.

<sup>87</sup> The founding of the University of London in 1826 (that part of it that became University College) had spearheaded the scientific revolution, according to Ashby (op. cit.), with its curriculum of new subjects such as experimental sciences and economics. Further colleges teaching the sciences, technologies and other applied subjects were added in Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and other cities, the “redbrick” university colleges and the civic universities developing fully into universities in the twentieth century.

<sup>88</sup> Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, *Technical Education (White Paper)*, Cmd. 9703 (London: HMSO, 1956). Shattock (*The UGC*, op. cit., pp. 143-144) documents the UGC’s lack of response in the 1950s to the growing demand for a new technological university, preferring instead to direct any extra resources into existing universities. The ten CATs provided higher technological education outside the universities, until Robbins accorded them university status in 1966. Several would suffer disproportionately in the UGC’s 1980s cuts.

time students at various levels up to and including degree work, perceived as a kind of “overflow” from the universities.<sup>89</sup>

In view of the substantial actual and projected growth in university places, Harold Macmillan’s Tory Government set up the Robbins Committee review in 1961.<sup>90</sup> Their Report in 1963 reiterated higher education’s widely-accepted liberal objectives - the promotion of ‘the general powers of the mind’, ‘the advancement of learning’, ‘the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship’ - but added a fourth, the importance of ‘instruction in skills’.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, it was given equal weight to the other three. The Report recognised explicitly a relationship between universities and the state, albeit with continuing safeguards for university autonomy, and it firmly took control of higher education as a national system and a matter of public concern.<sup>92</sup> Building on the notion of equality enshrined in the 1944 Act, the Report established the principle that anyone qualified to go to university should be able to do so, and at public expense: ‘[W]e have assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.’<sup>93</sup> Access to higher education would be enabled by the 1960 Anderson Report’s recommendations whereby, since 1962, a national state-funded mandatory grant system for full-time undergraduates had been in place, comprising payment of tuition fees and a means-tested maintenance grant, on a sliding scale according to personal/parental income.<sup>94</sup> The Tory Government accepted in principle Robbins’ recommendations for the further expansion of existing universities, the granting of university status to the CATs, the designation of three special high-level science and technology universities

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<sup>89</sup> Robinson, E., *op. cit.*, pp. 15-41.

<sup>90</sup> Carswell, J., *op. cit.*, p. 19. The so-called ‘new’ or ‘Murray’ (after the then Chair of the UGC) universities (Warwick, Kent, Sussex, York, Lancaster, East Anglia and Essex) were designated pre-Robbins, with Keele having been designated earlier.

<sup>91</sup> Committee on Higher Education, *Higher Education: Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-3 (Robbins Report)*, Cmnd. 2154 (London: HMSO, 1963); available online at <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/robbins/> [accessed 16 July 2012], paragraphs 25-29.

<sup>92</sup> Eric Robinson (*op. cit.*, p. 29) points out that higher education in the technical colleges was virtually ignored by Robbins’ terms of reference and treated like ‘a temporary expedient’. For a discussion on whether higher education could be said to have constituted ‘a system’ at this time, and on the hierarchy of universities, see Halsey, A. H., *op. cit.*

<sup>93</sup> *Robbins Report*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 31.

<sup>94</sup> Robert Stevens considers that the Anderson Committee ‘gave the last clear endorsement of the Newman view of the university’ but that it was working on ‘the assumption that going to university was for the few’: Stevens, R., *University to Uni: the Politics of Higher Education in England since 1944* (London: Politico’s, 2004), p. 19.

and the establishment of six more new universities.<sup>95</sup> When the new Department of Education and Science (DES) was set up in 1964, it assumed ministerial responsibility for the UGC from the Treasury, a move perceived by educationalists and civil servants as a downgrading, as it cut the UGC's direct Treasury link. In 1966, UGC/university finances were made subject to oversight by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), as were other publicly-funded areas.<sup>96</sup> The national administration of university education was now firmly part of the governmental machine.

In the same month as the Robbins Committee reported, Harold Wilson, the then leader of the Opposition, spoke at the Labour Party Conference on the need for the further expansion of higher education to give wider educational opportunity, but also to meet society's new industrial demands and promote economic growth. Wilson promised that a Labour Government would embark on

a tremendous building programme of new universities [with] more of them [...] sited in industrial areas where they can in some way reflect the pulsating throb of local industry, where they can work in partnership with the new industries we seek to create.<sup>97</sup>

Reflecting their commitment to equality, the Labour Party wanted to make higher education accessible to more people, including those who could not necessarily attend full-time. Accordingly, at the same conference, Wilson trailed a "university of the air", later translated into the 1966 Labour Party manifesto pledge to found the Open University (OU), which admitted its first students in 1971.

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<sup>95</sup> Robbins' proposed Special Institutions for Scientific and Technological Education and Research (the SISTERS) were to be equivalent in status to, for example, Imperial College, London, or the high level institutes in France - the *grandes écoles* - or in Germany - the *technische hochschulen*. By 1960, the percentage of the annual participation rate (APR, the number of home initial entrants to higher education aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the age group) was 6% - still low, relative to other competitors: see BIS, *Browne Report*, op. cit., fn.30. In the 1960s, there was cross-party agreement that higher education should be expanded to satisfy unmet demand, a position supported (even) by the Conservative Party Conference in October 1962: see Kogan, M. and Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 18-19. Robbins recommended an increase of full-time student places from 195,000 in 1962/63 to 507,000 in 1980/1, designed to raise the APR from 8% to 17%: see *Robbins Report*, op. cit., Chapter VI, paragraph 167, p. 65 and paragraph 171, p. 66. In all, the number of university institutions grew from 28 in 1960 to 44 in the following two decades: see Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Bell, R., Fowler, G. and Little, K. (eds), *Education in Great Britain and Ireland: a Source Book* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul with the Open University Press, 1973), pp. 192-194.



However, the Labour Party distrusted the traditional universities, those exclusive “ivory towers”, part of the Establishment and the class system that had kept out those whom Labour had traditionally represented.<sup>98</sup> This resonated with the view that many universities or faculties were divorced from the need to contribute to industrial progress. Reminiscent of Mao’s view (as noted in Chapter 1), some British (and particularly English) people - on both the Left and the Right - distrusted and resented what they perceived as the universities’ aloofness, considering - rather - that the best “education for life” was available through experience in the factory or business rather than from a higher education.<sup>99</sup> The Labour Party had a stronger allegiance to the local education authority (LEA) further and technical education colleges, which had given access to the working class to take liberal or vocational studies part-time.

Assuming government in 1964, Labour decided not to implement all Robbins’ recommendations (notably, not the creation of the new universities and scientific higher institutes), claiming pressure on resources. This was not resisted by the UGC which favoured a cautionary brake on establishing more universities, maintaining that the Robbins target for extra student places could be reached (or even exceeded)

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<sup>98</sup> Trow, M., ‘Binary dilemmas – an American view’, *Higher Education Review*, Volume 1, Number 3, 1969, pp. 33-34. The Labour Party in the 1960s considered some radical proposals for full integration of further and higher education: see Salter, B. and Tapper, T., *The State and Higher Education*, op. cit., pp. 22-29.

<sup>99</sup> Desmond Ryan dates the anti-university stance of manufacturers from the early nineteenth century onwards, showing how the Thatcher Governments in particular drew on both a British anti-intellectualism (which favoured the idea of ‘the practical man’) in their attack on universities, in their drive to promote a more utilitarian purpose for higher education: see Ryan, D., ‘The Assault on Higher Education’, *New Left Review*, Volume 227, January/February 1998, pp. 3-32. Thatcher was impressed by the views of Corelli Barnett who decried the mid-nineteenth century ‘takeover bid for the soul of British education [...] by the highminded liberal-studies lobby’, with ‘the practical man’ being relegated to carry out industrial development. Barnett argues that this “snobbism” led to under-investment in advanced science and technology teaching and research (unlike in Europe), and that the ‘false antithesis’ set up between arts and sciences damaged both industrial progress and the development of British higher education: see Barnett, C., *The Audit of War* (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 99-220. The Secretary of State for Education, Keith Joseph (and other Cabinet ministers, Nigel Lawson and Michael Heseltine), similarly admired Barnett’s ‘declinist’ analysis, with its criticism of the anti-business culture prevalent in higher education: see Denham, A. and Garnett, M., *Keith Joseph* (Durham: Acumen, 2001), p. 300. Joseph and Thatcher were also impressed by Martin Wiener’s criticism of the English ruling establishment for having privileged its values over middle-class industrial Victorian values: see Wiener, M. J., *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Joseph distributed Wiener’s book to the Cabinet: see *The Economist* online (author not stated), 27 April 2010, ‘Empty shelves’: available at <http://www.economist.com/node/15996751/print> [accessed 17 June 2012]. Eric Robinson (op. cit.) attacks the “anti-intellectualism” of British industry and the universities’ élitism and adherence to a traditional liberal higher education alike. Stefan Collini criticises the setting up of dichotomies between ‘the useful’ and ‘the useless’: *What Are Universities For?*, op. cit., pp. 39-60. Newman had pointed out in fact that nothing could be more ‘useful’ than a liberal education: Newman, J. H., op. cit., p. 117.

by enlarging existing universities, now comprising (since 1966) the former CATs.<sup>100</sup> The Government seized the chance to designate a higher education sector more directly under social control, moving radically in 1966 to create a “binary policy” for higher education, consisting of the universities on the one hand and the polytechnics and higher education colleges on the other - a public sector of higher education (PSHE), to be administered by the LEAs. Their justification for the separate sector included the ‘need and demand for vocational, professional and industrially-based courses in higher education’, in addition to maintaining that ‘a substantial part of the higher education system should be under social control, and directly responsive to social needs’.<sup>101</sup> The institutions in the new sector were not to be given university-style charters to award their own degrees. Instead, the Government created the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), as Robbins had recommended, with a charter to validate higher education in the existing colleges and award degrees of comparable standard to those awarded by the universities.

Although governments, both Labour and Tory, in the late 1960s and early 1970s remained committed to the personal value of a liberal higher education, there were also repeated attempts to shift more higher education applicants towards studying science and technology and vocational subjects. Robbins had emphasised the importance of expanding university provision in science and technology, but there

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<sup>100</sup> UGC, Cmnd. 3820, op. cit. (The only new “Robbins university” in the end was Stirling in Scotland.)

<sup>101</sup> Statement by Anthony Crosland, Secretary of State, to the House of Commons, 24 February 1965: UGC, *ibid.*, paragraph 226. For Crosland’s speeches at Woolwich Polytechnic, 27 April 1965, and at Lancaster University, 20 January 1967, see Pratt, J. and Burgess, T., *Polytechnics: a Report* (London: Pitman, 1974) and Robinson, E., op. cit., pp. 249-256. For the paper confirming the binary policy, see Department of Education and Science, *A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges: Higher Education in the Further Education System*, Cmnd. 3006 (London: HMSO, May 1966). Robbins criticised Crosland for rejecting the conception of a unitary university system and for implying that the polytechnics (on less resources and lower status) would be able to equal the idea of the SISTERS or their continental counterparts. He considered – as did Carswell - that Crosland’s justification for creating a public sector of higher education was confused and created artificial barriers between the public and university sectors which had not existed beforehand: see Robbins, L., *Higher Education Revisited* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 99-101. According to Carswell (op. cit., pp. 71-93), one impelling reason for Crosland’s binary policy was because Labour would have found it politically impossible to take local higher education out of predominantly Labour-controlled LEAs, as the latter’s influence over their local colleges and universities had been eroded and many had not favoured the Robbins proposals, which would have further diminished their control. Many at the time (Eric Robinson, for example) thought that the creation of PSHE was a way of challenging what were considered to be the overly-conservative universities. Others, like Martin Trow, thought it would reinforce the hierarchies, as ‘the realities which justify (and perhaps require) a binary system in the short run may be creating a system which threatens to perpetuate just the caste system, just the prejudices and snobberies and hierarchies, that are Britain’s greatest social handicap, and one that Crosland would most like to destroy’: Trow, M., op. cit., p. 43.

was a shortfall of home students in these subjects coming through from school to university, as the 1968 Dainton Report confirmed.<sup>102</sup> Successive governments tried to encourage applicants to take those subjects deemed to serve “the needs of the economy” and to get universities to involve students in their employment futures. For example, Labour Minister Shirley Williams invited universities in September 1969 to consider *inter alia* a scheme to tie some students to specific employment on graduation;<sup>103</sup> Secretary of State Thatcher’s 1972 White Paper encouraged applicants to consider the ‘relevance’ and ‘usefulness’ of their proposed subject of study.<sup>104</sup>

Britain’s deep economic and social problems in the 1970s (as well as a declining birth rate) meant that governments halted higher education expansion and student number targets were progressively reduced.<sup>105</sup> In the 1973 public expenditure cuts, the Government cancelled already agreed compensation funding to universities for inflationary costs, claiming that universities could accommodate this reduction without damaging growth. It amounted to a 10% cut which sent shock waves through the universities which had never before been so drastically cut.<sup>106</sup> With the demise of the quinquennial grant system in 1974/5, an annual allocation on a four-year planning cycle gave politicians the greater flexibility they needed, and universities’ actual income fell year on year, while student numbers continued to increase.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Carswell, J., op. cit., p. 44 and pp. 104-105; Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, *Council for Scientific Policy: Enquiry into the Flow of Candidates in Science and Technology into Higher Education (Dainton Report)*, Cmnd. 3541 (London: HMSO, 1968). In 1975, there were 30,000 science and engineering places vacant: see Callaghan, J., ‘Towards a national debate: speech by the Prime Minister James Callaghan at a foundation stone-laying ceremony at Ruskin College, Oxford, on 18 October 1976’: available at <http://education.guardian.co.uk/thegreatdebate/story/0,9860,574645,00.html> [accessed 2 October 2012].

<sup>103</sup> Universities largely ignored Shirley Williams’ ‘13 points’ for consideration: see Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., op. cit., pp. 146-147.

<sup>104</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Education: a Framework for Expansion*, White Paper, Cmnd. 5174 (London: HMSO, December 1972), paragraph 117, p. 35. It projected a science:arts mix of 53%:47% respectively by 1976/7, revised down from the Robbins figure of 60%:40% (paragraphs 141-142 and paragraph 136). See also: Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 18; Carswell, J., op. cit., p. 140; Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>105</sup> Robbins had projected the 1980 APR as 17% but by 1971 it was already 15%. The 1972 White Paper projected an APR of 22% by 1981 - an increase from the then current 463,000 full-time and sandwich student places to 750,000. This had been reduced down from the 1970 projection of 835,000 places by 1981. By 1974, the target was set at 650,000 and in 1976 at 600,000 to be reached by 1981: see Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 18-25; Carswell, J., op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132 and pp. 145-146.

<sup>107</sup> Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., op. cit., p. 48; Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., pp. 16-20.

Meanwhile, PSHE expanded, not just in business and technological subjects but also in the arts and social sciences. The latter was partly due to the UGC advising government against the automatic incorporation of the colleges of education into the universities, so that many of these colleges became part of the new polytechnics.<sup>108</sup> Ironically, PSHE had a “market advantage” outside government reach: whereas university student numbers were under DES/UGC control, PSHE funding - called the Advanced Further Education (AFE) “pool” - came from central government to the LEAs which were generally well-disposed towards encouraging the growth of their local higher education institutions. LEAs were entitled without limitation to charge to the pool the expenditure on courses of higher education. If a higher education institution admitted a student, the latter was entitled to a mandatory grant, so PSHE expanded. This - and the more gradual expansion of student numbers in universities - put severe pressure on the student grant scheme in the 1970s. Not matched by the soaring rate of inflation, the value of the student maintenance grant was falling to the extent that it could no longer support the cost of living. Regarding overseas students, a Labour Government had instituted a higher differential fee rate in 1967 and successive governments increased these fees up to 1979.<sup>109</sup>

A speech by the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, in 1976 explicitly queried why ‘our best trained students’ had ‘no desire to join industry’.<sup>110</sup> Like Thatcher in 1972, he wanted to forge a link between academic study and its application to ‘the world of work’.<sup>111</sup> Another political imperative was to keep or increase student numbers in higher education but at no extra - or even at reduced - cost to government. A ‘Brown Paper’ in February 1978 demonstrates government’s expectation of a closer involvement in planning the higher education system it financed, especially in view of the declining birth rate since 1964, set to impact on higher education from the early 1980s.<sup>112</sup> Two-year higher education diplomas/degrees - successfully mounted post-war for ex-forces personnel and

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>110</sup> Callaghan, J., op. cit. He told Gordon Oakes to ensure that the latter’s enquiry directed higher education towards meeting the needs of the economy: see Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>111</sup> See Ch. 1, fn.12.

<sup>112</sup> Department of Education and Science and the Scottish Education Department, *Higher Education into the 1990s: a Discussion Document*, Brown Paper (London: HMSO, 1978). The student numbers projection for 1981 was now assumed at 560,000. Shattock observes how seriously inaccurate the 1972 White and 1978 Brown Papers were in their numerical projections of student demand: see Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 8 and p. 149.

mooted by Shirley Williams back in 1969 and Thatcher in 1972 - were again proposed, as was encouragement towards greater provision of part-time degrees. A month later, the Oakes Report made recommendations on the management and control of PSHE and its better coordination with the university sector. The most significant recommendation was for the establishment of a national body for PSHE, to be provided via the LEAs collectively, to advise on planning and resource allocation in that sector.<sup>113</sup>

In the mid- to late-1970s, government problems in funding an ever-expanding higher education system, as national resources were falling, helped to confirm the opinion of some traditional Tories that more had meant worse. They rejected the social democratic striving for equality and had not favoured the Robbins expansion or the growth of the polytechnics. They espoused the idea of a liberal university education but only for an élite. Exemplifying this view, Scruton in 1980 maintained (in relation to education in general): ‘It is not possible to provide universal education. Nor, indeed, is it desirable.’<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, Thatcher and her followers blamed higher education for the country’s ills, including moving the country more towards ‘extreme Socialism’, through ‘the agitations of Marxist students’.<sup>115</sup> For Joseph, speaking in 1974, higher education had become so dangerously “large” that the views of its students and teachers were difficult to control:

Whatever we may have thought 15 years or so back, it is our right and duty to question, in the light of experience, the rapid expansion of the universities, and the belief that by increasing the number of undergraduates we necessarily multiply the benefit either to the young people concerned or to the nation. When young people are taken away from their home milieu, in late adolescence, crowded together in age groups, with diminished parental, and indeed, adult influence, and without the social disciplines which the need to earn a living impose, is it surprising that their late adolescent rebelliousness should feed on itself, and seek ideological rationalisation? [...] No doubt many will grow out of it when they leave for the world, but not all. Some will carry on an extended adolescence as teachers in schools and in polytechnics and in universities, helped by the like-minded, where they will co-operate with left-wing gangs.<sup>116</sup>

And a year later he queried: ‘Has it been wise to expand our universities quite so fast?’<sup>117</sup> In the Preface to an IEA pamphlet in the early 1980s, Arthur Seldon

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<sup>113</sup> Department of Education and Science, *Report of the Working Group on the Management of Higher Education in the Maintained Sector (Oakes Report)*, Brown Paper, Cmnd. 7130 (London: HMSO, March 1978), p. 1, paragraph 1.1; p. 9, paragraph 3.4; p. 55, paragraph 13.10 (ii).

<sup>114</sup> Scruton, R., *The Meaning of Conservatism*, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>115</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech 25 May 1976, op. cit. See also Ch. 1, fn.65.

<sup>116</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.299.

condemned the ‘over-expansion after the Robbins Report’ and ‘its (unintended) encouragement of irrelevant courses and irresponsible teachers’ and ‘fashionable but questionable subjects like sociology and mathematical economics without micro-economic foundations’.<sup>118</sup> The pamphlet’s author, Professor H. S. Ferns, an Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Birmingham, considered there had been ‘[t]oo rapid expansion in the 1960s [which had] resulted in the recruitment of second-class people in large numbers’.<sup>119</sup> He dismissed the post-war university expansion as a ‘politically-determined policy of providing university education for all qualified young people at the expense of the taxpayers’.<sup>120</sup> It was not just that higher education had grown too much and too fast but that, as Thatcher saw it, ‘a generation of easy liberal education has accustomed many to suppose that Utopia was soon to be achieved. Such education left the belief that, with the welfare state, all ills would soon vanish [...]’ That, she said, ‘has proved an illusion’.<sup>121</sup> Education was too easily becoming a route to greater equality. People needed to be more “realistic”, that is to adopt the truths of an altogether different ideology. Why, Joseph had posed in 1975, should this over-large higher education system - which had set itself against a “common sense” view of the market - expect state funding?:

Some would explain academic hostility [to profit, commerce, etc] as a by-product of the tendency of academic establishments to grow by natural processes. They want a larger academic sector, hence a larger state sector, given the present system of financing higher education. Would this necessarily be the case if higher education were financed differently? We should be asking these questions.<sup>122</sup>

Seldon proposed, rather, in 1982, that universities and the DES should adopt a

worldly realism that the taxpayer will not pay universities to produce graduates in useless subjects, students will not pay for studies that do not prepare them for the real world, and industry will not pay to support life tenure for teachers ignorant or scornful of industry in a competitive world.<sup>123</sup>

Standards were falling precisely because higher education was too “liberal”, was against “enterprise” and dependent on the state, as Thatcher had observed in 1978:

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<sup>117</sup> Joseph, K., *Reversing*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> Seldon’s Preface to Ferns, H. S., *How Much Freedom for Universities? Towards Independent Universities* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1982), pp. 7-8.

<sup>119</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>121</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech 6 May 1978, op. cit.

<sup>122</sup> Joseph, K., *Reversing*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>123</sup> Seldon in Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 8.

There is cause for alarm at the extent to which greater State involvement, to the point of virtual monopoly in higher education, has coincided with a decline in educational standards.<sup>124</sup>

So what did the neoliberals propose as the solution? Like everything else, higher education was a commodity to be bought by the individual.<sup>125</sup> Entrants to higher education should be free to choose to do so as individual consumers of private goods and services - like purchasing a car, private schooling or private hospital treatment - rather than take that provided by the state, funded collectively through direct taxation. Universities should be taken out of government control altogether, and “de-regulated”, which would encourage the diversity and healthy competition between institutions required by the free market, as Ferns had argued, with his colleague John Burton filling in the detail:

In the absence of state finance, each academy would have the incentive to specialise according to its comparative efficiency in different types of academic work. Some might choose to specialise primarily as ‘think-tanks’, on the model of the RAND Corporation in the USA, earning income primarily through research and consultancy work. Some might specialise as low-cost providers of large-scale higher education, while others as high-cost providers of smaller-scale courses (such as post-graduate work or short courses of a post-experience nature). Some academies might find it beneficial to specialise in certain subjects (such as engineering and technology), while others might find a niche in the academic market by offering a large ‘basket’ of disciplines.<sup>126</sup>

A free market economy simply did not require public investment in higher education. Prior to the neoliberal revolution, if individuals and higher education institutions did still want the state to pay, then the latter - the strong state - could use higher education - its ideological state apparatus - to help create neoliberalism, and thereby, ironically, to bring about liberal higher education’s own demise.

#### **(viii) Next steps**

Returning to the eve of Thatcher’s first government, three crucial issues in the relationship of higher education to the state were apparent: first, access to higher education and how expansion should be financed; second, how to persuade more applicants to take science, technology and vocational courses, to meet perceived national economic needs; and third, how higher education could better respond to

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<sup>124</sup> Thatcher, M., Speech 6 May 1978, op. cit.

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, Friedman, M. and Friedman, R., *Free to Choose*, op. cit.

<sup>126</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 14; John Burton in Ferns, *ibid.*, p. 49.

social and national needs. There was an ideological difference between those Tories who favoured élitism and those in the Labour Party who favoured expansion and wider access. But the outgoing Labour Government and the incoming Thatcherites shared a growing instrumental view of higher education. The Thatcher Governments would - over time - be able to exploit the tensions and contradictions in both parties' positions, combined with those inherent in higher education's history and traditions.

At the start of this chapter, I drew attention to the way that Thatcher framed her project as an explicit, deliberate and radical break with the past. With reference to Thatcherism, I demonstrated how the New Right took their set of ideas out to people, urging them to reject existing values, forms and practices and adopt the new ideology instead, as if it were simply common sense; and why higher education might occupy a particularly important place in that enterprise. The next chapters will show how the ideology of common sense was built in the practices of higher education. First, I shall look at what the Tories set out for higher education in their manifestos, papers and Acts of Parliament; second, I shall demonstrate how the process of debates in Parliament - and reactions to those debates and events - contributed to the construction of the ideology. Key aspects from these documents and debates - élitism, excellence and standards *versus* expansion; liberal *versus* instrumental and vocational; the free market and privatisation *versus* public funding, planning and control - appear to have contradictory meanings but it will be seen that they could be constructed into working together.<sup>127</sup> This will show how the ideology was formed not just from the neoliberals' beliefs but on the contradictions in the Tory Party and in the position of opponents. We can then see how an ideological attack on an apparently robustly liberal higher education system could be attempted, and how people could be led into following and practising an ideology which they had to date appeared to be against.

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<sup>127</sup> See Ch. 2, fn.27. I am considering these contradictions as both "logical" and, in the Marxist sense, as "real" contradictions that help to conceal what is "actually" going on. Marx wrote (in relation to the contradictions inherent in exchange value in capitalism) that 'equality and freedom' prove to be 'inequality and unfreedom': Nicolaus, M. and Fowkes, B. (eds), *Karl Marx: Grundrisse* (London: Penguin Books in association with *New Left Review*, 1973), p. 249.



## **Chapter 4    Higher education policies and legislation**

### **(i)    Constructing the ideology through the parliamentary process**

The Thatcher Government started its first term of office without any vision or blueprint for higher education.<sup>1</sup> Other matters - notably the application of monetarist policies to inflation, the commitment to reduce the public sector borrowing rate (PSBR) and tackling trade union power - took precedence.<sup>2</sup> Higher education would be further down the agenda.<sup>3</sup> Even if the politicians lacked a coherent strategy for higher education, however, we have already noted that neoliberal ideologues were framing a blueprint in the early 1980s.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that a Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS) paper, drafted behind the scenes in September 1982 with the involvement and approval of the Treasury, identified four big areas of public expenditure for radical reform, one of which was higher education. As the logic of the free market dictated that students should buy their higher education directly at source, the complete withdrawal of state funding from higher education was proposed, with student fees to be set at market rates. About 300,000 state scholarships would be made available, with student loans for the rest. But after its leak, this blueprint for an ideal neoliberal solution had to be shelved, for the time being at least.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, P., 'Higher Education', op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> See Ch. 3, fn.5.

<sup>3</sup> Thatcher's seven Education Secretaries of State later confirmed this, realising that higher education reform was going to be difficult: see Ribbins, P. and Sherratt, B., *Radical Education Policies and Conservative Secretaries of State* (London: Cassell, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. 3, fns.125-126.

<sup>5</sup> *The Economist* (author not stated) (18 September 1982), 'Thatcher's think-tank takes aim at the welfare state', pp. 25-26. The plan was leaked by Peter Walker (a 'wet') who wanted to scupper it (detailed in an email from Hugo Young to me). Set up in 1971, the CPRS think-tank was disbanded by Thatcher in 1983, and favoured advisers moved to the Downing Street Policy Unit. Nine policy committees were set up in 1982 to identify radical moves but, in the event, the 1983 Manifesto did not go as far as the radicals wished: see Denham A., *Think-Tanks*, op. cit; Young, H., op. cit; Hennessy, P., Morrison, S., Townsend, R., *Routine Punctuated by Orgies: the Central Policy Review Staff, 1970-83*, Strathclyde Papers on Government and Politics, series ed. Jeremy Moon, Number 31, December 1984. As if building on the CPRS recommendation, the Coalition Government (2010-) took a *Browne Report* proposal and withdrew funding from all subjects except science, technology, engineering and mathematics, so that the remaining subjects are now funded directly and solely from the £9,000 per annum student fees: see Ch. 1, fn.13 and Department for BIS, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, White Paper, Cm. 8122, June 2011: available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/hereform/white-paper/>, and Government Response, June 2012, available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32405/12-890-government-response-students-and-regulatory-framework-higher-education.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32405/12-890-government-response-students-and-regulatory-framework-higher-education.pdf) [accessed 20 July 2012].

If - as she and others later claimed<sup>6</sup> - Thatcher was trying to “decentralise” higher education institutions and set them free, and if overt privatisation was not yet politically possible, what could be done that would lay foundations for that hegemonic project? Experience would prove that greater central control of higher education would be needed to enforce “freedom”, as Johnson comments: ‘Although the need to centralize could have been derived from Hayekian principles, it took time to learn in practice.’<sup>7</sup> First, like other publicly-funded areas, higher education could be, and was, subjected to cuts. Yet, by the end of the 1980s it had also become much more closely aligned to the New Right’s ideological agenda, even though not yet privatised. The Government had to build its ideological project gradually over the 1980s, as if adopting a Gramscian method, by intervening in the institutions of civil society in order ‘to reshape the institutional framework of the free economy’, as Gamble puts it.<sup>8</sup> It is through the state apparatuses - as we noted from Althusser - that the dominant ideology is actually expressed.<sup>9</sup> I am adopting here Perry Anderson’s view - consonant with Althusser’s<sup>10</sup> - that the parliamentary system itself is crucial, acting as ‘the hub of the ideological apparatus of capitalism’.<sup>11</sup> So how did the developing ideological process work on both the parliamentary system and higher education? How did they contribute towards the construction of hegemony?

**(ii) ‘A strategic line’: from cuts to legislation**

To help answer those questions, this section comprises a factual summary of the higher education cuts, policies and legislation from 1979 to 1990, on which basis I give a more analytical account from section (iii) onwards. Thatcher’s policies might be viewed in phases or trends, as by Scott,<sup>12</sup> or as comprising ‘a strategic line’, in which different elements contributed to ‘the primary strategic goals’, as Jessop describes it.<sup>13</sup> Thatcher’s three successive election victories gave her the majorities and timescale she needed to turn ideas into legislation.<sup>14</sup> Even though legislation on

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<sup>6</sup> Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 599. See also Ch. 7, fn.115.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, R., op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> Gamble, A., op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Ch. 2, fn.71.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. 2, fn.72.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Eagleton, T., op. cit., p. 112, who contends that it fosters ‘the illusion of self-government on the part of the populace’.

<sup>12</sup> Ch. 1, fns.39-40.

<sup>13</sup> Ch. 3, fn.27.

<sup>14</sup> In 1979, the Tories won 43.9% of the vote with a majority of 43 seats; in 1983, 42.4% of the vote with a majority of 144; and in 1987, 42.3% of the vote with a majority of 102: BBC Politics website,

higher education was not an immediate priority, we can trace a line from the early cuts through the major policy papers - notably, the 1981 Green Paper on PSHE, the 1985 Green Paper, the 1987 White Paper, the 1988 Top-up Loans for Students White Paper - to the culminating legislation of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the 1990 Student Loans Act.<sup>15</sup> It was a small amount of legislation that achieved such a major turnaround in higher education's structures, governance and ideological alignment; yet as one ideological shift was achieved, each that followed contributed to what came to appear as an unstoppable momentum towards a new consensus in and about higher education.

In the Government's first term there was no specific legislation on higher education. Following through the 1979 Manifesto commitments, the first budget in June 1979 insisted simply that 'we must make savings in public spending and roll back the boundaries of the public sector'.<sup>16</sup> The budget cuts to higher education affected LEA grants (which funded PSHE), UGC recurrent grants, the real value of student grants, capital and building monies, and funding for scientific research across both sectors.<sup>17</sup> This set the scene for higher education in the early 1980s: repeated and substantial cuts, preparing the ground for the policy papers and legislation to follow.

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available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/background/pastelec/ge79.shtml> [accessed 24 June 2013]. Jessop, B. et al. (eds), op. cit., p. 18, identify Thatcher's third term as 'consolidated Thatcherism'.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Education and Science (DES), *Higher Education in England outside the Universities: Policy, Funding and Management*, Green Paper (London: HMSO, July 1981); DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, Green Paper, Cmnd. 9524 (London: HMSO, May 1985); DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, op. cit.; DES, *Education Reform Act (No. 2)* (London: HMSO, July 1988); DES, *Top-up Loans for Students*, Cm. 520 (London: HMSO, November 1988); HMSO, *Education (Student Loans) Act 1990* (London: HMSO, 1990). In comparison, the legislative and organisational changes visited on schools and further education/training colleges were substantial from the start: see Lawton, D., *The Tory Mind on Education 1979-94* (London: Falmer Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> The Manifesto claimed that 'the balance of our society has been increasingly tilted in favour of the State at the expense of individual freedom'. The state had to be cut by using its power to reduce its functions and liberate the free economy, so that services would then be improved through private enterprise: Conservative Party, *The Conservative Manifesto* (London: Conservative Central Office, April 1979), pp. 5-6. Ian Gilmour considers public spending cuts were based on two mistakes, or delusions as he terms them. Quoting from the Government's first White Paper, which claimed that '[p]ublic expenditure is at the heart of Britain's present economic difficulties', he pointed out that, 'apart from Greece, Britain's ratio of public expenditure to GDP was then the lowest in the European Community'. The second delusion, he continued, was the Government's 'deeply held conviction that a high PSBR produced an enlarged money supply'. That, he claimed, 'was simply wrong': Gilmour, I., *Dancing with Dogma*, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> HC Deb, 'Public expenditure', 12 June 1979, vol.968, cc.246-249. For commentary, see Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 32-33.

The PSHE pool was ‘capped’ as part of the move to curb local authority spending and power, and then progressively cut in the Government’s first term, amounting to a reduction overall of about 6.5% between 1980/81 and 1982/83. It is not possible to gauge the extent to which the cut to the pool was passed on to PSHE institutions by LEAs, as many “softened the blow” by making up at least part of the difference from other income. However, the PSHE cuts amounted to a 20% reduction in real terms of the unit of resource between 1980/81 and 1984/5 while, as we will see later, the sector’s student numbers rose.<sup>18</sup> As for the universities, the UGC warned them in August 1979 that, to retain the unit of resource, it looked as if universities would have to reduce their intakes by 6% in 1980/81. A reduction of £411M on the education budget overall for 1980/81 was announced in November 1979 but the proportion of the cut to higher education was still not specified. The UGC asked universities to prepare various planning scenarios, including a possible 5% cut in funding for the forthcoming year.<sup>19</sup>

The Government’s raising of overseas student fees to full-cost from 1980 amounted to a cut of up to 10% because the savings to public expenditure were not reimbursed.<sup>20</sup> Although this had been presented as the only way to maintain level funding for home students, the Government announced further reductions on 16 December 1980, on top of the 1979 cuts and the withdrawal of the overseas student subsidy. The March 1981 Public Expenditure White Paper confirmed a ‘progressive reduction’ over the next three years, 1981/2 to 1983/4, to the higher education

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<sup>18</sup> The 1980 Education Act gave the DES powers to limit the pool, first capped at the 1979/80 level of £320 million, then reduced to £313 million, with further reductions envisaged to bring it down to £281 million by 1983/4. The cut to polytechnic lecturer posts was estimated at about 13%. - see Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 128-129; Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., op. cit., p. 88; HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.361; HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.921; HC Deb, 4 June 1985, vol.80, cc.205-245. Despite Government/National Advisory Body (NAB) attempts to cut Humanities at Newcastle Polytechnic, Brighton Polytechnic, and Humberside College of Higher Education, only the subject area of Town Planning was cut from the polytechnics: see Cowan, A., ‘History UK (HE)’, The Institute of Historical Research, 2008: available at <http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/HE.html> [accessed 31 December 2012], p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 32-33.

<sup>20</sup> HMSO, *Education Act 1980*, April 1980: available at [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/20/pdfs/ukpga\\_19800020\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1980/20/pdfs/ukpga_19800020_en.pdf) [accessed 21 July 2013], section 2.10, paragraphs 14-16, pp. 96-97. David Watson and Rachel Bowden advise that this 5-10% reduction in funding had a particularly severe impact on the universities, as some LEAs made up some of the shortfall for PSHE institutions: see Watson, D. and Bowden, R., *Ends without Means: the Conservative stewardship of UK higher education 1979-1997* (Brighton: University of Brighton Education Research Centre Occasional Paper, April 1997), p. 5. See also Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 46.

recurrent grant. This cut in institutional resources for both sectors of about 8.5% (below the level announced only a year earlier) constituted, with the withdrawal of the overseas student fees subsidy, a ‘double cut’, as it was termed.<sup>21</sup>

The UGC responded by reviewing university grant allocations and decided on differential cuts between universities, informing them on 1 July 1981. The UGC estimated the total university cuts as a loss of income for the period to 1983/4 of approximately 11%.<sup>22</sup> Later, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) reported that the cuts ranged from 44% to 6% for individual universities, the average being around 17%.<sup>23</sup> The overall accumulative loss of recurrent resources was in the end estimated to have been around 13% up to 1983/4. Although there was a 4% increase in student applications to universities in October 1981, university admissions that year were 3% down on the previous year. In the end, there were no compulsory redundancies, however, as job cuts were achieved through early retirements and voluntary redundancies.<sup>24</sup> As I explore further below (and in Chapter 7), the differential cuts set universities up in competition with one another, and against PSHE, and against the UGC that had implemented the cuts, engendering a state of affairs that would serve the progress of the Government’s ideology.

With regard to PSHE, the new Government had not acted on the 1978 Oakes Report’s recommendation for a national planning body, supported by the LEAs.<sup>25</sup> Finally, in July 1981, the Government brought out a Green Paper which resolved that

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<sup>21</sup> HMSO, *The Government’s Expenditure Plans 1981-2 to 1983-84*, Cmnd. 8175 (London: HMSO, March 1981), section 2.10, paragraph 14, p. 106. See also Baroness Young in HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 45. For comment, see Sizer, J., ‘British universities’ responses to events leading to grant reductions announced in July 1981’, *Financial Accountability and Management*, Volume 4, Number 2, June 1988, p. 79; and the following Association of University Teachers (AUT) papers, UCU archives: AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 14 May 1981; Briefing Paper to Branch Secretaries, 16 June 1981; and Statement for MPs, October 1981.

<sup>22</sup> UGC Circular Letter 10/81 to universities, 1 July 1981; HC Deb, 2 July 1981, vol.7, cc.448-455W. The Government summarised university savings as £212 million over the three year period, to be deducted from the £1 billion current grant: HC Deb, 1 December 1981, vol.14, cc.108-109W. The heaviest cuts to student numbers and resultant loss of posts were predominantly to the technological or newer universities of Salford, Aston, Keele, Bradford and Stirling. For example, Bradford was to be cut by 29%, Stirling by 23%: see HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.291-376. Peter Scott (‘Higher Education’, op. cit., p. 200) estimated the cuts to both Aston and Salford as 40%. Between 1980-1983, about 2,300 university academic staff (from a total of about 34,000) left their posts: HC Deb, 28 February 1984, vol.55, c.134. By June 1985, it was reported that 3,318 had retired or taken redundancy in academic years 1981 to 1984: HC Deb, 26 June 1985, vol.81, c.419W.

<sup>23</sup> CVCP, *Report of the Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities (Jarratt Report)* (London: CVCP, March 1985), paragraph 2.8.

<sup>24</sup> For details and comment on the cuts, see Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 44-65.

<sup>25</sup> Ch. 3, fn.113.

the ‘open-ended commitment of national resources’ to PSHE via the LEAs should be halted to enable ‘overriding national priorities’ to be pursued and that this would necessitate taking PSHE out of the LEA framework.<sup>26</sup> However, the proposals became too difficult politically to effect at the time. Instead, in 1982, the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education (NAB) was formed, whose remit was to advise the Secretary of State directly on the distribution of resources and the approval of degree and higher diploma courses.<sup>27</sup> Although delayed, PSHE at last had their planning body.

The student grant system was also a focus for cuts. Thatcher’s advisers explored the idea of “education vouchers” for higher education (as was being investigated for schools), making numerous study visits to the United States to look at their student support and funding mechanisms, but there was insufficient support in the Party to proceed.<sup>28</sup> Joseph confirmed to Parliament that he favoured ‘a part-loan scheme’ but the opportunity for the Government to put this into practice did not come until the end of the 1980s.<sup>29</sup> Acting pragmatically, Joseph pushed instead to require middle- and higher-income parents to contribute more to student maintenance and to pay students’ tuition fees. Over 1984, he first halved and then abolished the minimum maintenance award (which even students with the richest parents received) but - bowing to enormous opposition from backbench Tory MPs - withdrew his proposal that the richest parents should also pay tuition fees, although he then took savings from other higher education budgets instead. The Government also moved to change students’ travel allowances, seeking to abolish individual differential travel claims and bring in a flat-rate instead. Despite considerable opposition by Tory MPs, separate reimbursement for travel was abolished, together with access to other individual benefits (such as income support, unemployment and housing benefits) to

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<sup>26</sup> DES, *Higher Education in England outside the Universities*, op. cit., paragraph 3, p. 1 and paragraph 30, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> The title was amended in February 1985 to the National Advisory Body for Public Sector Higher Education.

<sup>28</sup> For arguments in favour of education vouchers and loans, see Friedman, M. and Friedman, R., *Free to Choose*, op. cit., p. 193; Hayek, F. A., op. cit., p. 381; Thatcher, M., *The Downing Street Years*, op. cit., p. 278. Boyson was an enthusiast for vouchers, for which he and Number 10 policy advisers campaigned up to 1986, but failed to convince Secretaries of State Carlisle and Joseph: see Scott, P., ‘Higher Education’, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>29</sup> HC Deb, 5 December 1984, vol.69, c.369.

which students had previously been entitled.<sup>30</sup> Student maintenance was consolidated into a single system, and eventually (from 1990) made available on a part- and then full-loan basis.<sup>31</sup> As I shall demonstrate further below, the shift from student grants to loans came to be seen by the end of the 1980s as the only course of action apparently available.

By the mid-1980s, the Government's policy papers on higher education reflect a sharpened focus. First, an instrumental view of higher education is put to the fore, as those subjects deemed most useful to the economy are promoted and higher education institutions, staff and students are enjoined to adopt entrepreneurial and business values; and second, it becomes clear that increased central planning and control of higher education - by the now strengthened state - is to be used to enforce the first.

The major expression of these developing trends is the 1985 Green Paper. It takes a directive stance, asserted in confident "business-speak" language. This step change is confirmed in the May 1987 Manifesto for the third term, with a whole section on higher education. While recognising 'the value of research and scholarship for their own sake', it emphasises in stronger terms a much more instrumental view: 'At the same time we must meet the nation's demand for highly qualified manpower to compete in international markets.'<sup>32</sup> A month earlier, the April 1987 White Paper had confidently laid down higher education's aims and purposes, to:

- serve the economy more effectively
- pursue basic scientific research and scholarship in the arts and humanities
- have closer links with industry and commerce, and promote enterprise.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> HC Deb, 4 April 1984, vol.57, c.544; 30 October 1984, vol.65, c.1256; 12 November 1984, vol.67, cc.55-58W; 5 December 1984, vol.69, cc.360-369.

<sup>31</sup> The grant was cut progressively and the loan element increased over the 1990s. The 1997 *Dearing Report* recommended that graduates pay a flat-rate of about 25% of tuition fees by taking out an income-contingent loan to be repaid once they started earning, together with the existing loan for maintenance costs: National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, *Higher Education in the Learning Society (Dearing Report)* (London: HMSO, July 1997): available at <https://bei.leeds.ac.uk/Partners/NCIHE/> [accessed 22 March 2013], Chapter 17, paragraph 17.16. The New Labour Government went further, charging fees up front and bringing in means-tested loans in totality for maintenance: *Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998* (London: The Stationery Office Ltd., 1998): available at [http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/30/pdfs/ukpga\\_19980030\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/30/pdfs/ukpga_19980030_en.pdf) [accessed 2 January 2013]. As noted, the Coalition Government abolished grants for tuition fees, now charged up to £9,000 per annum, and replaced them with loans from September 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Conservative Party, *The Conservative Manifesto: The Next Moves Forward* (London: Conservative Central Office, May 1987), p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, op. cit., referenced in Ch. 1, fn.10.

Although ‘meeting the needs of the economy is not the sole purpose of higher education’, it was clearly the major one to be ‘vigorously pursued’. The point is that, by now, not only the content of these views but the manner in which they are presented is to be taken as read, simply as common sense, offering no room for debate. With higher education weakened by cuts, once the Government was re-elected for a third term the way was clear for the ‘next moves forward’ - to quote the title of the 1987 Manifesto.

Back in 1982, the Secretary of State had launched a consultation exercise with the UGC and the NAB on the development of higher education for the rest of the decade and into the 1990s. A flurry of other reviews was undertaken around this time. In line with the efficiency studies being required of all government departments, the CVCP commissioned the Jarratt review (chaired by a businessman who was Chair of Birmingham University’s Board of Governors) which concluded its findings in 1985 with recommendations at various levels on university governance, accountability and management. The NAB published its complementary *Good Management Practice* report in 1987, recommending corporate status (that is, independent governance) for polytechnics, although still within the LEA framework, but this was not acceptable to the Government.<sup>34</sup> The UGC’s 1984 response to the consultative exercise had, unsurprisingly, recommended its own continuation. The Croham Report (1987) recommended major reform and restructuring of the UGC to ensure improved efficiency and accountability.<sup>35</sup> It looked as if the higher education sector bodies were moving towards better collaboration. However, within two months, the Government’s 1987 White Paper simply abolished the UGC and the NAB - a way of proceeding I return to later. Johnson sums up this period for education as a whole:

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<sup>34</sup> The Government would have seen the draft of the report it had commissioned (at a cost of £350,000: see HC Deb, 1 April 1987, vol.113, cc.1091-1100), but pre-empted its publication. On 1 April - only days before the NAB was due to publish - the Government published the 1987 White Paper, recommending the abolition of the NAB and the UGC, the formation of the PCFC and the UFC, and the incorporation of the polytechnics and major colleges outside LEA control. See also Ch. 7, fn.47.

<sup>35</sup> For details of the consultative exercise, see UGC Circular Letter 16/83, 1 November 1983. For responses and related reports, see UGC, *A Strategy for Higher Education into the 1990s: the University Grants Committee’s advice* (London: HMSO, September 1984); CVCP, *Jarratt Report*, op. cit.; DES, *Academic Validation in Public Sector Higher Education (Lindop Report)*, Green Paper, Cmnd. 9501 (London: HMSO, April 1985); NAB, *Management for a Purpose: the Report of the Good Management Practice Group* (London: NAB, 7 April 1987); DES, *Review of the University Grants Committee (Croham Report)*, Cm. 81 (London: HMSO, 1987). For comment, see Kogan, M. and Hanney, S., op. cit., pp. 150-152; Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., pp. 128-129.



‘The most important lesson of 1982-6 was that reform, even on neo-liberal lines, required decisive central control. It was a lesson that was to be well learned.’<sup>36</sup>

The April 1987 White Paper gave the go-ahead for two new central funding and planning bodies. Technically, they were independent of government, but would be given a strong steer by the Secretary of State.<sup>37</sup> They would “contract” with higher education institutions as businesses. To furnish the information required to evaluate the contract, business techniques and performance indicators would be developed including, *inter alia*, systems for teaching quality assurance (QA), selectively-funded research, and staff development and appraisal. At the same time as the new funding councils would be deploying public money, they were also charged with encouraging higher education institutions to be more enterprising in attracting contracts from private sources, to lessen dependence on public funding. The 1988 Education Reform Act confirmed independent status for the polytechnics and major colleges and established the two new bodies: the Universities Funding Council (UFC) and the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC). The Act also abolished tenure in the universities (which I consider further in Chapters 5 and 6) and the ‘no compulsory redundancy’ agreements in PSHE: from now on academics’ jobs - as just one example of features which had traditionally set higher education apart from other areas of employment - were no longer sacrosanct. Higher education was being remodelled on private business lines and at the same time being brought under central control.

The next step was a paper in April 1989 setting out how the balance of funding to higher education would be shifted further from state support to institutions to a model based on individual fees “following the student”.<sup>38</sup> The Government would raise the standard maximum full-time mandatory award-bearing undergraduate fee (still publicly funded): first to a flat rate, with a corresponding shift downwards from the central grant to fees, and then to four differential bands. These reflected the

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<sup>36</sup> Johnson, R., *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>37</sup> Since 1981, the Secretary of State’s ‘letters of guidance’ to the UGC had ensured that universities were informed of his decisions, to avoid the kind of furore that arose over the 1981 cuts (see Chapter 5). The guidance was designed to ‘relate to the reorientation of effort within existing resources’ but ‘on occasion’ was intended to ‘extend to earmarking of resources for particular purposes’: see DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 8.5, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> DES, ‘Shifting the balance of public funding of higher education to fees: a consultation paper’, April 1989.

differing costs of science/arts teaching, thus encouraging internal competition: ‘A fee structure which took account of this variation would clearly apply the desired market disciplines more widely within institutions.’<sup>39</sup> The market benefit would be that institutions’ income would be more dependent ‘on their ability to attract and satisfy student demand’: this would ‘both promote effectiveness in marketing and teaching, and enhance the scope of institutional independence’, and ‘assist in encouraging institutions to exploit spare capacity by taking in additional students, so contributing to the objective of widening access to those able to benefit and wishing to do so, while in the process reducing unit costs’.<sup>40</sup> The mechanism would allow student numbers from tuition fees paid through mandatory awards to be managed by an institution across its academic departments, depending on the ability to attract students to a particular subject at a particular institution. By the time Thatcher was ousted from office, it was clear that the market had come to higher education - and *vice versa*.

### **(iii) Using contradictions**

In order to understand how the transformation from one ideological construct to another could have come about in only ten years, and to the extent that neoliberal characteristics became embedded and reproduced in higher education’s structures and practices, further explanation is required. I now turn to offer a more analytic commentary on how hegemonic domination was built - a process that is further demonstrated by my analysis in Chapters 5 and 6 of the parliamentary debates. For ideological change to become accepted at a level deeper than the legislative changes alone, I shall argue, sets of seeming contradictions were used in practical ways to help achieve ideological shifts, whenever opportunities for their implementation presented themselves.

As I have already established, Thatcher inherited certain underlying political positions: the traditional Tory view of higher education as an élite privilege, alongside the post-war commitment by all parties - particularly the Labour Party - to the expansion and extension of educational opportunity, not just for the individual but to meet national needs. The apparent dichotomies or contradictions I identified at

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., paragraph 9, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., paragraph 4, p. 2.

the end of Chapter 3 - élitism, excellence and standards *versus* expansion; liberal *versus* instrumental and vocational; the free market and privatisation *versus* public funding, planning and control - could work together to craft an ideological process. Various elements - seemingly contradictory - could contribute to building the Thatcherite ideology in higher education and, in the absence of a strong and co-ordinated opposition, the progress of that ideology began to seem unstoppable. To explain how this worked, I consider each set of these contradictions.

(a) Elitism, excellence, standards and expansion

Returning to the 1979 Conservative Manifesto, its one short paragraph on higher education states the need to maintain excellence but within existing resources - while also encouraging more vocational studies.<sup>41</sup> This panders to traditional and New Right Tories alike - as well as to the electorate - and gives some pointers to policy priorities. The word “excellence” is a kind of shorthand, a code word for both élitism and cuts, a signal that a Thatcher Government would break earlier governments’ commitments to publicly-funded expansion.<sup>42</sup>

The early cuts were the first building-block in the construction of an ideological process: they weakened, undermined and destabilised the whole of higher education. First of all, there was that useful lever to ideological change: the shock element.<sup>43</sup> *The Times Higher Education Supplement* described the universities in particular in 1979 as ‘stunned by the nature, intensity and timing of the cuts [...] and confused because they still [did] not have hard figures or prospective student targets with which to work’.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, the July 1981 notification of reduced budgets constituted a crisis partly because it was so close to the start of the new academic year, giving little room for negotiation or manoeuvre. Second, the remorseless repetition of cuts demoralised higher education institutions, making liberal educationalists less likely to resist the next round: they started taking them for granted. As one commentator

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<sup>41</sup> *The Conservative Manifesto* (1979), op. cit., p.25. The Labour Party’s 1979 Manifesto is also sparse on higher education policy, pledging to expand further education and widen access to higher education: see Dale, I. (ed.), *Labour Party General Election Manifestos 1900-1997* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 225.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Glenamara pointed out how the words “élitism” and “excellence” were being used interchangeably, incorrectly and confusingly by the Tories: see HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> See Ch. 1, fn.63.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 33. For an example of the universities’ shock, confusion and disbelief, see AUT, *Universities at Risk* (London: AUT, January 1980).

observed: ‘Cutting services and expenditure seemed to have become an irrefutable and higher truth incapable of logical critique or explanation.’<sup>45</sup> The Government promoted the need to economise as a positive virtue. It acquired the status of a - indeed, the only main - policy direction, with Joseph advising that efficiency would be achieved through ‘tighter staffing ratios in many sixth forms and in further and higher education’ and ‘rationalisation within and between universities and colleges’. ‘Everyone’ was enjoined ‘to contribute to this search for efficiency’. Priorities would simply have to change: ‘Where a problem’s solution does require extra money, can that money not be found from what is currently being spent in education. Through a reordering of priorities and improvements in efficiency?’<sup>46</sup> “Efficiency” and “rationalisation” become code words for cuts.<sup>47</sup> The language presented the partial or clouded view that cuts were inevitable, acceptable, desirable or just plain common sense.

But the cuts were not just an imposition: they also contributed to building the ideology by playing successfully on the contradictions inherent in the structures. For what the cuts meant for the universities on the one hand and PSHE on the other, both literally and ideologically, was different, though interrelated. Student intakes to universities had been rising by about 9,000 per year, but the sector was concerned about the pressure on resources.<sup>48</sup> The UGC tried to retain the unit of resource and academics’ availability to undertake research, prioritising the conservation of “standards” or - as some would have it - preserving university élitism.<sup>49</sup> In the end, as we noted above, the UGC presided over accumulative cuts of around 13%. Its attempt to protect universities’ unit of resource ended up as chaos and then collaboration - however unwittingly - in a process that weakened their resistance to central government control and ushered in all that followed (see Chapter 7). Seemingly contradictorily, student numbers in PSHE were at the same time increasing, albeit “on the cheap”. The Government could capitalise on each sector’s response to cuts, setting them up in competition with one another: ‘Between 1979

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<sup>45</sup> Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph, K., ‘Speech to the North of England Education Conference in Sheffield, 6 January 1984’, *Oxford Review of Education*, Volume 10, Number 2, 1984, p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> As one AUT President put it: ‘What perversion of language we have seen – the meaning of words like rationalisation, voluntary, excellence being corrupted to accommodate the cuts’: AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 15-17 May 1985, UCU archives.

<sup>48</sup> AUT, *Universities at Risk*, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> UGC Circular Letter 13/79, 15 August 1979.

and 1983 admissions to universities fell slightly, but admissions to public sector higher education increased by about 30 per cent.<sup>50</sup> Students who could not obtain university places had simply gone to polytechnics or colleges. While the UGC had clung to safeguarding the unit of resource as the hallmark of university standards, polytechnic directors were “wooed” - in Althusserian mode - to increase student numbers at their institutions, even if staff numbers and other resources did not expand to match. It could not be claimed that standards were at risk because public sector degrees were validated through the agency of the CNAAB, on which there was extensive university representation, guaranteeing their equal standing to university degrees. Universities could keep their “standards” intact while at the same time the “knock-on effect” of cuts to their student numbers could be made to look as if this was - as indeed it was - an extension of access to PSHE. The Government could state that both sectors had acted freely and got what they had apparently wanted:

[W]e have had to ask the local authority sector and polytechnics to stretch their resources, and they have done so and have shown that there was room to take in a considerable number of extra students. They have done that and I do not hear complaints that standards are under pressure. In the universities, the alternative view was taken, which was that the unit of resource was so stretched already that we had to ask for a limitation of numbers, because otherwise the unit of resource would be stretched to such a point that research, the other great output of universities, would come under serious pressure.<sup>51</sup>

While it is unlikely that the Government could have foreseen at that stage the way in which each sector would react, it was able to capitalise pragmatically and act opportunistically to build its ideological agenda, working on the contradictions long present in British higher education.

At first, the Government could make it look as if cuts would help “standards” to be “rescued”; there would be 'a smaller system at the end of the period with 20,000 fewer student places'.<sup>52</sup> At the very time when the number of qualified school leavers was to reach its peak, it was estimated that the cuts would cause the annual participation rate (APR) to fall from the 12.9% it had been projected to reach in

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<sup>50</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit., paragraph 3.1, p. 10. In 1979 there were 131,000 FTE students in PSHE, rising to 171,000 by 1984, an increase of 30%. By 1980/81 PSHE's share of higher education student numbers was 39%. Between 1979-1986, the amount of money spent per PSHE student decreased by 25%: see HC Deb, 8 July 1986, vol.101, cc.151-153. By 1987, PSHE was the larger of the two higher education sectors, with about 300,000 students: see HC Deb, 3 November 1987, vol.121, cc.771-772.

<sup>51</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1348.

<sup>52</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.766.

1981/2 to a lower projection of 11.2% for 1984/5.<sup>53</sup> Pandering to the traditionalists and neoliberals alike, Thatcher runs cuts and standards together, as if they were logically connected, turning *ad hoc* actions into policy: '[I]t is likely that entry standards will rise as the universities reduce [their] intake by about 5 per cent as compared with 1979-80 to meet the [revised] targets set by the UGC.'<sup>54</sup> After some intense parliamentary opposition to the cuts (as we shall see in Chapter 5), events moved on and, by the end of the 1980s, the Government appeared to have "changed sides" in favour of expansion. It was as if the New Right Tories had stolen the clothes of the Left. How did this come about? By taking advantage of contingencies, a government that had initially promoted the need for a smaller higher education system ended up expanding it in order to serve explicitly instrumental purposes.

Although much of the growth was due to factors not of its making, the Government claimed it as a measure of its success, reporting towards the middle of the decade that the overall APR had in fact risen from 12.4% in 1979 to around 14% in 1985.<sup>55</sup> What had happened was that rising intakes mainly to the polytechnics had - pragmatically - "come to the rescue" and could show, in addition, that higher education could be "delivered" "on the cheap" (as I explore further in Chapter 5), as Thatcher herself realised.<sup>56</sup> Doing more with less ("efficiency gains") now becomes a virtue, indeed, a paradigm of how the job is done. With higher education expenditure reduced by about 3.5%, academic staffing had fallen by 1 in 7 in universities and 1 in 12 in PSHE, while overall student numbers had risen.<sup>57</sup> The Government and the UGC had been accused in the midst of the 1981 cuts of drawing conclusions about academic provision on the basis of flimsy evidence and poor statistics. The 1985 Green Paper shows how the Government could use statistics to its advantage, to back up premises or what it wanted people to believe. It claimed that the projected decrease in the number of 18 year olds would constitute a fall of 33% between 1984 and 1996, the paper using the lower of two variants to drive down the projection of

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<sup>53</sup> HC Deb, 8 March 1982, vol.19, c.312. For an explanation of - and the vicissitudes in - the APR, see Ch. 3, fns.95, 105 and 112.

<sup>54</sup> HC Deb, 10 December 1981, vol.14, c.460W.

<sup>55</sup> HC Deb, 15 May 1984, vol.60, c.90W; 10 June 1986, vol.99, c.165.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Moore reports that Thatcher (as Education Secretary in 1972) had favoured increasing admissions to polytechnics over universities because the former 'were cheaper and, in her eyes, crucial to the expansion of higher education': Moore, C., *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>57</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 9.1, p. 39. Student:staff ratios (SSRs) "improved" from 9.3:1 in universities and 8.4:1 in PSHE in 1979/80 to 10.3:1 in universities and 12:1 in PSHE by 1985/6: see Watson, D. and Bowden, R., *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the number of full-time student places required to the level of expenditure the Government wished to deploy.<sup>58</sup> The PSHE teaching staff union, the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), characterised the similar use of statistics in the 1987 White Paper as an ‘overt attempt to use the demographic downturn as a pretext to restrict the size of the student population’.<sup>59</sup> However, it was more than that: these factors were being used to “rig the market”, to recast student demand and expansion on Government terms.

To meet employer demands for a more highly educated workforce, and assuage social democratic pressures, all the Government had to do was support PSHE’s strengths in vocational studies and its developing practice of extending access to higher education to mature and part-time entrants. The polytechnics and major colleges were well set up to accommodate such students, unlike many universities. NATFHE might bemoan that the Government’s concept of access was ‘essentially geared to ad-hockery and access for vocational purposes only’ but, in the face of increasingly tight resources, PSHE went with the political flow.<sup>60</sup> Some polytechnics and colleges proposed more “flexible” modes of study, a move welcomed by the 1985 Green Paper:

The demand projections [...] allow for [numbers of mature students] to increase. [...] Mature students with families will find it difficult to give up their earnings for as long as three or four years. They and other students could be helped by the availability of modular courses and the possibility of credit transfer, which allow students to build on their studies progressively and to mix full-time and part-time study. A wider development of credit transfer and of experimental modes of study are needed. In response to a Government approach the CNA is exploring how best to promote further developments.<sup>61</sup>

The Robbins recommendation that university degrees should be broadened was now being recast as modularity<sup>62</sup> - an industrial, Fordist, term from the production line being applied to learning:

The Robbins Committee regarded the broadening of the undergraduate curriculum as a necessary condition for the expansion of higher education. Outside the universities there has been such a broadening: an estimated one in four students in

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<sup>58</sup> DES, *ibid.*, paragraphs 3.4-3.6, pp. 11-13. Neoliberalism ‘requires technologies of information creation and capacities to accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace’, David Harvey observes (*op. cit.*, p. 3).

<sup>59</sup> NATFHE, *Higher Education at the Crossroads: NATFHE’s Response to Government Plans for Higher Education* (London: NATFHE, 1987), p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> DES, *ibid.*, paragraph 4.9, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> Brecher, B., ‘Complicity and modularisation’, *op. cit.*

voluntary colleges and one in fifteen in local authority institutions are following a modular or combined studies degree programme. Within the universities, too, growing numbers of students are studying combinations of (mostly related) subjects.<sup>63</sup>

The modular “product” could, of course, more easily be varied in length or level, chopped and changed, with staff hired and fired at will, if financial constraints required. The Government leant on the NAB to promote the DipHE (the two year sub-degree diploma), in an attempt to cut humanities degrees in the polytechnics.<sup>64</sup>

Arts, humanities and social studies courses should be studied by only a few because

arts provision should to some extent be concentrated in the interests of cost-effectiveness; consideration for quality argues that for the most part it should be within the university sector. [...] Those responsible for counselling intending students (and, perhaps, particularly girls) about their subject choices should be aware that the proportion of arts places in higher education as a whole can be expected to shrink.<sup>65</sup>

Thus the commitment of liberal educationalists to extend access to higher education was being turned by the Government into an opportunity to cut provision and differentiate between the two sectors, retaining “standards” in the universities, while the polytechnics would teach students on shorter courses with lower and more flexible resources. Although shorter degrees and the threatened limitation of provision did not, in the main, occur, PSHE demonstrated that it could be compliant. The two sectors were cutting and undermining both themselves and each other, while the Government could say that student numbers overall had grown and access had been widened.

Thus we can see that the simple act of cutting higher education funding delivered up more than some, at least, had bargained for. In one sense, the original plan failed, as student numbers did not fall as would have been in line with some Tories’ ideological stance. As if contradictorily, cuts in the one delivered up expansion in the other; universities’ adherence to their *status quo* delivered up expansion in PSHE, and then a government push to make the curriculum - especially in PSHE - concentrate on training for jobs. As Scott points out: ‘It was the cuts that allowed the government, under the guise of value-for-money accountability, to extend its

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<sup>63</sup> DES, *ibid.*, paragraph 6.3, p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 6.4, p. 25.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.11, p. 9.



political control over the system.<sup>66</sup> Once the groundwork had been done, it was comparatively straightforward for the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, to set in motion from May 1986 the structural and statutory changes required for a higher education system that could now expand on the Government's terms. If universities wanted 'to play their part in the future', then Vice-Chancellors would have 'to study their market' and meet the Government's interpretation of 'the country's need for highly qualified manpower'.<sup>67</sup> Meeting the Government's needs now appeared to be the only reasonable "way forward" for higher education.

(b) Instrumentalising higher education

Having at once destabilised higher education, but unable to stop the expansion of PSHE, the Government needed to consider "the product" itself; what they wanted to use an expanded higher education system for.

As we noted earlier, in the early 1980s the Government did not have a clearly articulated policy for higher education. Even the 1982 CPRS proposals were about the complete privatisation of higher education, rather than any government-led use of the existing system. But if a liberal higher education should be reserved for the élite, to what ideological use could the rest be put? A comment from Rhodes Boyson (Under-Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Higher Education) in 1979 - that universities facing cuts should reduce intakes in some subjects in order to allow more "relevant" ones to expand - is an early expression of the developing ideology.<sup>68</sup> In 1982, William Waldegrave (Boyson's successor) asserted that 'a strong utilitarian wind [was] blowing through higher education as students accurately assess the needs of a Britain which has a long slow job ahead of it building a better economic performance'. He warned that this would be 'a chill wind for some of the less well founded liberal arts and social studies departments, and for some of the less practical science courses too'.<sup>69</sup> Although some Tories opposed an instrumental view of higher education, not many spoke up, with some notable exceptions.<sup>70</sup> But even those

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<sup>66</sup> Scott, P., 'Higher Education', op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>67</sup> Speech by Kenneth Baker to the CVCP Residential Conference, 23 September 1986: UCU archives.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Ryan, D., op. cit., pp. 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> Enoch Powell described it as 'barbarism to attempt to evaluate the contents of higher education in terms of economic performance or to set a value upon the consequences of higher education in terms of a monetary cost-benefit analysis': HC Deb, 21 May 1985, vol.79, c.861. See further examples of such views in Chapters 5 and 7.

against were generally in favour of safeguarding an élite liberal university education rather than extending it.

Higher (or perhaps lower) level technical education was the role envisaged for many.<sup>71</sup> The ‘key contribution’ of PSHE was to provide ‘courses specifically designed to reflect the opportunities and requirements of the country’s employment market’, as the July 1981 Green Paper had specified.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, the Labour Party continued to express its commitment to extend access to higher education by similarly favouring growth predominantly in vocational courses, thus unwittingly contributing to what the Government would turn into higher education’s predominant purpose: to serve the instrumental needs of the state.<sup>73</sup>

The 1983 Tory Manifesto admonished that ‘[t]he very large sums of public money now going to higher education must be spent in the most effective way’. They spelled out what they meant by this: ‘[W]e want to see a shift towards technological, scientific and engineering courses’. Money would be set aside for 700 ‘new blood’ lectureships, primarily in applied science and information technology courses, with other funding in support. The role for most higher education institutions would be to ‘train the skilled workforce of the next generation’.<sup>74</sup> The 1985 Green Paper followed this up by stating that ‘it is vital for our higher education to contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the economy’. Unless it did, ‘we’ would be ‘even less able than now to afford many of the things that we value most - including education for pleasure and general culture and the financing of scholarship and research as an end in itself’.<sup>75</sup> If public money had to be spent on higher education, then there would be “strings attached” to a higher education brought to serve particular ends:

The future health of higher education - and its funding from public and private sources - depends significantly upon its own success in generating the qualified

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<sup>71</sup> As Tory MP John Stokes put it in 1981: ‘[T]he basic problem is that we have too many universities [...]. What the country really needs is more students with national certificates and fewer graduates, some of whose courses are half-baked.’ - HC Deb, 7 April 1981, vol.2, c.810.

<sup>72</sup> DES, *Higher Education in England outside the Universities*, op. cit., paragraph 9, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Dale, I. (ed.), op. cit., p. 253 and p. 264.

<sup>74</sup> Conservative Party, *The General Election Manifesto, The Conservative Party: the Challenge of our Times* (London: Conservative Central Office, 1983), section headed ‘Higher education’.

<sup>75</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit., paragraph 1.2, p. 3. See Desmond Ryan (op. cit.) for a scathing attack on the Government for blaming higher education - a successful “enterprise” - for the failure of British industrial competitiveness, and the irony in the Government’s introduction of outmoded industrial methods into higher education.

manpower the country needs. [...] Of special importance are the innovators and entrepreneurs who will create new jobs and those who achieve vocational qualifications, for which there is a market need.<sup>76</sup>

It was 'right to maintain a distinct emphasis on technological and directly vocational courses at all levels, leading to a switch in output in favour of graduates and diplomats with corresponding qualifications'.<sup>77</sup> But, even as the Government tried to plan for this, there was a problem:

The increased numbers of science and technology places in public sector institutions planned by the NAB for the 1984-85 academic year have not been fully taken up. This is remarkable - given high youth unemployment and the fact that graduates in maths- and physics-based disciplines stand a better than average chance of getting jobs.<sup>78</sup>

Students were just not choosing the "right" subjects, were failing to see that

[o]ne of the potentially surer routes to a successful business career [...] for those with an enterprising and innovative attitude of mind ought to lie through competence in science, engineering, technology or mathematics.<sup>79</sup>

As the PCFC later bemoaned:

[S]ome of the factors which influence choice [...] do not lead to choices which necessarily accord with the Government's or the PCFC's priorities for qualified manpower. For example, the strong demand to study humanities has not abated in recent years despite clear signals from the centre for a shift to science and technology and despite evidence that the employment prospects of arts graduates may be less than those of graduates in other subjects.<sup>80</sup>

How could this be turned around? How could it become a matter of common sense that there should be a greater proportion of students undertaking vocational courses in publicly-funded higher education, when even the Government's own evidence showed that students - in the free market of student choice - were not seeking places on them? To serve the Government's ideological aim of training a next generation of technically skilled but compliant workers, higher education - and particularly the polytechnics - needed to be weaned away from arts subjects. The Government recognised some

areas of learning and scholarship which have at most an indirect relationship to the world of work. The encouragement of a high level of scholarship in the arts, humanities and social sciences is an essential feature of a civilised and cultured

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<sup>76</sup> DES, *ibid.*, paragraphs 2.1-2.2, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.9, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.4, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 2.6, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> PCFC, *Funding Choices: a Consultative Document* (London: PCFC, March 1989), paragraph 38, p. 13.

country. Clearly too, undergraduate education of quality in these disciplines is valued by employers, both as a basis for professional training and in its own right.<sup>81</sup>

But, in general, students needed to be deflected from arts and social science courses and enticed into those areas of study the Government saw fit:

[A] modest increase in opportunity to enter university as demand falls is to be welcomed. But a move in this direction should not lead to automatic admission to the universities, and particularly onto humanities courses, of those who might be more likely to profit in terms of personal development and future employment prospects from the vocational and technological courses offered by the public sector.<sup>82</sup>

Continued public spending on higher education could be justified only by tailoring student “demand” more closely to the country’s economic interests, by ensuring that higher education “produced” more scientists, engineers, technologists and technicians. The Government was directing applicants in a free market to take up higher education places in scientific and technological subjects, for which extra funding was repeatedly specifically earmarked without proving demand.<sup>83</sup> A market had to be created and presented as a “natural” development, a free choice.

Government initiatives in schools would prime higher education applicants to choose the Government’s favoured subjects over others, a preference which would be reinforced if student grants or bursaries could be tailored to those subjects. In addition, all higher education institutions had to be made to reflect a more enterprising and work-related approach, ‘to be concerned with attitudes to the world outside’, ‘to beware of “anti-business” snobbery’ and ‘to foster positive attitudes to work’. Furthermore, ‘our higher education establishments need [...] to go out to develop their links with industry and commerce’.<sup>84</sup> Postgraduate work should be

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<sup>81</sup> DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, op. cit., paragraph 1.2, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit., paragraph 3.7, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> In December 1982, Joseph announced a £100 million three-year programme for boosting information technology courses and bringing ‘new blood’ into higher education. This involved allocating an additional 2,000 student places for 1983/84, building up to 5,000 by 1985/86, plus extra staff posts, research grants and fellowships: see DES Press Notice 299/82, 16 December 1982, UCU archives. The 1985 Green Paper announced some £43 million over the three years 1985/86-1987/88 to provide under- and postgraduate places in the applied sciences and IT, building up to an estimated 4,000 additional places: DES, *ibid.*, paragraph 2.10, p. 8. See also HC Deb, 12 February 1985, vol.73, c.124. See Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., pp. 67-68, for details of these and other similar Government initiatives around this time, provided - according to the authors - without demand having been proven. Parallels can be drawn with contemporary government policy and practice: see fn.5 above.

<sup>84</sup> DES, *ibid.*, paragraph 1.6, p. 4. Initiatives - such as, the Enterprise in Higher Education scheme - attracted bids from the sector.

given ‘a closer industrial orientation’ with more employer involvement.<sup>85</sup> Research aligned to the demands of business and industry would fortuitously offer opportunities to raise income lost as a result of the cuts: ‘Researchers should be more aware of the commercial exploitation and of their responsibilities for its promotion.’<sup>86</sup> As higher education - and even employers - were to blame for the country’s poor economic situation, they had to find other forms of funding, such as employer sponsorship of students or consultancy or industrial donation of equipment.<sup>87</sup> Staff had to adopt the “correct” ideological attitude and take up more ‘relevant’ research, which could then be “measured” for promotion:

Institutional attitudes and action are important. The Government hopes that all institutions [...] will [...] encourage all relevant departments to follow [...] the good practices now to be found in many, such as [...] taking consultancy and other beneficial industrial work fully into account when assessing candidates for promotion.<sup>88</sup>

The UGC would

ensure that universities’ efforts and successes in industrial research and consultancy receive due recognition in the process of grant allocation and that universities are aware of this practice. [...] [U]niversities which are successful in carrying out such work should be helped to build on their strengths.<sup>89</sup>

The notions of concentration, selectivity and differentiation between the universities and PSHE in a market system had to be reinforced:

Both quality and economy argue for some concentration of research activity - particularly where expensive equipment is needed - and concentration implies selectivity. There is a debate about whether research and teaching need to be carried out together. The UGC argues that research stimulates the teaching of able students; but there is no evidence that all academic staff must engage in research. [...] Research will be a consideration in the necessary process of rationalisation.<sup>90</sup>

As for research in the humanities, this is glossed over in the briefest possible way: most of it was not needed in the utilitarian “real” world.<sup>91</sup> If those who worked in higher education could be brought to internalise the apparent “problems” they had helped to create, they could be brought to take the consequences and come up with “common sense” solutions.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., paragraph 5.17, p. 23.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., paragraph 5.9, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., paragraph 2.3, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., paragraph 5.10, p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., paragraph 5.11, p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., paragraphs 5.4 and 5.7, pp. 20-21.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., paragraph 5.15, p. 23.

So how were students to be encouraged to choose “useful” subjects? The Government’s funding choices had to be made to make sense, so business tools such as “rates of return” were brought into play. Reflecting the 1985 Green Paper, two DES policy papers in 1987 showed the personal financial benefits - the “value added” - of a higher education.<sup>92</sup> The social rates of return on particular subjects (unsurprisingly, those favoured by the Government, like applied science and ‘business-related social sciences’) are shown as high, while - not surprisingly - a negative rate of social return is shown on arts degrees. Why then should public money be spent on the latter, if ‘A’-level earners had the same rate of return? As a leaked Government document put it, there was ‘scope for substituting non-graduates for graduates’.<sup>93</sup> If arts graduates accrued such a high rate of personal gain, why shouldn’t they pay for their own higher education? Statistics could reinforce the conclusion the Government wished to draw: that funding students and their places should ideally be linked to the subject’s perceived usefulness. As there needed to be a limit on ‘the numbers of publicly funded places to be provided in particular subject areas’,<sup>94</sup> the 1985 Green Paper asserted that the student’s “employability” in the labour market should be a key indicator of quality:

External judgements about quality can be attempted by comparing the success of students in obtaining jobs, their relative salaries and their reported performance in employment, and by reference generally to the international standing of our academic qualifications.<sup>95</sup>

“Choice” had to be engineered more forcibly.

Thus in the late 1980s, the four new fee bands set up by the funding councils were designed to steer institutions towards expanding in the Government’s preferred

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<sup>92</sup> DES, *ibid*; Clark, A. and Tarsh, J. (as officers of the DES), ‘How much is a degree worth?’, *Education & Training UK 1987: an economic, social and policy audit* (London: Policy Journals, 1987), pp. 109-115; Tarsh, J. (as an officer of the DES), ‘What happens to new graduates?’, *Education & Training UK 1987: an economic, social and policy audit* (London: Policy Journals, 1987), pp. 50-60.

<sup>93</sup> Chevening Discussion Paper (1988), ‘“Manpower planning” in higher education’, 25 July 1988, covering letter from Norman Lamont (Financial Secretary to the Treasury) to Robert Jackson (Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science), 18 July 1988.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 7. Economists of education treated with caution claims that graduates of some subjects (apart from those graduating in the most obviously vocational subjects, such as medicine) are more suitable for employment than others: see, for example, Fulton, O., Gordon, A., Williams, G. (eds), *Higher Education and Manpower Planning: a Comparative Study of Planned and Market Economies* (London and Paris: International Labour Office and UNESCO, 1982); Williams, G., ‘Graduate Employment and Vocationalism in Higher Education’, *European Journal of Education*, Volume 20, Numbers 2-3, 1985, pp. 181-192.

<sup>95</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 6.11, pp. 27-28.

subjects. One commentator did not consider this move to be as disingenuous as some others seemed to think:

[U]niversities and polytechnics will find it more profitable to recruit science and engineering than arts and social science students [...]. [T]he main effect of higher fees, which will be exacerbated if the Treasury shaves central grants accordingly, will be to drive down unit costs [...]. One outcome of [the resultant] disparity [between universities and polytechnics] no doubt is planned. Polytechnics and colleges with their lower unit costs will have a stronger incentive to recruit extra students, which would confirm their role as the engines of mass access.<sup>96</sup>

The new top-up loans ought to steer students towards choosing the subject with the best “rate of return”. This, according to another commentator, was effectively a “Trojan horse” that would usher in students eventually funding their own degrees:

The real question is who will pay the fees in the long run? The present proposal is that they will be paid through the grant system and students will not even notice. The problem is that there are powerful voices saying the fees should be paid by the students themselves.<sup>97</sup>

The overall strategy was to shift the balance of funding to income received directly from the student, that is the purchase of the services directly at source by the customer, in true neoliberal mode. But, the same commentator warned, one thing could lead to another:

[O]ne does not have to be a conspiracy theorist to envisage the possibility that [...] the loans will be extended to fees as well. What then will become of the claim that fees will increase participation in higher education? [...] Some vice-chancellors have welcomed the proposals. They need to be careful [...]. If some universities are able to provide student places at lower average costs the UFC will expect them all to do so. There will be downward pressure on costs and on quality everywhere. The contents of the chalice the government is offering them will need to be tasted very cautiously.<sup>98</sup>

As the President of the National Union of Students (NUS) concluded, this was clearly not just about saving money or increasing access but was part of an ideological strategy: ‘the idea of the individual only getting what they pay for, regardless of the cost to society as a whole’.<sup>99</sup> But “society” was not a significant consideration for Thatcherites: what was crucial was to set up, on the one hand, competition between institutions and subjects and, on the other, to engineer students away from a free choice and towards vocational subjects deemed by the Government

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<sup>96</sup> Scott, P., ‘Goodbye to vouchers?’, Editorial, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 5 May 1989, p. 40.

<sup>97</sup> Williams, G., ‘Sipping the fee-paying chalice’, *The Sunday Times*, 30 April 1989.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Sherlock, M., ‘Real cost of pay as you learn’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 25 November 1988.

to be most “useful” for employment - or even to wean them away from a higher education at all.

The Thatcher Governments were only partly successful in achieving their ideological goal of instrumentalising higher education: there was a small shift in students’ subject choices.<sup>100</sup> The original aim that fewer people should have access to a liberal higher education would take longer to effect. Nevertheless, a successful challenge had been made to the previously accepted post-war norm that students should be publicly funded in full to pursue the higher education of their choice. Furthermore, from the mid- to late-1980s, higher education managers were working with the new Government-dominated funding and planning regimes, which brought higher education institutions closer to embracing the practices and values of neoliberalism, and, by extension, accepting whatever the Government might require.

(c) Freedom and control

The 1979 Manifesto had promised that a Thatcher Government would ‘restore the balance of power in favour of the people’. This was, it claimed, ‘based not on dogma, but on reason, on common sense, above all on the liberty of the people under the law’.<sup>101</sup> Even though jobs and services would be cut to achieve “freedom”, we would, somewhat contradictorily, ‘all be on the same side’.<sup>102</sup> People were being recruited - in Althusserian fashion - to inhabit a neoliberal world, to ‘come to terms with reality’, to listen to and accept ‘the truth’, and to reject the ‘make-believe’ of what had gone before.<sup>103</sup> As the Manifesto puts it: ‘Those who look in these pages for lavish promises or detailed commitments on every subject will look in vain.’<sup>104</sup> The detail did not matter as long as the main neoliberal ideological message was clear: education, like other public services, needed to be liberated from the state and become the responsibility of parents and individuals.<sup>105</sup> The message was consolidated in the 1987 Manifesto: people had to be given ‘greater choice and responsibility over their own lives in important areas such as housing and

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<sup>100</sup> The increase was from 50% to 53% in universities and from 36% to 41% in PSHE: see DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, op. cit., paragraph 2.2, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> *The Conservative Manifesto* (1979), op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 9. David Harvey quotes a Thatcher advisor saying that cuts could be used as (my emphasis) ‘a cover to bash the workers’: see Harvey, D., op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>103</sup> *The Conservative Manifesto* (1979), ibid., p. 32.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



education'.<sup>106</sup> How come, then, that the freeing of PSHE from LEA bureaucracy, and of universities from the closed-door and allegedly biased workings of the UGC, resulted by the end of the 1980s in higher education coming under increased central government control?

After the flawed student number projections of the 1970s and the *ad hoc* cuts and confusion of the early 1980s, both higher education sectors were pushing for better planning and funding mechanisms. Given the difficulties of working under so many different LEA bureaucracies, together with the fact that PSHE recruited students not just locally but nationally and internationally, it is understandable that polytechnic directors and college principals welcomed the idea of a national body. Fortuitously, this coincided with the Government's ideological imperative to rein in the LEAs, for both financial and political reasons. Higher education's apparently reasonable demands for more openness and better information in order to manage and plan their resources played unwittingly into the way in which the two new funding councils were set up and used by the Government as a means of acquiring and enforcing greater control.<sup>107</sup> Performance indicators were a key instrument here. As a market system relied on the concepts and practices of competition, differentiation and selectivity, the Government needed data to compare one institution to another. Higher education institutions would be drawn into accepting the use of business tools as a "necessary evil" in exchange for planning and funding information. Broad measures were deemed insufficient; what was needed was something measurable; and once higher education accepted that, much else could, and would, follow: the way in which findings could be interpreted was merely the next reasonable step. The funding of whatever number of students in higher education could be justified by demographic trends and whatever number of graduate employees it was deemed "the market" required. A whole set of business phrases and techniques were brought to bear: unit costs, inputs and outputs, effective staff development, appraisal, adaptability and accountability, supply and demand, cost-benefit analysis, performance measurement, rate of return, value for money and more. Such forms of quantification were needed in the emergently market system of higher education in

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<sup>106</sup> *The Conservative Manifesto* (1987), op. cit., p. 9. Labour's 1987 Manifesto resolved to make good the cuts and increase resources for expansion: see Dale, I. (ed.), op. cit., p. 301.

<sup>107</sup> John Sizer (op. cit.) criticises the universities/UGC for their lack of preparedness prior to 1979, as does John Carswell (op. cit.), p. 132.

order to measure and control production targets and rates. And so higher education institutions allowed themselves to be “educated” away from a collegiate model and towards setting themselves up in competition with one another, stratified by different “mission statements”.

The differences required in a competitive higher education market place could, conveniently, even be represented as evidence of the Government’s commitment to a liberal pluralism. Thus the Government claimed that it had

no wish to impose a uniform pattern on higher education; on the contrary, the Government would like to see even greater vitality and flexibility. [...] [E]ach type of institution has a valuable contribution to make, provided that what each does is fit for the purpose which it serves.<sup>108</sup>

Diversification and differentiation were “natural” results of greater competition, especially across the binary divide. If some institutions went to the wall, then so be it: that simply proved that they were not “fit for purpose”. The Government could now openly admit that it was ‘not improbable that some institutions of higher education will need to be closed or merged at some point during the next ten years’.<sup>109</sup> “Quality assurance” was a useful technique, to be applied as required. For example, if the traditional three-year degree course in the humanities or social sciences were to be reserved for the universities, as only they could be considered to maintain proper academic standards (simply by virtue of their élitism), then shorter, sub-degree vocational courses (the DipHE or the HND) would be what PSHE should predominantly offer, suitably quality-assured by higher education practitioners themselves.

Even if business techniques were inimical to higher education, the central planners would still insist on their use:

The pursuit of value for money in higher education can only be successful if it is based on an analysis of benefits and their related costs in different activities. There are significant difficulties in measuring performance in higher education. Some benefits may not be quantified readily or at all. Activities and objectives are multiple, and relative values are not readily assigned. But the effort has to be made if the Government is to pursue its objectives of controlling public expenditure and of making the most effective use of the taxpayers’ money; and if institutions and others concerned with higher education planning are to be fully

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<sup>108</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit., paragraph 1.8, p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 1.13, p. 5.

informed in taking their decisions on the allocation of the resources available.<sup>110</sup> And later, the PCFC demonstrated its difficulty in applying market techniques to higher education, acknowledging that '[e]ducation is not like other products'.<sup>111</sup> Despite the barely-concealed civil service and funding council officers' reservations, the model would be applied anyway. After all, it was "simply" a matter of helping to control public expenditure and assisting institutions in planning their finances accordingly.

Planning projections need no longer be based solely on student demand, since that could be engineered, at least in part, by central government, as Secretary of State Baker made plain in 1987: '[S]tudent demand will no longer be a sufficient basis for planning. A major determinant must also be the nation's demands for highly qualified manpower.' Therefore the Government had to ensure 'that within the total numbers the shift towards scientific and other vocational courses should be carried through'. Giles Radice (Labour Shadow Education Spokesperson) riposted: 'Higher education will now be run on the basis of Whitehall diktat, and the view that the Secretary of State always knows best.'<sup>112</sup> Despite the New Right's claims that the market was supreme, student demand was no longer to be 'the sole indicator of which subjects and institutions ought to be supported'.<sup>113</sup> Acting on the Government's behalf and in the guise of "the people", the PCFC justified its attempts to influence the market, claiming to represent

the taxpayer who, through the funding council, meets some 80% of the total funding going to polytechnics and colleges, [and who] may feel that the PCFC, the conduit for that finance, ought to have some say in the pattern or quality of educational provision. In addition the Government may wish to set priorities for qualified manpower. These reservations have encouraged the group to look at ways in which the PCFC might try to influence the range of courses and quality of teaching directly.<sup>114</sup>

The PCFC was prepared to put into place mechanisms designed to influence student choice in the directions the Government wished. There would simply have to be a certain loss of freedom if public funding was to be forthcoming. Hiding behind the funding bodies, government *dirigisme* is presented in the guise of common sense. Furthermore, because 'better management' was needed to '[yield] greater value for

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Annex B, paragraph B1, p. 49.

<sup>111</sup> PCFC, op. cit., paragraph 25, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> HC Deb, 1 April 1987, vol.113, cc.1091-1100.

<sup>113</sup> PCFC, ibid., paragraph 25, p. 9.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

money’,<sup>115</sup> this would require matching internal management controls run along business lines from Vice-Chancellors’ offices: there really was no alternative.

Higher education had to be shifted away from its post-war reliance on public funding and back to the pre-war practice of raising income from private sources. In the face of the cuts in the early 1980s, the UGC had urged universities to put more effort into raising private sources of income. Despite protests, the position of liberal educationalists was compromised in accepting full-cost overseas student fees as their institutions needed the resources to shore up the shortfall in public funds. In the end, this aspect of privatisation has been a success story for neoliberalism, as higher education institutions have learnt to compete in the free market for overseas students, this crucially important “income stream”.

Although the Government freely admitted that it wanted to shed its responsibilities for the public funding of higher education, it could only go so far. In a letter to the UGC Chair on 1 September 1983, Joseph had urged universities, contradictorily, that raising private income would free them from the very government control he was imposing on them: ‘The higher the proportion of university income that comes from non-Government sources, the greater their freedom of action and their capacity to survive fluctuations in the level of recurrent grant.’<sup>116</sup> As the 1985 Green Paper confirmed, public funding would ‘be determined in the light of [the Government’s] assessment of what the country can afford’, so it made sense for the universities to ‘seek to maximise their income from other sources as a supplement to their grant’.<sup>117</sup> In 1984 the CVCP had duly set up a committee to look into resources from the private sector. The 1985 Green Paper emphasised ‘the importance to higher education of seeking to derive more of its total income from sources other than the taxpayer and the ratepayer’.<sup>118</sup> After all, ‘with the right approach and input of effort, more income for higher education can be obtained from business and private sources’.<sup>119</sup> Salford University could be cited as proof that universities could be

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<sup>115</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit., paragraph 5.3, p. 20.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Secretary of State, Keith Joseph, to UGC Chair, Edward Parkes, 1 September 1983: UCU archives.

<sup>117</sup> DES, *ibid.*, paragraph 9.5, p. 40.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 9.4, p. 40.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 9.5, p. 40.

successfully ‘forced to be free and enterprising’.<sup>120</sup> Having suffered a 42% cut in 1981, it had since obtained significant funding from industry.<sup>121</sup> With regard to research, the Government’s prediction was already coming true by 1985:

The UGC and other commentators have claimed that cuts in university budgets have fallen especially on research. [...] University income from research grants and contracts has nevertheless been rising in real terms in the last few years.<sup>122</sup>

By 1987, universities’ research income from industry had doubled since 1981.<sup>123</sup> The free market was working. Centrally imposed cuts were fostering a stronger entrepreneurial spirit, in turn leading to the reproduction - in Althusserian fashion - of greater freedom from public funding.

The 1985 Green Paper urges university senior academics and administrators, who had now become managers, to do just that: to manage diminishing public funds more efficiently and strictly according to Government policy.<sup>124</sup> However, the status of universities posed a difficulty: ‘[U]niversities, although dependent on public funds, are privileged institutions with a very significant degree of self-government’. The Government needed to deal with that constitutional position so that they could, for example, intervene in institutions to stamp out alleged ‘political bias in teaching’.<sup>125</sup> Tenure in the universities and ‘no compulsory redundancy’ agreements in PSHE were an ‘impediment to reorganisation’, so legislation was needed to enable higher education managers ‘to terminate academic appointments on grounds of redundancy or financial exigency’.<sup>126</sup> Differential pay and ‘merit awards’ to staff were recommended in order to set up “healthy competition” between and within higher education institutions, departments and staff. Not all these policies could be put into place immediately, but the important thing was to set up the structures and pass the initial legislation so that institutional managers would increasingly have to carry out the Government’s ideological agenda on its behalf at institutional level.

Even though the Government was now promoting higher education’s purpose as instrumental to the needs of the state, it needed to find a way of making the expanded

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<sup>120</sup> A phrase used by Gamble, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>121</sup> Shattock, M., *The UGC*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>122</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 5.2, p. 20.

<sup>123</sup> DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 1.6, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, *op. cit.*, paragraph 7.2, p. 30.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 6.15, p. 29.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 7.6, p. 31.

population of students pay individually for both their maintenance costs and tuition fees. True to the spirit of the 1979 Manifesto, the Government was considering by the mid-1980s ‘the extent to which students, their families and other sponsors might progressively assume greater responsibility for their participation in higher education’.<sup>127</sup> We have seen how Joseph’s attempts to make richer parents pay more met with fierce Tory backbench opposition, partly on the grounds that these MPs thought that students should not be dependent on their parents. (I return to this debate in Chapter 5.) As if meeting that objection, the 1988 ‘Top-up loans’ White Paper stated that ‘a system in which students rely on just two main sources of support - parents and grants from public funds - is unsustainable’.<sup>128</sup> Bringing in top-up maintenance loans of up to 50% and cutting student benefits was presented not simply as a means of saving public expenditure, but as a way of freeing students from dependency on the state and their parents, as a form of liberation:

It is undesirable that students should learn to depend upon a wrong understanding of the reciprocal obligations of the citizen and the state. [...] The Government believes that ending students’ dependence on social security benefits will, like the availability of a loan, contribute to increasing their economic awareness and their self-reliance.<sup>129</sup>

It could be all things to all people: it would help students to choose their subject of study more responsibly, and would constitute the means whereby access to higher education would be extended.<sup>130</sup> Despite repeated objections from both Opposition MPs and Vice-Chancellors, the Student Loans Bill (to which I return in the next two chapters) was presented to Parliament in 1990 as if there were no alternative.<sup>131</sup> What are effectively cuts are presented as an extension of freedom and responsibility, and quickly enabled to become so. Students should choose those “useful” subjects that would be publicly funded. Alternatively, a student can of course choose to study a subject not publicly funded - as long as they pay for this themselves. Thus a financial cut is made to look like freeing up access to study vocational subjects at a lower level, rather than what in fact it was: a form of social engineering and central control.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., paragraph 9.11 (vi), p. 42.

<sup>128</sup> DES, *Education Reform Act* (1988), op. cit., paragraph 2.9, p. 6.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., paragraphs 2.12, p. 7 and paragraph 3.30, p. 19.

<sup>130</sup> *The Conservative Manifesto* (1987), op. cit., pp. 22-23.

<sup>131</sup> HC Deb, 4 April 1990, vol.170, cc.1294-1311. Those against top-up loans had been pointing out for some time that the Government could explore other means to restore the value of the student grant: see, for example, Labour MPs Robert Brown, HC Deb, 5 December 1984, vol.69, c.368 and Dave Nellist, HC Deb, 22 January 1985, vol.71, c.850. The Government’s claim in 1988/89 that £230 million would be saved by 2027 was disputed by Nicholas Barr, an academic at the LSE, who pointed out that the White Paper had not taken into account the administrative costs: see *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (author not stated), ‘Costs mean loans will lose money’, 6 January 1989.

As I have already suggested, given the Government's repeatedly expressed views that public and private organisations should be freed from domination by the state, it appears to be a contradiction that increasingly greater central controls were imposed on higher education by the end of the 1980s. But the contradiction disappears as soon as it is understood in terms of the bigger ideological picture. The Government uses the expansion it had not set out to put into place to fulfil its ideological goal of both creating a market in higher education and planning the subject areas and student numbers it wished to fund, irrespective of demand, which it was then effectively fashioning.<sup>132</sup> In this way, the higher education state apparatus could be brought to reflect a developing ideological purpose.

**(iv) A renewed purpose**

It seems surprising in hindsight that higher education expanded under Thatcher. Full-time undergraduate student numbers increased by 80,000 from 1979 to 1986 and by 1989 the APR was at a record 18.3%.<sup>133</sup> However, funding in real terms fell sharply.<sup>134</sup> Between 1976-1997, the unit of resource per student was reduced by 46.5%, and between 1989-1997 funding per student dropped by 36%.<sup>135</sup> By the end of the 1980s, the "centralisers" in Thatcher's Government saw how they could harness a weakened higher education apparatus to serve neoliberal interests in practical ways, in '*the real world* [my emphasis] of industry, business, administration and the professions'.<sup>136</sup> Access was no longer to be exclusively the realm of the polytechnics and colleges. The value of the unit of resource in the polytechnics had been significantly reduced, so why not in the universities too? The 'productivity' of higher education institutions needed to be 'improved', as the Under-Secretary of State put it in 1988, as it was simply a matter of '[looking] at the amount of money

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<sup>132</sup> This was made explicit in the Chevening Discussion Paper which sought 'to formulate a policy on the overall numbers of students [the Government] wants to fund, independently of demand': op. cit., paragraph 5.

<sup>133</sup> HC Deb, 20 November 1986, vol.105, cc.281-282W; 19 December 1989, vol.164, cc.204-205W. The Government committed to fund an extra 50,000 student places by 1990: HC Deb, 1 April 1987, vol.113, cc.1091-1100.

<sup>134</sup> HC Deb, 13 June 1990, vol.174, cc.223-224.

<sup>135</sup> *Dearing Report*, op. cit., Chapter 17, paragraph 17.16; *Browne Report*, op. cit., Chapter 2, section 2.1, p. 18.

<sup>136</sup> AUT and Standing Conference on University Entrance, *Widening Access to University Education: Conference Report, the Barbican, 25 April 1988* (London: AUT and SCUE, 1988): speech by Robert Jackson, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, p. 13.

which is spent and the number of graduates that are produced'.<sup>137</sup> Neoliberalism needed the mass production of highly skilled - but compliant - workers, as Althusser might have put it, to replace the social democratic system designed to encourage a wider range of people to undertake a higher education "for its own sake". Higher education's renewed purpose was to provide companies with graduates who would bring 'intellectual power to bear in the market-place'.<sup>138</sup> A revised role had been developed for a previously liberal higher education system: the explicit production and reproduction of students, workers and managers to design and implement the New Right world order.

How successful, then, had the legislation been in re-engineering the ideological relationship of higher education to the state? The evidence shows that by 1989 the policy papers at least were expressing a considerably different view of higher education from the previously accepted liberal model inherited from Newman and Mill; and that higher education institutions were conforming - in the main, or at least officially, at institutional level - to their newly-crafted role. The universities, in particular, had been undermined by cuts. Working on ideological "fault-lines" and exploiting hierarchies, PSHE could be expanded but on a lower unit of resource, and with attempts to tie its curriculum to the needs of the state. Government quangos reflected and passed on to higher education institutions the need to bow to the Government's ideological agenda. Higher education managers were embracing the language and style of business, enterprise and the market. Through legislation culminating in the 1988 Education Reform Act, the Thatcher Governments had brought higher education under central government control and shifted its focus towards neoliberal ideas and practices, based on commerce and competition, using devices borrowed from the private sector, seeking to destroy forms of collegiality and organised labour, and generally gearing the sector more towards a notion of service delivery, responsive to the demands of the customer and the ups and downs of the free market. By 1990, cuts and legislation had brought higher education into being at once more subservient to Government *diktat* while also subject to market forces: a neoliberal ideological "dream ticket", whereby the contradiction worked to

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-20.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid: speech by Lord Prior, p. 29.



further the ideology.<sup>139</sup> Higher education could now be reined in more easily under government control, that is effectively “nationalised” to support a New Right ideological agenda: the instrumentalisation of the very idea of a university education, whose organisations and practices should be exposed to market forces.<sup>140</sup>

Although the Thatcher Government might have started the decade by wanting to keep higher education small and to preserve the élite universities for the few, the progress of a neoliberal agenda crafted by contradictory elements amounted to something much more than that. In order to achieve and embed a lasting ideological revolution, Thatcherites realised they could harness an expanded higher education system more explicitly in the role of an ideological state apparatus, a means of converting people to a different ideology, to accepting a more narrowly vocational and instrumental higher education, tied more closely to the wishes of the state. And by so doing, people could become converted to a different way of looking at things within higher education and - beyond that - in “the real world”. The way the New Right Tories achieved this was as much due to the operation of one contradiction on another, helping to craft the seemingly unstoppable ideological changes, as it was to winning higher education over to their point of view.

Having considered how this process worked through documents and legislation, I next turn in Chapters 5 and 6 to look in more detail at how these were debated in Parliament and how the proposed changes were resisted or supported on the level of the contradictions identified.

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<sup>139</sup> Andy Green comments: ‘Even those measures which appear to be increasing central control in education are in fact a means to the same end. As with nineteenth-century political economy, they have found it necessary to strengthen central control to create the conditions for a free market in education’: Green, A., ‘The peculiarities of English education’, in Department of Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>140</sup> The Chief Executive of the UFC stated that it had been established by the Government to expose universities to market forces: see Pritchard, R. M. O., ‘Government power in British higher education’, *Studies in Higher Education*, Volume 19, Number 3, 1994, p. 255.

## **Chapter 5    Higher education debated: the House of Commons**

### **(i)    Using the parliamentary process**

Here I focus on the House of Commons *Hansard* record of higher education debates in the 1980s, considering what exactly proponents and opponents of the Government's legislation argued, and how these debates may be understood as contributing to the construction of consent to the Government's "common sense" ideology through the workings of those dichotomies or contradictions I identified earlier: élitism, excellence and standards *versus* expansion; liberal *versus* instrumental and vocational; the free market and privatisation *versus* public funding, planning and control.<sup>1</sup> I have concentrated on the House of Commons' and in Chapter 6 on the House of Lords' records - as opposed to, say, interviewing those involved - because I aim to show from the record itself how the debates on higher education legislation helped to construct the ideology.<sup>2</sup> The focus of this and the following chapter's material is thus dictated to a large extent by those issues that dominated each House's debates. So, for example, as the Lords spent more time discussing the detail of the 1988 Education Reform Act than did the Commons, this is one of my emphases in Chapter 6. Although there is no one review of all higher education legislation of the 1980s or the parliamentary debates on it, the columns of *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (together with articles and letters in the broadsheets from time to time) provide a kind of commentary on academics' and trade unions' reactions to the cuts and the ensuing legislation.<sup>3</sup> I refer to these articles as appropriate throughout. In Chapter 7, I consider in more detail the objections of trade unions and other dissenters to the legislation, showing how the very terms of dissent were set to favour the progress of the neoliberal ideology.

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<sup>1</sup> Concentrating (for reasons of space) on taught higher education in England, the main debates (whose predominance can be measured in terms of *Hansard* column space) were on: universities and PSHE generally; overseas student fees and numbers; and student grants, fees and loans (by far the most voluminous part of the record). I therefore largely exclude, except in passing, debates on, *inter alia*, research study and councils, teacher education, lecturers' pay, the OU and students' unions.

<sup>2</sup> Other social forms and practices were, of course, instrumental in constructing Thatcherism, notably the popular press as, for example, Gilmour discusses in *Dancing with Dogma*, op.cit., pp. 193-198.

<sup>3</sup> The only in-depth analysis of one piece of the legislation (the 1988 Education Reform Bill), and responses to it, is by Julian Haviland in *Take Care, Mr Baker!: a selection from the advice on education which the government collected but decided not to publish* (London: Fourth Estate, 1988).

In one sense, given their parliamentary majorities, the Thatcher Governments could enact whatever policies they wished. But the Government had to convince MPs - and particularly dissenting Tory backbenchers - and carry them along, lest MPs withheld support for particular policies for fear of being voted out at the next election. The Government had to make their proposals seem to make sense, with no alternative. In short, they needed to gloss over the “reality” of the material conditions and make use of inherent contradictions and accidental opportunities to help them build the hegemonic domination they sought. For opponents, the parliamentary debates offered an opportunity to point up the confusions and contradictions in the Government’s arguments, to show that the ideas did not make sense; but they would have needed to expose the ideological process at work and how it was distorting the terms of the debate. However a unified response was unlikely, given both the splits in the Labour Party and - outside Parliament - the antagonisms that existed between the two higher education sectors. Some Government proposals ran into delay and compromises had to be sought. But, overall, the parliamentary process helped the Government to build their ideological domination over time, as objections gave them the opportunity to see what, if anything, they really needed to deal with in terms of serious opposition and in what ways, if at all, they needed to adjust details in order to get the legislation through and keep the underlying ideology on course. If the Government did not succeed in enacting a policy in quite the way or in the timescale envisaged, this did not matter from a long-term ideological perspective, as long as the Government had started to wear down and/or win over opposition - from both within and outside their own ranks - to their overall ideological cause.

**(ii) The cuts: kick-starting the ideological process**

I shall begin by examining what MPs said about the 1979-1981 university cuts (which I argued in Chapter 4 were a fundamental building block in the New Right’s assault on higher education), showing how this set up an “ideological pattern” for the debates which followed.

It was difficult for those opposing the cuts to engage much public interest. This was understandable because higher education (and especially the university sector) was still élitist and, of course, many other cutbacks of more immediate concern to most

people were being enacted at the same time.<sup>4</sup> Waldegrave in fact received 3,000 letters against the cuts between July and November 1981. Significantly, most were about the university cuts, and over half were about cuts to specific universities. A much smaller number of letters concerned the cuts to PSHE.<sup>5</sup> An estimated 11,000 people (mainly university staff) demonstrated outside the House of Commons on 18 November 1981.<sup>6</sup> Inside Parliament, far less time was taken in discussing the cuts to PSHE than to the universities. First, the cuts to the polytechnics and colleges were not so visible, as they were contained within general LEA funding cuts; indeed, no co-ordinated record was initially kept of the cuts in the PSHE sector. Second, many LEAs minimised cuts to their local polytechnics and colleges. Third, the university cuts were passed on by the UGC on a university-specific basis, and so MPs could be more easily lobbied to speak against specific cuts to specific universities. And fourth, the universities had much higher public status than PSHE - many people not realising that polytechnics offered degrees - so that MPs and other public figures were more likely to support the universities rather than the relatively new polytechnics. As Phillip Whitehead (Labour Shadow Spokesperson on Higher Education), condemning the estimated 10% cutback in funding for PSHE in 1982, put it: ‘The public sector is not as adequate a publicist of misery as are the universities and the vice-chancellors.’<sup>7</sup>

As we have seen, the cuts allowed a “divide and rule” scenario to develop between the universities and PSHE, and this was replicated by the MPs defending them. As the debates unfolded, the Government could capitalise on the particular ways in which the cuts impacted on each sector differently. How the cuts and subsequent follow-up actions were debated and came about - and not just parliamentary approval of individual policies - was what was fundamentally important in the construction and sustainability of the Government’s two-staged ideological mission: first, to weaken higher education and then to win it over to its cause.

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<sup>4</sup> As Kinnock identified: HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.292. Also, as Labour Lord Molloy pointed out (HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 31), ‘the sycophantic Tory national press’ backed the Government. See, for example, extracts quoted from *The Daily Express* and *The Sun*: HC Deb, 4 June 1985, vol.80, c.205.

<sup>5</sup> HC Deb, 27 October 1981, vol.10, c.331W; 17 November 1981, vol.13, cc.129-130W.

<sup>6</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.362.

<sup>7</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1332.

What reasons did the Government give in debate for these initial cuts - especially to universities - and the policies they then put in place? What support - or opposition - did they receive from their own backbenchers and why? What objections did the opposition parties raise and did these offer any challenge to the Government's underlying ideology? In order to track the ideological process at work, I shall analyse three specific sets of grounds on which the opposition parties objected in the House of Commons to the cuts. These can be summarised as follows: (a) the cuts overturned the post-war all-party commitment to expand higher education, and did not make sense because the country needed more highly-educated people (these were the most extensive debates, apart from those on student grants, to which I return later); (b) the cuts were not cost-effective, would necessitate more being spent on unemployment benefits, and would damage higher education institutions' local economies; and (c) higher education institutions were not a failing industry so did not warrant being cut, especially when the Government was spending public money elsewhere.

The parliamentary process meant that the Opposition was always one step behind, trying to salvage what they could in piecemeal fashion from the Government's planned public expenditure cuts. To counter this, Labour in particular, as the major opposition party, would have needed to present an explicit and robust alternative higher education policy; otherwise all they could do - at best - was to defend the *status quo*. Let us consider the objections which Labour put forward and how the contradictions that came to the fore in debate helped the developing ideology to start to dominate.

(a) First objection

As noted in Chapter 3, the expansion of higher education slowed down in the 1970s. Nevertheless, it was still generally taken as read that a more highly-educated population was desirable and of benefit both to individuals and to society as a whole. One strand of Labour's argument was that the cuts constituted an unacceptable denial of opportunity to individuals qualified to enter higher education. This was backed by some Tory MPs and the findings of the November 1981 House of Commons Education, Science and Arts Select Committee.<sup>8</sup> Labour's view that access to higher

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<sup>8</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.322 and cc.293-294 respectively.

education was a right was repeatedly expressed by Labour MPs, based on an unspoken assumption that it should continue to be funded by the state.<sup>9</sup>

Neil Kinnock, the then Education Spokesperson for the Labour Party, opened the 18 November 1981 debate by robustly condemning the cuts, calling for 'the abandonment of policies which destroy opportunity and contradict the economic, technological, scholastic and social needs of the nation'.<sup>10</sup> Joseph's response was framed in simple monetarist terms: all he was trying to do was to cut public borrowing and spending.<sup>11</sup> Higher education had been growing at a faster rate than the country could afford.<sup>12</sup> The Government's argument was that the economic position regrettably dictated this strategy for higher education: indeed, effectively was the strategy for higher education.<sup>13</sup> The Robbins principle had to be 'redefined by what is going on now', as common sense dictated.<sup>14</sup>

As noted in Chapter 4, the Government believed that a positive by-product of the cuts would be 'increased competition for places - and probably, therefore, higher standards'.<sup>15</sup> Kinnock challenged these conclusions, claiming instead that the Government was limiting individuals' access to higher education and reserving it for the élite, but that this was being justified under a pretence of arguments about 'degeneration' and upholding 'standards'.<sup>16</sup> The argument about standards did not make sense, he maintained, given that the Chair of the CVCP had informed Joseph that 'the quality of the entry this year is higher than it has ever been and that [universities] are having to turn away students who, only a year or so ago, would have had no difficulty at all in gaining a university place'.<sup>17</sup> Kinnock was effectively accusing the Government of distorting the truth for ideological purposes, claiming

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<sup>9</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.291-376; 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.740-769; 26 October 1984, vol.65, cc.911-978.

<sup>10</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.291.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., cc.301-302.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., cc.307-308. As Joseph later claimed: '[W]hile higher education is so largely dependent on public funds, there must be some link between the prosperity of the economy and the resources available to higher education, and that as our economy is fighting to regain profitable competitiveness in an increasingly tough world, that relationship is even more unavoidable.' - HC Deb, 21 May 1985, vol.79, c.862.

<sup>13</sup> As Liberal MP Clement Freud pointed out, the Government had 'no real education policy, only an economic policy': HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.935.

<sup>14</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.309.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., c.292.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., c.295.

that the actual reason for making the cuts was not to save money or maintain standards but to further the Government's ideological agenda of narrowing access to higher education. He claimed that ministers

not only understand but deliberately contrive those consequences. They have long believed that there is too much and too great a variety of higher education for too many people [...], in their narrow concept of higher education, and for their narrow purposes of social engineering. [...]

Ministers loathe the so-called Robbins principle. They now fully intend to slaughter that principle. They use the argument of national economic imperatives to excuse their political assassinations.<sup>18</sup>

Oonagh McDonald (Labour) echoed Kinnock's claim that the situation was being misrepresented by the Government's contention that standards had fallen, and she insisted that the real reason for the cuts was élitism:

[The Secretary of State] has already said that proportionally fewer young people will get higher education, but that the quality of graduates will probably rise. There is no evidence to support that proposition [...]. There is no justification for the claim that the Robbins expansion took place too quickly. I believe that what lies behind this idea is the élitist principle that few people are qualified to benefit from university education. I believe that we draw from a very small pool in this country and that the pool could be much larger. Many people are qualified to benefit from university education. [...] I can only believe that the Secretary of State feels that higher education should be limited to the better off, in view of his attitude towards maintenance grants and the cuts proposed in that area.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, she and Barry Sheerman (Labour) pointed out the irony of the extensive cuts to the OU - the embodiment of the 'self-help' ethos Thatcher supposedly favoured.<sup>20</sup> These and countless other comments from Labour and other opposition MPs demonstrated not just their strong opposition to the cuts but their realisation that the "real" - ideological - reason for them was not just the Government's wish to save money or safeguard standards but their ideological commitment to limiting access to higher education.

However, Labour's objections were weakened by a contradiction in their own position. On the one hand, they opposed the cuts to higher education and were committed to defend the universities and PSHE alike. On the other hand, they were ambivalent about defending a university system that was predominantly élitist and protecting its interest to remain so by cutting student numbers. This resulted in

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., c.296.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., c.351.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., c.349-350; 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.756. The OU's fees doubled between 1979 and 1984: HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.971.

Labour “side-swiping” at the universities and the UGC (whose representatives were drawn predominantly from the more traditional universities), deflecting Labour from concentrating its attack on the Government. For example, Kinnock criticised those academics who

never liked the expansion of higher education in the past 20 years. They always complained of entrance standards falling when [...] standards were actually rising. Those few were always irritated by the characteristics of succeeding generations of new undergraduates whom they saw as ill-kempt, unruly, ungrateful and ungracious, and occasionally even accused them of being ignoramuses.<sup>21</sup>

Labour MP Dennis Canavan’s comments in the 21 December 1981 debate reinforced this, as he criticised

the academic ivory tower élitists on the UGC who have been trying to protect themselves and to deal out hatchet blows to some of the younger universities and some of the universities which are not necessarily hidebound by tradition but are trying to bring about many of the innovations which are so necessary in curriculum, in research and in other aspects of higher education.<sup>22</sup>

Sheerman interpreted the UGC’s decision to cut student numbers on a selective institutional basis as a policy driven by élitist vested interests, suggesting that university staff should work harder (as the polytechnics were doing), in order to maintain access:

Surely we should say to the entrenched vested interests "You should work harder. You should have higher student and staff loads. You need bigger classes, bigger tutorials, larger numbers of entrants." [...] [W]e must tell [the universities] that they need to have more students. We must tell them to work harder, expand, and use the talents in their institutions to educate more young people. If that is what the Government were doing in higher education, they would have my vote. [...] We must be tough with the universities. [...] We must tell them to educate more young people, more scientists and more technologists, so that our country can build on strength.<sup>23</sup>

Thus - crucially - what had started out as a condemnation of Government policy became an attack on the universities and the UGC (and I explore the latter’s role further in Chapter 7). Christopher Price (Labour, Chair of the Select Committee) reinforced - I assume inadvertently - this “divide and rule” stance by pointing out something true:

The university that succeeds in lifting someone with three E grade A-levels to a first-class honours degree gets chopped, but the university that succeeds in lifting someone with three grade A grade A-levels to a first-class honours degree gets

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<sup>21</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.292-293.

<sup>22</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.741.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., c.758.



enhanced funding. There cannot be any sense in that.<sup>24</sup>

Another Labour MP again rightly pointed out the country's poor record of participation in higher education:

It is a scandal - perhaps the universities should look to themselves as well - that in this country social class 4 makes up 18 per cent of the country's population but 4.9 per cent only of university entrants; that the unskilled make up 6 per cent of the population but 0.9 per cent only of university entrants. It is a scandal that the universities must face.<sup>25</sup>

The point is that, however justified such criticisms might have been, they weakened the Opposition's initial argument that all higher education cuts were unacceptable. Furthermore, the Labour Party's position was compromised by their attempts, however laudable, in government to persuade the universities to reform, and the Tories latched on to this.<sup>26</sup> Waldegrave was to some extent justified in claiming that Labour's had been 'an agenda for retrenchment that was far more radical than any policy that we are now pursuing'.<sup>27</sup> The Tories could make it look as if they were the ones simply acting on common sense - Britain needed to cut public expenditure, after all - whereas the Labour Party in government had been the ones who had tried to intervene in university affairs. Labour, which in government had set up PSHE and the OU precisely to challenge the élitist university system, was now finding it difficult to fight effectively to maintain an élitism they did not support, especially at a time when so many other public services for their constituents were being drastically cut. This ambivalence inevitably weakened their principled stance. My purpose here is not to uncover to what extent they realised this, nor to apportion blame, but, rather, to show how the contradictions in their position helped to strengthen the New Right's ideological project.

Another strand of Labour's argument was to object to the cuts from an instrumental point of view. Derived from their longstanding support for further education and particularly as the architects of the 1966 binary policy, Labour considered that

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<sup>24</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1333.

<sup>25</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.959.

<sup>26</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.302. For details of Shirley Williams' 1969 proposals for university reform, see Ch. 3, fn.103. William van Straubenzee (Tory, c.315) found himself in agreement with Williams' proposals, which had included cutting some university courses to two years. Dennis Canavan (Labour) criticised Williams (now SDP) as the first Secretary of State to preside over a reduction, in real terms, in the budget for education and science, for closing more colleges of education than before or since, and for confronting the AUT over a modest pay claim: HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.744. Canavan's comments only served to confirm the divisions in the Opposition which the Government could exploit.

<sup>27</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.767.

vocational higher education should be expanded. Mocking Joseph's conclusion that the 1981 cuts obviously made sense, Kinnock queried for whom it made sense:

Does it make sense in terms of national needs and national interests? No, we cannot say that, because it is more obvious to this generation than to any previous generation that economic development, technological mastery, social stability and democratic values depend not on the brilliance of the few, no matter how worthwhile it is to nurture, but on the competence of the many.<sup>28</sup>

But this phrasing gives a mixed message. Equating 'the few' - élitism - with 'brilliance' makes it appear as if 'the many' should be educated for vocational 'competence'. McDonald realised the danger of her fellow Labour MPs using utilitarian arguments to justify the expansion of higher education. Although that was important, she said, 'we should not lose track of the importance of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and the importance of developing independent, rational criticism of our society and others'.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, many Labour MPs expressed their support of higher education primarily in terms of an investment for employment, especially 'a highly vocational and job-oriented interpretation of it', as one MP put it.<sup>30</sup> This accorded with the Government's view that, particularly the polytechnics, should fulfil this purpose.

Notwithstanding some of the contradictions in Labour's thinking, could they nevertheless mount a successful challenge by exposing the fact that the Government claimed to favour economic development while - contradictorily - cutting the very means by which this might be achieved? At the beginning of the 18 November 1981 debate, Kinnock quoted from the Chair of the CVCP's letter to Joseph:

[W]e are, in comparison with our industrial competitors a sadly under-educated and under-trained society. [...] At the same time both the quality and the volume of the universities' contribution to basic and applied research will be seriously affected at the very time when this contribution has never been more needed or more highly valued by British industries.<sup>31</sup>

As Kinnock and several opposition MPs pointed out, it did not make sense for Joseph to criticise the nation's economic failures and the greater success of the UK's industrial competitors, while at the same time imposing cuts on higher education, in which other competitors were increasing their investment as a way of improving

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<sup>28</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.297.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., c.351.

<sup>30</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.967.

<sup>31</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.294.

industrial competitiveness.<sup>32</sup> Why were the vocational - the allegedly more “useful” - subjects being cut? Alan Beith (Liberal), for example, queried why ‘universities that have deliberately set out to cultivate a close relationship with industry [are] suffering particularly under the present round of cuts. One cannot look at what is happening in Aston, Bradford or Salford without asking what conceivable policy objectives are being served by that part of the UGC's advice to the universities.’<sup>33</sup> Martin Flannery (Labour) pinpointed the Government’s contradictory position:

The Government pretend that they wish to build up industry to a strong competitive position. [...] Vital scientific and technologically based research is being cut on a scale that is bound to affect industry.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, Kinnock pointed out, while the Government might be ignoring universities’ objections to cuts, it contradicted the Government’s belief in private enterprise that they should ignore the views of business people.<sup>35</sup> Price summed up the utilitarian argument:

The Opposition and, I believe, a majority of Conservative Members regard public expenditure on higher education as an essential investment and a service for the whole of British industry. None of the profit-making parts of our industry could operate without a flow of graduates from our higher education system. [...] [T]he Secretary of State, in pursuing his ideological approach to the subject, also said that there is no evidence from any other country that investment in higher education has any relationship to economic prosperity. He is just plain wrong.<sup>36</sup>

It surely did not make sense to cut university provision in the very subjects the Government professed to support the most!

The Opposition accurately highlighted the Government’s contradictory position in, on the one hand, promoting applied science and technology subjects over others and, on the other, permitting these subjects to be cut, particularly in the technological universities. However, in their energetic promotion of these subjects, Labour was in danger of giving the impression that they did not support the expansion of others.

This was precisely also the view of those traditional Tories who thought that a liberal higher education should be available, if only for the élite. Using utilitarian arguments in favour of expanding technological subjects alone was a hostage to fortune: it made

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., cc.324-325. An international competitor, Finland, was increasing its spending on higher education by 23%. UK expenditure on higher education as a proportion of GDP was 1% in 1974/5 and had only risen to 1.1% by 1983/4: see HC Deb, 15 July 1985, vol.83, c.34W.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., c.311. See also Canavan: HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.745.

<sup>34</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.334.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., c.296.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., c.327.

it seem that Labour's primary allegiance was to technological and vocational higher education, the very kind of higher education that neoliberal elements of the Government were also proposing for 'the many'. These confusions and contradictions weakened the Opposition's position and strengthened the development of the Government's instrumental view of higher education.

The parliamentary system itself helped to reinforce the "divide and rule" situation caused by the UGC's selective cuts. In their support of their constituencies, MPs tried to reverse specific cuts proposed for their local university or polytechnic. In one sense, there was strength in that approach and some robust defences were made; but it was largely divisive as MPs rarely spoke against the cuts as a whole. Some Tory MPs defended liberal higher education in the university in their constituency, but usually only for an élite, while others backed the "relevance" of their local technological university.<sup>37</sup> The way the ideology worked was that Labour MPs backing the Government's shift to more applied science and technology courses appeared to be supporting the Government's policy overall.<sup>38</sup> The UGC and MPs alike thus opened up dichotomies between liberal and vocational subjects, arts and sciences, universities and polytechnics, technological universities and the others, pitting institutions and departments against one another on the basis of cost.<sup>39</sup>

Several MPs pointed out that it would actually have made more sense to cut science and technology subjects, rather than arts and social sciences, if saving money had been the real - or only - intention.<sup>40</sup> Many highlighted the fact that this was not really about saving money or promoting science and technology. The very idea - or at least the convenient result - was to cut back the arts and, particularly, social science subjects in the newer universities and the polytechnics in an attempt to redirect students towards employment-related subjects. With the publication of the 1985

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., c.333; 29 July 1982, vol.28, cc.1335-1336; 26 October 1984, vol.65, cc.926-933. The Tory MP for Cambridge, Robert Rhodes James, professed himself to be against whole-hearted support for 'relevance', stating that 'the concept that universities and polytechnics are institutions for the production of technicians is very repugnant to many people, including me': Rhodes James, R., 'Government and higher education', *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume XI, Number 1, January 1987, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.956.

<sup>39</sup> For criticism of the 'badly thought out and badly handled rationalisation exercises', see AUT paper LA/1586, 8 May 1980: UCU archives.

<sup>40</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.355; 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.917.

Green Paper, the position became obvious, as Giles Radice (Labour Shadow Education Spokesperson) realised, at least in part:

Despite the lip service paid in the Green Paper to the importance of arts subjects for their own sake and that of industry and commerce, the shift to science and engineering will take place - contrary to the UGC's advice and what the House of Lords Select Committee said - at the expense of the arts. That also is nonsense. [...] The Government want to cut resources to higher education not because there are rational arguments for doing so but because the Cabinet wants to cut public spending.<sup>41</sup>

It was perfectly true, in one sense, that the Government was cutting public expenditure in order to save public money. However, the underlying project - at least in the early 1980s - was to limit access to higher education, as many Tories believed (genuinely or otherwise) that this would drive up standards. At the same time, the New Right Tories could profess the need to promote some subjects over others in terms that would compromise Labour MPs who supported the expansion of vocational higher education. The Government would in time be in a position to argue that the bulk of public higher education should be for narrowly vocational and instrumental purposes, that it should foster an approach to competitiveness and espouse related neoliberal values. With MPs and institutions squabbling over diminishing resources, the Government's two-pronged mission could start to take hold: that higher education should be cut and subject provision engineered in ways which favoured a neoliberal agenda, controlled by central government.

(b) Second objection

Although the Government was prepared to countenance high unemployment - in higher education as elsewhere - to achieve their ideological ends, there was a risk.<sup>42</sup> The position of Tory MPs would be compromised if the cuts led to fewer student places and to increased unemployment in their constituencies: this might make MPs so unpopular that they would feel they had to act against the Government or lose their parliamentary seats. So the fact that some Tory MPs spoke against the proposals - albeit usually only in relation to the university in their own constituency - could not be completely ignored by the Government.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> HC Deb, 4 June 1985, vol.80, cc.205-245.

<sup>42</sup> The Government estimated that academic staff redundancies would amount to 5,000 (1 in 6) over the following two years: HC Deb, 25 January 1982, vol.16, c.275W. For Labour MPs' estimates of the local impacts of higher education cuts, see HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.335; 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.740-769.

<sup>43</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.343; 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.746-747.

Labour tried to show that the cuts did not make sense because they were not cost-effective. In the same vein, the Select Committee recommended that the Secretary of State 'review current policies to take account of the comparative costs of maintaining a student at university and an individual on the unemployment register'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, irrespective of whether or not the cuts were morally justified, surely they should make sense as a means of saving money, as that was what the Government had said they were designed to do? Joseph was challenged to produce the figures, but simply replied: 'It is not possible to give precise figures. We are in the realm of assumptions.'<sup>45</sup> Waldegrave later added: 'No reliable estimate of the cost of redundancies is available.'<sup>46</sup> However, McDonald demonstrated that it was in fact possible to make such an estimate, reporting that the Manpower Services Commission had confirmed that the cost of financing an unemployed person was equivalent to the cost of financing a student at university.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, in financial terms, cutting jobs and depriving students of university places did not make sense. However this was only so because a person not able to become a student with a state-funded grant would receive unemployment benefit. Second, it would cost more money to cut academic posts than it would save only because tenure and no redundancy agreements could not be broken without compensation. Canavan asked rhetorically (in relation to one university's cuts): 'What is the point of trying to save £4.16 million by spending £8.47 million?'<sup>48</sup> The answer was obvious. As in other political showdowns, the Government was prepared to spend money to make its ideology work ('the demonstration effect', as noted in Chapter 3), even if that ideology was ostensibly about not wasting money. As Dave Nellist (Labour) later summed it up:

The House knows that the money exists, but it is not used in the directions that it should be. [...] The Government are prepared to waste £4 billion in an attempt to break the National Union of Mineworkers. [...] The money is there. Rather than spend it on higher and further education, the Government want cuts in public expenditure to pay for tax cuts for the rich and super rich.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> HC First Report from the Education, Science and Arts Committee, 2 December 1981, paragraph 1.

<sup>45</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.302.

<sup>46</sup> HC Deb, 1 December 1981, vol.14, c.109W.

<sup>47</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.349.

<sup>48</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.743.

<sup>49</sup> HC Deb, 30 October 1984, vol.65, cc.1266-1267. Other Labour MPs challenged the Government to explain why, if it was short of money for universities, it could afford to spend public money on

What actually happened was that, as we noted earlier, academic job cuts were achieved voluntarily, so the cuts did not cost as much as opponents had claimed; applicants who could not get places at universities got places in PSHE instead, rather than being unemployed; and the Government must have realised that it would need in due course to cut public funding of student grants and welfare benefits, so that the same argument could not be used again.

The Government did in the end have to set aside some money for restructuring. The UGC allocated some £20 million within the 1981/82 grant for immediate redundancies and the Government agreed a further £50 million for 1982/3.<sup>50</sup> However, the CVCP and the UGC estimated that a voluntary redundancy scheme would cost much more, in fact between £150-180 million. As one Vice-Chancellor summed it up: 'We can neither afford to keep the staff nor to sack them.'<sup>51</sup> In the end, redundancies and restructurings cost around £130 million.<sup>52</sup> As the Chair of the CVCP put it, the 1981 cuts did not make financial sense 'since the savings on recurrent grants have to be set off against the cost of compensating staff for dismissal'. If there were no savings to be had, it seemed to him that it would 'have been all for nothing'.<sup>53</sup> But this was not true in ideological terms. First, it was worth spending a one-off sum on redundancies to make an annual saving of £150 million each year from 1984/5 onwards - or so the Government calculated - because the system would be smaller to fund. It was 'not a bad deal', as Waldegrave put it.<sup>54</sup> Second, and more importantly, the 'demonstration effect' of the cuts served as a crucial building block: it showed people that the Government meant business. It was another step in wearing down higher education institutions and their MPs so that they would be more inclined to consider and accommodate compromises and, in time, not stand in the way of the Government's drive for hegemonic domination. As a by-product of this, rather than overturn the Government's policy, what the objections achieved was to put into focus those two issues that were clearly obstacles to the

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subsidising private schools, expanding the police force, and buying defence missiles: 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.324-334; 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.759-760.

<sup>50</sup> HL Deb, 18 March 1981, vol.418, cc.761-850, p. 57; HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.743-748 and 15 February 1982, vol.18, cc.56-57W.

<sup>51</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.747.

<sup>52</sup> Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>53</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, cc.1323-1324.

<sup>54</sup> HC Deb, 16 February 1982, vol.18, c.139.

progress of a neoliberal agenda and would need to be tackled (as I shall explore further in due course): student grants and academic staff tenure.

(c) Third objection

A third argument put forward by opposition parties was that the cuts did not make sense because universities were not failing financially and were not overspending. Such severe cuts, it was argued, would cause damage beyond repair to universities and their local communities.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, even if universities were failing, other failing industries - notably British Leyland - were being bailed out by the Government, as one Labour MP pointed out.<sup>56</sup> Joseph retorted that ‘BL was in a market place, and universities are not - to the same extent’. He continued: ‘The universities would be far less vulnerable if they were not so dependent upon the taxpayer.’<sup>57</sup> How did this follow? How did it make sense for a government espousing the rules of market forces to bail out one industry but not another? As universities were recipients of public money, from the Government’s “common sense” point of view they had to be cut, whether they were failing or not. This was the only solution to the problem as set up: higher education was costing too much and should seek funding from private sources and, furthermore, this would give it more freedom. It looked as if universities as public institutions were being set up to fail, and then moved towards privatisation, as Labour pointed out.<sup>58</sup> But Joseph presented his ideology under a cloak of reasonableness and common sense:

I am not postulating a privatisation of universities. I am postulating that it would be more healthy for the universities if they did not depend so much upon Governments and taxpayers.<sup>59</sup>

If universities wanted less interference from the Government, all they had to do was to seek a greater proportion of their income from private sources: it was as simple as that.

In arguing against Joseph’s view that universities were failing, and/or too dependent on public money, Opposition MPs understandably gave examples of grants and contracts won by universities from private sources. But this justification of

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<sup>55</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.294.

<sup>56</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.303. The same point was made by Lord Segal: HL Deb, 18 March 1981, vol.418, cc.761-850, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.303.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., cc.300-327.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., c.303.



universities' worth in financial terms provided yet another ideological opportunity for the Government. Initially, the Opposition claimed that the cuts would damage wealth-creation and investment in local communities and would undermine universities' ability to earn private income to support their development and the economy as a whole. However, in trying to prove that it did not make sense to say that universities were failing, MPs fell into showing that universities did not depend (and - by extension - did not have to depend) solely on public funds. This was proving precisely Joseph's point: universities need not be wholly dependent on the taxpayer. He could make it look as if the restructurings that universities were having to make were all to the good.<sup>60</sup> After all, Salford had suffered heavy cuts in 1981 but by 1982 was, according to Waldegrave, 'doing what has been asked of it' in 'raising money from outside and building new connections with industry'.<sup>61</sup> The cuts had been good for universities, just as Joseph claimed:

I venture the opinion that both Aston and Salford are better universities through the energy, devotion and skill of their vice-chancellors and staff and all who work there as a result of what they have had to do.<sup>62</sup>

Everything was for the best. For example, by 1984, Peter Brooke (Tory Higher Education Minister) was able to 'welcome the industrial sponsorship of students reading appropriate subjects, and also welcome resources from private funding which, as it is free money, enables the universities to start new initiatives'.<sup>63</sup> Andrew Bennett (Labour) pointed out the dangers - in rather naïve terms, given he was addressing a hard-headed Government intent on privatisation:

I warn the Government not to go into private funding with great enthusiasm. Private funding rarely comes without strings. Many people in the academic world are already worried that if they take money from a particular source their academic freedom or the academic freedom of their colleagues who may want to criticise will be reduced. If a person is asked to give evidence for Friends of the Earth and knows that his evidence conflicts with the interests of a large company that is sponsoring his institution, he wonders what he should do.<sup>64</sup>

But Joseph enthused that 'the more that we can do to enhance the relationship between higher education and business, the better', adding that it would be 'wise for universities and other higher education institutions to inch [...] towards a larger

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<sup>60</sup> HC Deb, 15 February 1982, vol.18, cc.56-57W.

<sup>61</sup> HC Deb, 9 November 1982, vol.31, cc.419-420. See also Ch. 4, fns.117-123.

<sup>62</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.947.

<sup>63</sup> HC Deb, 6 March 1984, vol.55, c.723.

<sup>64</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.972.

contribution to their funds from the private sector'.<sup>65</sup> One Tory MP's contribution in particular demonstrated the neoliberal faith in the market:

[W]e must look towards the market to shape the future. [...] Higher education must not only prepare people for the world, but must be integral to it. By setting the sector free in the market, with adequate backing, the Government will be performing the classic Conservative role of linking the nation past and the nation present with the nation of the future.<sup>66</sup>

Joseph took the opportunity to set out the long-term neoliberal vision and how it would be attained:

No one has the romantic illusion - at least I have not - that there will be a sudden transformation from near total dependence upon the taxpayer to near total dependence upon the private sector.

Every step that the higher education institutions can take to increase contributions from the private sector will be a step towards the greater reality of academic freedom and real independence. If we look not a year or even a decade ahead but perhaps several decades ahead, a series of individually undramatic but useful steps towards greater contributions from the private sector can over a time transform the reality of academic freedom.<sup>67</sup>

He reiterated the view that 'an increase in the private funding arrangements throughout would, I believe, desirably and healthily detach the higher education system a little more from dependence upon Government decisions and finance' and repeated that 'even small steps can be significant over time'.<sup>68</sup> Bennett realised the dangers:

Would not the right hon. Gentleman's plea for private funding for higher education be far better if he would give a guarantee to those who get it that it will be extra? They fear that it will give the Government the excuse to cut further their resources.<sup>69</sup>

But it was too late. Universities were proving that they could survive cuts. By 1985, Brooke was able to report that since 1979 contributions to universities from private sources had risen by 18% in real terms.<sup>70</sup> The Government was beginning to be proved right. Its policies were self-fulfilling. Universities could, after all, increasingly be enjoined to raise more funds from private sources. Cuts would, on the one hand, force higher education institutions to seek private resources to make up the shortfall and, on the other, would make them more subservient to central

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., c.978.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., cc.953-954.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., c.912.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., cc.917-988.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., c.912.

<sup>70</sup> HC Deb, 23 April 1985, vol.77, c.727.

Government directives. Who could say but that in the fullness of time universities might even freely choose to go completely private?

**(iii) Coming to the ideological rescue**

The Government's public expenditure plans, involving *inter alia* the cuts to higher education, were approved by Parliament. In one sense, the Government's ability to prevail in the House of Commons was not surprising, given Thatcher's successive electoral majorities. However what happened at a deeper level was that the contradictions and confusions in the Opposition and its relationship to a divided higher education system inadvertently assisted the Government's ideological drive. The Opposition could not win the arguments: not for want of forceful speeches, but because the contradictions in their own and the Government's positions worked together to favour changes that supported a neoliberal agenda.<sup>71</sup> An "ideological drift" took place among both the Opposition and recalcitrant Tory MPs. Various factors "came to the ideological rescue" of the Government, enabling it to present solutions and make adjustments, without damaging the ideological mission overall. MPs (and those whose interests they were representing) were assuaged by this or that compromise, a process bringing them closer to the Government's ideological position by the end of the debating process than at the start.

I shall follow this process in the House of Commons in more detail by drawing on three examples I have touched on earlier, before turning in Chapter 6 to those that particularly dominated the higher education debates in the House of Lords.

**(a) Using the polytechnics**

As we saw earlier, the development of the polytechnics - and, in turn, the higher education colleges which offered some degrees and aspired to polytechnic status - was inextricably and ideologically linked to the assault on university education. Having cut university funding, what helped the Government to limit the damage, obscure the impact of the university cuts from the general public and hamper Opposition arguments, was the opportunity afforded by the binary system to play off the two sectors of higher education against one another.

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<sup>71</sup> For examples of forceful speeches, see HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.291-376; 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.740-769; 26 October 1984, vol.65, cc.911-978.

It was expedient for the Tories to keep the two sectors separate at that time so that - first of all - the polytechnics could absorb the places lost in university cuts in a competitive, rather than collaborative, relationship with the universities. It was more difficult for those opposing university cuts to maintain that it did not make sense to cut university places, and would damage higher education and young people's chances irreparably, when prospective students found that they could take up degree places in PSHE instead.<sup>72</sup> The polytechnics could come to the rescue with a pragmatic solution, their rapid 30% growth being made to look as if it had arisen "naturally" in response to the market. Waldegrave could demonstrate the maintenance of the Robbins principle:

There has been a limitation on university places undertaken by the UGC to preserve the research output of universities. Despite the pressure on the recurrent grants of the local authority institutions, those institutions have managed to take in large numbers of students, which perhaps shows that there must have been some slack in the system before. The Robbins principle has therefore been maintained.<sup>73</sup>

Joseph, meanwhile, could claim that standards would be improved:

Some of the people disappointed in achieving university places will then compete for polytechnic places and possibly displace other people with fewer qualifications who would, under past assumptions, have found a place in polytechnics. [...] It obviously makes sense.<sup>74</sup>

In reality, fewer people would have access to a higher education, as those at the bottom of the hierarchy would lose out. It constituted 'a knock-on effect' all the way to the dole queue, as one Labour MP put it.<sup>75</sup>

Second, not only could the polytechnics take more students but they were proving that they could do it more cheaply than the universities, as one Labour MP helpfully pointed out, not even counting the universities' research costs.<sup>76</sup> Polytechnic managements were prepared to let their institutions run on a lower unit of resource per student for teaching. As Joseph insisted, the cuts needed to apply to both sectors:

It would be wrong if the universities alone in higher education were being squeezed. There is also the non-university sector of higher education. Reduction in funding will not be limited to universities alone. Our aim is to encourage a more coherent - it will never be completely coherent - disposition of functions

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<sup>72</sup> For the increased intakes to PSHE, see Ch. 4, fn.50.

<sup>73</sup> HC Deb, 23 November 1982, vol.32, c.808.

<sup>74</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.297.

<sup>75</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, cc.1327-1332

<sup>76</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.955.

between the local authority sector of higher education and the universities.<sup>77</sup>

If the unit of resource could be driven down all round, it would be easier to bring the two sectors of higher education into the ‘coherent disposition of functions’ - under central government funding and control - the Government required. On the other hand, for the Opposition parties and those lobbying them, coherence meant bringing the two sectors closer together for funding and planning purposes.<sup>78</sup> For example, Beith argued:

We continually discuss what is happening in universities in total isolation from what is happening in the polytechnics and colleges, many of which provide courses in the same subjects, to the same standards, and covering the same range, and sometimes compete or offer parallel opportunities for the same kind of students. There are differences, but one cannot draw any clear distinctions. If the Secretary of State wants to draw clear distinctions between the two sectors, he is on the wrong track.<sup>79</sup>

The danger in arguing this was that the polytechnics could provide a blueprint for a cheaper and more compliant higher education state apparatus. The Government wanted, if anything, to reinforce the two-tier higher education system which the Labour Party’s binary policy had instituted.<sup>80</sup> If Joseph was going to pursue his idea of ‘some converted universities’ where advanced vocational training would take place (a return to the CATs?), the polytechnics offered a testing ground.<sup>81</sup> After all, as Labour had also claimed back in 1966, the universities were not always responsive, did not always produce the right goods:

Even before the recession there were many criticisms from business that the universities were not producing the trained people that they wanted. The demand from business [...] was rather in terms of business and industry wanting better, rather than more, training in universities.<sup>82</sup>

By 1985, Joseph was happy to sanction ‘the predominance of, and leadership in, academic work by the universities’, alongside the separate ‘indispensable function of the polytechnics in fulfilling their role, in which, far more than the universities, they serve part-time students’.<sup>83</sup> In their support for polytechnics, the Opposition -

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<sup>77</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.307.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., c.330.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., c.313.

<sup>80</sup> Later, Robert Jackson (Education Under-Secretary of State) was quick in reply to a Labour MP to point out the irony (HC Deb, 3 November 1987, vol.121, cc.771-772): ‘As I recall, the concept of the binary system originated under a Labour Government. It reflected a just appreciation of the existence of different possible missions for institutions in higher education. There is a difference of mission and one of historical background, and those are reflected in the Government’s proposals.’

<sup>81</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.297.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., c.304.

<sup>83</sup> HC Deb, 21 May 1985, vol.79, c.863.

inadvertently - contributed to rationalising a lower-level role for PSHE by running various factors together. For example, Radice referred to PSHE's

more relevant and practical courses, to the creation and protection of sub-degree courses, to the encouragement of mature and part-time students and to the general widening of access and educational opportunity.<sup>84</sup>

However, Radice pointed out, '[a]lthough, to their great credit, the polytechnics accepted many of the students turned away by the universities [...] they did not receive matching resources'.<sup>85</sup> Arguing for resources after the event was unlikely to be successful. Joseph retorted:

Because the staff-student ratio in the local authority higher education sector was so relatively luxurious - about 8:1 - there has been scope, with smaller numbers of lecturers and slightly less money, to take in very large numbers of extra students while maintaining standards. All credit to those concerned.<sup>86</sup>

It was also to the polytechnics' credit, as a Labour MP pointed out, that the differential cost for teaching between the two sectors was at least £800 per student, that is, the universities received about 25% more funding for teaching.<sup>87</sup> This meant that there were difficulties in particular in teaching science and technologies to the same standard in the polytechnics.<sup>88</sup> Understandably, the NAB was calling for a common unit of resource with universities for teaching purposes.<sup>89</sup> Although apparently a perfectly reasonable proposition, such a strategy simply indicated to the Government that it would be possible to undercut higher education teaching funding all round, rather than bring the polytechnics up to university levels of funding. Seemingly unaware of the trap, Radice urged that '[t]he more we blur the binary line the better it will be for the country'.<sup>90</sup> The "flexibility" of the polytechnics could be used (by one Tory MP) to redescribe the higher education of the future:

At present there is a growing programme of short courses involving some 100,000 students, which result from close collaboration between polytechnics, industry and the professions. [...] [T]he young people who are leaving the training schemes and many adults who are desperate to get off the dole queues, will look to these short courses for help and an opportunity for retraining for a job. There is no doubt that a strengthened and well-supported polytechnic sector will benefit

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<sup>84</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.921.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. See also Ch. 4, fn.57.

<sup>87</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.955. A January 1989 paper from the AUT's Education and Development Committee shows its realisation that proving higher teaching standards based on universities' research environment alone was problematic, and begged the question as to how research quality could be evaluated: UCU archives.

<sup>88</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.955.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., c.924.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., c.925.

industry and do much to lessen the fear of the unemployed that there is nowhere for them to go for higher education.<sup>91</sup>

Higher education could 'help the country meet the challenge of providing more useful, cost-conscious and beneficial higher education for many more people'.<sup>92</sup>

Polytechnics had marketed themselves as the cheaper option, effectively cutting and undermining - however unintentionally - the price of higher education across both sectors. Angela Rumbold (Tory) was able by 1984 to praise the rise in the student: staff ratio (SSR) in PSHE, rejoicing that '[o]verall expenditure and funding generally has already been brought to a much more satisfactory level'. It could be an exemplar: 'My message to the Government for the next very difficult decade, in planning for higher education, is to look at the experience that we have already had in the public sector.'<sup>93</sup> The Opposition could complain that the polytechnics needed more resources, or that university staff should work harder, but the polytechnics had effectively shown that they could teach more undergraduates from a wider social group more cheaply than the universities, apparently without damaging standards. And overall, student numbers had increased so, taken as a whole, the Government could show that higher education was expanding.<sup>94</sup> As time went on, the Government came increasingly to see that an expanded PSHE could "deliver" higher education on neoliberal terms; therefore, once resources eased in the mid-1980s, higher education could be expanded to meet that changed ideological purpose.

By 1984 MPs' comments had begun to reflect the changing language in terms of which the debate was conducted. The "training of manpower" was now a much more important part of higher education's role. Bennett asked Brooke 'what steps the Government are taking to ensure that resources for higher education in the polytechnics and the rest of the public sector are sufficient to meet the demands for trained manpower in the event of a recovery in the economy'.<sup>95</sup> Brooke's reply reflects the growing strength of the changing ideological purpose for higher education (my emphasis):

The National Advisory Body's plans for local authority higher education in 1984-85 [...] provide for a substantial increase in admissions *in subjects of relevance to*

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., cc.939-940.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., c.960.

<sup>94</sup> HC Deb, 28 February 1984, vol.55, cc.134-135.

<sup>95</sup> HC Deb, 9 July 1984, vol.63, c.373.

*the economy*, including a 15 per cent increase in first year engineering students. The Government are considering with the NAB and others what further measures may be needed to consolidate this shift of provision in later years.<sup>96</sup>

What neoliberals needed was the “flexibility” that would permit higher education to be changed in response to “customers’ needs”, or whatever the Government chose to decide those needs should be, as Joseph demonstrated:

The principles that should inform our policies are clear and constant, but, unlike the brave days of the 1960s, I have no illusions that those policies will allow us to lay down a blueprint for the next 20 years. What we have to try to do instead is to ensure that not only Government but all who are involved in decision making at all levels are able to respond flexibly to changing circumstances. This means more and better information about student aspirations and employers' needs, and, although much of the responsibility lies with institutions, the Government and their advisory bodies must also be able to keep track of developments if necessary change is to be sensibly facilitated.<sup>97</sup>

By the 1985 Green Paper and the 1987 White Paper, it can be clearly seen that the Government could be more confident that both sectors could help to contribute to the achievement of the Government’s ideological hegemony, crowned by the 1988 Education Reform Act. Championed by MPs, the polytechnics’ very success was helping to craft the Government’s ideological mission for higher education as a whole.

(b) The call for “extra time”

Another solution that helped the progress of the Government’s project was MPs’ call in the 1981 debates for “extra time” for universities to make the cuts, as lobbied by the UGC and the CVCP, and in accordance with the advice of the Public Accounts Committee.<sup>98</sup>

Seeing that they could not persuade the Government to reverse the cuts, MPs on all sides started to be deflected from arguments solely against the cuts and towards seeking a compromise: an extension of the cuts’ timescale from three years to five or six instead. Whilst agreeing that there should be cuts because expansion in the 1960s had been “excessive”, numerous Tory MPs argued against the speed at which they were being made.<sup>99</sup> A longer timescale would allow for “natural wastage” to occur

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, cc.913-918.

<sup>98</sup> HC Deb, 18 May 1982, vol.24, cc.176-177

<sup>99</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.322-344; 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.749-750. See also Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., op. cit., p. 5 and their fn.3.



instead. One Tory MP said that his local university's staff were 'deeply concerned about the whole process, but what disturbed them most was the timing of it. They felt that if the timing could be made more flexible, they might be able to cope.'<sup>100</sup>

Another Tory MP (also a member of his local university's governors) claimed that '[i]f the reduction in grant were phased over a longer period, and if it did not coincide with the reduction in the number of overseas students, it would be manageable in our case.'<sup>101</sup> Brian Mawhinney (Tory), a member of a London medical school, pinpointed the difficulty of Tory MPs:

I am in some difficulty. I support the Government's general policy. [...] However, I do not understand how I can be expected to support the Government in their policy and at the same time tell my students that their education will not be disadvantaged because almost half the teachers will have been moved out.<sup>102</sup>

One Tory MP seemed to assume that the Government's primary reason for the cuts was to save money but that logic would prevail, once he had pointed out the contradictions:

They want to save money, but, as a result of the timing, they will actually spend more money. Because of security of tenure [...] - although it is arguable that there should be different arrangements for new appointments in future - the likely effect of quick redundancy, rather than natural wastage, will be a dis-saving because expenditure will exceed the saving.<sup>103</sup>

The savings could be made 'only by changing the balance in the short term away from the expensive scientific disciplines, which have a higher loading of non-tenure employees per undergraduate place, in favour of the arts'.<sup>104</sup> As if coming to Waldegrave's rescue, the MP asked him 'not to say that he has not seen the evidence that he has seen, but to draw the logical inferences from that evidence - that the time span must be stretched to four years at least'.<sup>105</sup> Beith aided the Government by proposing how it might avoid opposition by listening to

the important arguments - which are clearly felt strongly on the Conservative Benches - about how the proposed cuts could be phased so that they brought about less damage and might even prove more effective in attaining the financial objectives that the right hon. Gentleman has set.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.323.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., c.326.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., c.348.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., cc.357-358.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., c.309.

Another MP presented the difference in savings over six - as opposed to three - years, and pointed out that it would even be more productive financially to make the cuts over six years.<sup>107</sup>

But the Government would not accede. In response to all these pleadings, and to ward off a backbench revolt, the Government's only concession was that they would put in some £50 million for the following year 1982/3 'to restructure the university system and to help with the amelioration of the rundown'.<sup>108</sup> The UGC was permitted to use some discretion in timescale but only in respect of specific universities. As one Labour MP pointed out, the real reason for the cuts had become clear:

It is an historic occasion. The hon. Gentleman [Waldegrave] consistently refers to the running down of universities. This is the first time that I have heard in the House a Minister honest enough to say what the Government are doing.<sup>109</sup>

In one sense, nonetheless, the pleadings for an extension were effective. Some funds were produced to pay for the 'running down' of universities and MPs saved face with their constituents but did not have to disobey the Government. However, in the process, opposition was watered down and sidelined into an argument about timescale, rather than about cuts *per se*. Rallying around the call for "extra time" for the cuts gave MPs on all sides an honourable way out but it demonstrated the way they were prepared to shift ideologically from the initially uncompromising Opposition motion against the cuts. At the beginning of the 18 November 1981 debate, Kinnock explicitly condemned the cuts and called for provision to be reinstated. The subsequent repeated interventions of (particularly Tory) MPs, calling for a longer timescale, at least for the particular universities in their constituencies, had the effect of enabling Joseph to allow MPs to feel they had had their say, whilst also enabling him to ascertain their views. In light of this, he could rehearse a more subtle - veiled - approach to making the cuts acceptable by making MPs think that what they were really arguing about was simply timescale and whether a specific cut was in the interests of their particular constituency or not. He summed up opposition arguments and cast himself as a reasonable man, reframing the issue in terms of timescale rather than the fundamental matter of the cuts *per se*:

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<sup>107</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, cc.747-748.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., cc.765-766.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

The argument is whether, after a period of sustained expansion, [the universities] should have an adjustment that is less sharp and less abrupt than is being asked for. For many Conservative Members and, I suspect, many Opposition Members, that is the heart of the matter. [...] [However,] we are ready to argue about the scale and speed.<sup>110</sup>

Kinnock's response effectively caves in, seeming to indicate an acceptance of this last phrase with the words 'That is good news', even though it turned out not to be, as Joseph did not in fact extend the timescale overall. The problem was simply handed over to the UGC to discuss with individual universities, some of which did get a longer timescale to make the cuts.<sup>111</sup> Ideological opposition to the principles concerned had been dissipated. Furthermore, the 1981 debates about the cuts not making financial sense had the beneficial effect of enabling the Government to see that one of the next issues to be tackled would have to be academic autonomy and the status of hitherto untouchable professional academics, symbolised by the power of tenure.

(c) Tenure

The main reason why academic staff redundancies would cost more money than other job cuts was because, contractually, tenured staff had to be compensated. The potential costs of making them redundant gave credence to the claim that the cuts did not make financial sense. For academics and liberal educationalists, including many Conservatives, tenure was a powerful expression of university autonomy and academic freedom from state interference: its abolition was rightly seen as tantamount to political control. If the Government wanted greater control over universities, they would indeed need to challenge tenure as it prevented the Government's (or the funding councils', the CVCP's or Vice-Chancellors' and their governing bodies', acting as the Government's agents) ability to make cuts quickly as and when opportunities arose. Beith seemed to think this was inevitable:

Clearly, universities will also be forced into somehow bypassing or sidestepping the tenure system in the future if they are to expect to be forced to make redundancies in the years to come. I foresee many more short-term appointments [...].<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.304.

<sup>111</sup> For example, Salford got an extra year: see HC Deb, 18 May 1982, vol.24, cc.176-177.

<sup>112</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.309-310. As David Harvey (op. cit., p. 4) points out, the shorter the contracts the more advantageous it is to neoliberalism.

A Government argument in favour of abolishing tenure was that it was an example of the universities' dependence on the state, and that university managers were therefore not free to do as they wished - as they would if running private universities. The Government thus claimed that tenure demonstrated a lack of academic freedom rather than, as those defending it thought, the most powerful expression of it.

Having seen how tenure hampered the flexibility to cut academic jobs quickly in the early 1980s, Joseph was in a better position to move to abolish it. At his request, the CVCP wrote to universities inviting them to consider how new academic contracts could allow for 'dismissal for reasons of redundancy or financial exigency'.<sup>113</sup> As the CVCP received few responses from universities to this proposal, Joseph stated

that tenure in the strongest form in which it is enjoyed by some universities cannot be justified by reference either to the need to protect academic freedom or to the case for reasonable security and continuity of employment for academics, both of which I accept. Neither requires that academics should be guaranteed continued employment until retiring age no matter how the circumstances of their university change.

I therefore propose that tenure should in future be limited. The Government is prepared to introduce legislation if this cannot be achieved voluntarily.<sup>114</sup>

If universities would not 'act themselves to comply with the Government's wishes', he would in any case introduce legislation.<sup>115</sup> There seemed to be no alternative.

Brooke took up the argument:

Academic tenure in the strictest form in which it is found in some universities is incompatible with their dependence on the taxpayer for the bulk of their funding. [...] [P]roposals for the limitation of such tenure [...] are designed to give universities long-term greater flexibility of response to any future variations in their financial circumstances.<sup>116</sup>

The Chair of the CVCP appeared to be unable to do anything other than cave in, as he wrote to Joseph:

It is evident in the light of the most recent enquiry we made of all Vice-Chancellors and Principals that the majority do not believe their institutions could bring about the changes you envisage by their own volition within the timescale you have in mind. [...]

In the circumstances it now remains for you to decide what you want to do. We shall expect to be consulted further when you have reviewed the matter.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> HC Deb, 10 May 1984, vol.59, cc.452-453.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> HC Deb, 24 May 1984, vol.60, c.488W.

<sup>117</sup> HC Deb, 1 August 1984, vol.65, c.268W.

The CVCP had effectively washed their hands of their responsibility to protect and promote academics' interests in this respect. Despite vigorous defence by opposition parties in the House of Commons, the battle to retain tenure was lost.<sup>118</sup> Now that the Vice-Chancellors had caved in, the way was clear for the Government to take control and abolish tenure, as enshrined in the 1988 Education Reform Act, and to which I return in Chapter 6.<sup>119</sup>

**(iv) Student grants and loans: a thorn in the side or the next step forward?**

The Opposition used the same argument about cuts to student grants as they had in opposing other cuts: that this would limit the access of poorer applicants and make higher education more élitist. However, what almost derailed the Government was the considerable opposition from MPs - and particularly Tory MPs - to these cuts, because many of them and their middle-class constituents took student grants for granted, effectively supplying a subsidy for their children's higher education.<sup>120</sup>

Some Tories had long thought that the means test should be abolished and parental contributions reduced, despite the Government's view that it was up to parents to make the contribution they should.<sup>121</sup> Joseph acknowledged that students were suffering financial hardship and suggested that they should try 'part-time earnings [...] or loans or stinting or a combination of these three'.<sup>122</sup> This was hardly practicable at a time of high unemployment, as various MPs pointed out.<sup>123</sup> Joseph's attempt not to increase maintenance grants but to increase parental contributions instead resulted (as we saw earlier) not just in Opposition objections but also in Tory backbench rebellion. Tory MP Tony Marlow in fact used an earlier Opposition argument in pointing out that the Chancellor seemed able to afford to reduce taxes in

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<sup>118</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.970.

<sup>119</sup> Freedom of speech in higher education institutions was protected by the Education (No. 2) Act 1986. As Chapter 6 shows, the Lords fought with some success for clauses to be inserted in the 1988 Education Reform Act to safeguard academic freedom.

<sup>120</sup> Halcrow, M., op. cit., pp.180-181.

<sup>121</sup> Thatcher did not fulfil her promise made in 1978 that a Tory Government would 'conduct a thorough review of student grants [in which] highest priority will go to a reduction in the parental contribution': quoted by Labour MP Stuart Randall, HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.966. Waldegrave repeatedly urged parents to make good their contribution: see, for example, HC Deb, 23 November 1982, vol.32, c.811.

<sup>122</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1334.

<sup>123</sup> HC Deb, 23 November 1982, vol.32, cc.804-805.

the next budget so there was clearly enough money to decrease parental contributions to students' maintenance.<sup>124</sup>

As with institutional cuts, most MPs argued on behalf of students in their own constituencies. David Steel (Liberal, and Rector of Edinburgh University) broadened the argument by observing that students were one of the 'groups of people in our society who are less well off than others [and] are being squeezed under the alleged non-incomes policy of the Government'.<sup>125</sup> As seen in Chapter 4, Joseph moved in 1984 to halve the minimum maintenance award - which he then abolished in 1985 - and he also attempted to require richer parents to pay tuition fees. On the face of it, it seemed reasonable to require rich parents to pay fees.<sup>126</sup> But Tory backbenchers vehemently opposed this, Marlow for instance:

At the age of 18, a person becomes adult with the right to vote. How on earth can the government sustain the argument that any parent anywhere should make a contribution in this sense? The European convention on human rights states that there shall be no fear or favour about education and that everybody should be entitled to it. It also states that there shall be no discrimination and no advantage to anyone because of birth. How does the Government proposal stand up before the European convention on human rights?<sup>127</sup>

When Joseph had to withdraw his proposal that richer parents should pay student tuition fees, Mark Carlisle (Tory) welcomed the move, describing free tuition as 'the principle of free higher education in this country'.<sup>128</sup>

The move to abolish differential travel allowances for students also met with considerable opposition from MPs on all sides. Joseph maintained that moving to a flat rate would save money but, when questioned by MPs, Brooke was unable to estimate how much the changes would save or whether some students would be worse off under the new system.<sup>129</sup> In the long debates on this issue in 1984, several Tories spoke against the proposed flat-rate travel grant, especially those in whose constituencies "out of town" universities were based. Beith asked:

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., c.819.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., c.812.

<sup>126</sup> Halcrow (op. cit., p. 182) describes the ironic discussion between Joseph and an Opposition acquaintance, just before the former faced 250 angry Tory backbenchers in December 1984. The acquaintance told Joseph it was a mistake to get parents to pay more, to which Joseph replied: 'How can you as a socialist say it is wrong to make the well-off pay towards their children getting a university education?' This needed a strong rebuttal, not forthcoming.

<sup>127</sup> HC Deb, 30 October 1984, vol.65, c.1257.

<sup>128</sup> HC Deb, 5 December 1984, vol.69, c.362.

<sup>129</sup> HC Deb, 4 June 1984, vol.61, cc.68-69.

What is the justification for giving public money to help with travel costs to the very students who do not suffer those costs rather than to the students who do? [...] The Government have admitted that they did no research on the consequences of the change in the travel grant system. [...] The change is utterly contrary to reason. [...] [T]he Government have turned the system of travel grants into not only a mess but a source of real hardship and discouragement to many students. The grant system itself has lost any rationality and is not properly related to student costs. The Government have made the student more than ever dependent on his parents, and they distort the choices which people should be making about what sort of education is good for them by the application of such financial pressures.<sup>130</sup>

Without supporting evidence, Brooke continued to insist - generalising, in ideological fashion, from the particular - that the existing system was 'administratively cumbersome and inefficient and therefore inherently expensive' and that - even more importantly - it gave no incentive to students to seek the cheapest form of travel.<sup>131</sup> There was fierce opposition from some Tory MPs. For example, Fred Silvester (Tory) said that he found it 'marginally unconvincing that the Government's economic policy depends upon depriving students in my constituency of £100 a year'. He did not believe the Government's assertions:

We have had no figures for the administrative savings that would accrue. [...] The Government should face the fact that we have put forward a proposal that is giving money to people who have no justification for receiving it, and taking money from people who have a justification for receiving it. I am sorry to put it so simplistically, but that is what it boils down to. Why on earth should we make such a proposal when there seems to be no gain in either equity or public expenditure?<sup>132</sup>

Clearly it was not a matter of saving money and some Tory MPs had realised that much. Opposition MPs recognised that the erosion of student grants would aid the Government's plan to cut them altogether, by making it seem as if student loans were the only alternative.<sup>133</sup> The scheme eventually introduced in 1990 was both costly and administratively cumbersome. Labour MP Jack Straw produced figures to show that 'uprating' the grant in line with inflation would be cheaper.<sup>134</sup> But objections along these lines made no impression. This agenda was about cutting benefit payments of all kinds to students, so that a loan scheme - better suited to free market

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<sup>130</sup> HC Deb, 30 October 1984, vol.65, cc.1251-1255.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., c.1258.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., c.1268.

<sup>133</sup> HC Deb, 5 December 1984, vol.69, cc.370-371; 23 November 1982, vol.32, c.813.

<sup>134</sup> HC Deb, 9 July 1990, vol.176, cc.123-148.

values and interests - could be brought in, becoming acceptable in time to MPs on all sides.<sup>135</sup>

Given that many Tory backbenchers had spoken against loans, why did they in the end cave in?<sup>136</sup> With the Government remaining firm, MPs started to shift - as they had with university cuts in general - towards entertaining the possibility of a loan scheme. Some Tories were so strongly against parental contributions and the threat of parents paying tuition fees that loans seemed to them to be a freedom from that dependency.<sup>137</sup> Tory backbenchers were appeased and the Opposition could not produce a robust alternative. The Student Loans Act received royal assent in April 1990 and came into operation that autumn.

**(v) Ideological step change achieved?**

We have seen how the process of debate in the House of Commons helped to strengthen and construct the “ideological step changes” the Government needed to achieve. As higher education institutions started to be undermined by cuts and the challenge to the assumption that they and students would be automatically funded by the state, MPs (with some exceptions) started to compromise. As distortions and confusions helped to make the Government’s ideology appear to be the only alternative, deeper ideological messages started to become embedded: that higher education should be compliant to Government directives; should compete between and within institutions to get students and save jobs; should be persuaded to reflect a more vocational and entrepreneurial focus; should accept the demise of age-old practices (such as tenure); should require students to borrow the money for their higher education rather than expect the state to provide; and that higher education institutions should seek private funding to shore up diminished public resources. In short, higher education was being drawn into becoming an ideological arm of a neoliberal state which in turn it was helping to construct. More subtly than can be discerned by simply looking at which Acts of Parliament were passed, from reading

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<sup>135</sup> See Ch. 4, fn.31. At the height of the New Labour Government in 2004, the educationalist Ted Wragg commented: ‘Instead of expressing complete and utter horror at the very thought of charging young people thousands of pounds for what should be their birthright, MPs have become caught up in the very same market practices that some claim to abhor.’ - Wragg, T., ‘Opinion: We are now all so brainwashed we are no longer shocked when education is sold off like a commodity, says Ted Wragg’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 6 January 2004, p. 5.

<sup>136</sup> HC Deb, 23 November 1982, vol.32, cc.814-815.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, c.817.



*Hansard* one discerns a more veiled, incremental process of the construction of control, an ideological drift arising from MPs' caving in to the greater political power of the Government, and the weaknesses and contradictions of their own position, first by beginning to compromise and then positively to buy in to at least part of the Thatcherite agenda. Thus an originally negative attack on the universities - the cuts - together with what might be seen for the polytechnics as a positive development - that is expansion, albeit on tight resources - developed into a positive ideological drive to undermine the whole of higher education. The Government had successfully used both the contradictions of their own policies and those of the Opposition to mask the reality of the set of ideas they were proposing and thus to further their fundamental cause. The Tories could capitalise on the weaknesses exposed to promote their underlying ideology, that is an ever more radical agenda towards their goal of a smaller, élite system for the few, and a more technical higher education for the many, to be pursued through more centralised planning of higher education answerable to Government demands. As Radice concluded in 1987, higher education had been brought 'under government diktat'.<sup>138</sup>

In Chapter 7, I consider in more detail how this process was furthered outside Parliament both by those in support and - in part, and unwittingly - by those previously against. Meanwhile, I turn next to consider how the ideological process was supported or challenged in the House of Lords.

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted in National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO), 'Polytechnics and major colleges: letter to secretaries of certain local government branches', 3 April 1987.

## **Chapter 6    Higher education debated: the House of Lords**

### **(i)    The struggle for the terms of the debate**

Using the same approach I adopted in reviewing the House of Commons' debates, I focus here on the extent to which the debates in the House of Lords can be understood as contributing to the construction of consent to the Government's ideology, or whether they posed a challenge. As with the Commons, we shall see first how the contradictions in the Lords' positions on the early cuts were a building block in that construction. On the basis of the same dichotomies I identified earlier - élitism, excellence and standards *versus* expansion; liberal *versus* instrumental and vocational; the free market and privatisation *versus* public funding, planning and control - I consider in particular their debates on two aspects of policy that could be said to epitomise the free economy: strong state. In the Lords' two most extensive sets of debates, first, on student grants and loans and, second, on the centralising tendencies of the Education Reform Bill 1987/88, we shall see the limitations of the Lords' challenge and how that led some - ironically - to fall back on the Government's preferred option: that higher education should move out of state funding and control altogether.

The form and content of the Lords debates were prescribed by the House's remit and constitution. Given its functions are, *inter alia*, to debate policy matters and to consider draft legislation referred from the Commons, its discussions range from broad principles to extremely detailed drafting matters. The Lords who spoke on higher education in the 1980s often had practical experience of the sector, being, or having been, senior academics, members of governing bodies or Vice-Chancellors. The Lords' debates highlight - at times more clearly than those in the Commons - that those opposing the Government's radical assault on established norms grasped the ideological significance of the Government's intentions and the specific actions being taken to achieve them. Nevertheless, despite the strength of feeling expressed in many debates, the constitutional power of the second house in challenging the Government's overriding numerical and ideological supremacy in the House of Commons was limited.

There are many instances in the early 1980s' debates of Lords challenging Government peers to clarify their confused and confusing stance on higher education.<sup>1</sup> While it would become clear later in the 1980s that the Government was seeking to impose 'a planned economy of learning', as Earl Russell termed it, the situation in the early 1980s was much less coherent.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of a Government lead, some peers initiated debates on key issues. For example, as student choice had taken the post-Robbins expansion predominantly into the arts, humanities and social sciences, they asked whether there should be more emphasis on encouraging applicants to take up science and technology places, in order to fulfil the Robbins Report's expectation.<sup>3</sup> Given that many universities - apart from the technological ones - had not taken opportunities to reform and broaden their curricula (as the Robbins Report had recommended) nor had fundamentally addressed the problem of low intakes from poorer socio-economic groups, how could they be encouraged to do so? As PSHE had been formed with a view to concentrating on technological and vocational subjects but was predominantly expanding in the same subject areas as the universities, should PSHE's remit be reasserted or changed? Should science and technology studies be more applied?<sup>4</sup> As the binary policy had, if anything, reinforced the universities' insistence on their predominance over PSHE in teaching and research, and as funding between the two sectors was so inequitable, should this hierarchy be confronted by reconfiguring higher education as a unitary system?<sup>5</sup> Should there be a plurality of higher education institutions but with only the "top" universities undertaking research?<sup>6</sup> How could the decline that was about to occur in the late 1980s in the number of 18-year olds (by as much as 30%) be used as an opportunity to extend access to mature and other "non-traditional" applicants, so that the output of graduates could be maintained or even increased, economic growth

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<sup>1</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 37; 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.745-751, p. 1; 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> In the 19 January 1983 debate (op.cit., cc.1416-1490), Lord Pennock stated that, within the numbers of university first degree candidates already accepted for 1984, 25% of applicants would be admitted for social sciences (of which just over 1% would take business studies); 22% for languages, literature and the arts; and 25% for science and mathematics, of which 13% would take engineering.

<sup>4</sup> HL Deb, 17 February 1982, vol.427, cc.564-626, p. 19; 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Around 1984, the Labour Party - the very party which had set up the binary system - was proposing that higher education should be a unitary system, while - ironically - the Tory Government preferred the *status quo*, at least for the time being. For details of the inequitable funding between the sectors, see HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.745-751, pp. 4-5; cc.758-851, pp. 14-15;

<sup>6</sup> HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 7 and p. 24.

stimulated and the APR brought closer to that of Britain's competitors?<sup>7</sup> To meet "non-traditional" students' needs, how could more part-time and continuing education courses be provided?<sup>8</sup> These are some of the very pertinent issues raised in Lords' speeches; but, in the main, their views fell on stony ground. The debates amounted to little more than a series of interesting points which the Government did not need to act upon, showing no interest in initiating a co-ordinated review of higher education. And the universities had to rein in their resources, so falling back on conservatism rather than reform was the general, and predictable, reaction. There was in fact more innovation in curriculum design and pedagogy in the polytechnics, as they continued to expand and develop new courses validated by the CNAA.

However, even in the midst of the chaotic speed of the cuts in the early 1980s, some Lords continued to voice principled opposition to the Government either on liberal or utilitarian grounds. For example, Labour peers initiated a debate in 1983, calling attention to 'the erosion of educational opportunities under the present Government, and the adverse effect this will have on economic recovery'.<sup>9</sup> Some Lords took a traditionally liberal stance, stating that higher education should not be cut back, not linked to economic "needs" and not subject to the practices of the market.<sup>10</sup> In 1984, Lord Flowers considered that it was 'still not too late for the Government to affirm their belief in the importance of having highly educated and well prepared citizens [reaching their] full potential', instead of continuing the policies which had 'reduced the chance of university entry over the last few years by about one in seven'.<sup>11</sup> Some Lords claimed that the eventual drop in the number of 18-year olds was being used by the Government as an excuse to cut higher education, to which access should be

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., cc.732-741, p. 1; cc.758-851, p. 19; 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 3; 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 38. Many Lords – including Lords Butterfield and Dainton and Baronesses Seear and Blackstone (the latter, Master of Birkbeck College) - urged the Government to find ways of extending access to under-represented groups. Part-time higher education students had never been satisfactorily funded under the grants scheme, so some liberally-minded Lords saw this debate as an opportunity to resolve that. From the Government's point of view, there was an incentive to promote part-time education as long as students did not receive mandatory grants. There was no incentive for universities to take on part-time students: see HL Deb, 16 May 1988, vol.497, cc.83-173, p. 57; 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1310-1323, pp. 20-31.

<sup>8</sup> HL Deb, 17 February 1982, vol.427, cc.564-626, pp. 15-16.

<sup>9</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490.

<sup>10</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 32; 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 1.

extended.<sup>12</sup> Lord Fulton considered that ‘[a] modern state simply cannot do without strong universities’.<sup>13</sup> Lord Alport believed that

[u]nless this country is prepared to invest in higher education to provide the resources which the universities require, to allow the able and dedicated men and women who preside over them to have freedom of judgement and initiative which is an essential part of our whole academic tradition, then the decline of our country’s fortunes to which the Prime Minister has so frequently referred will be a reality at an accelerated pace. This will certainly be true if the attitude of the Government to the universities continues to be characterised by interference, discouragement and parsimony.<sup>14</sup>

Lord Grimond, speaking straight after this, also stressed the liberal purposes of a university.<sup>15</sup> However, the Government did not heed the Lords’ call for a debate on principles. It did not matter to Thatcher and her followers: universities simply had to be cut.

As the attention of higher education was diverted towards the immediate problems caused by the 1981 cuts, the debates in the Lords came to be dictated by the Government’s agenda. Baroness David realised this in 1984: although the original motive for higher education cuts ‘seems to have been the simple desire to reduce public expenditure’, that motive had ‘now assumed *the disguise* [my emphasis] of a restructuring of the whole of HE’.<sup>16</sup> Ideology was working here to usher in a more fundamental change than simply cutting expenditure. This threw the Lords onto the defensive. When the Government’s opportunity to intervene in higher education came about through the agency of the UGC and the NAB (as I consider in more detail in Chapter 7), the Lords’ discussions shifted to the validity or otherwise of specific Government or sector decisions - or the contradictions inherent in them - rather than the broad policy options they had been considering earlier. Reactions to piecemeal and *ad hoc* moves arising from the cuts hijacked the Lords’ debates, just as had occurred in the Commons. Consideration of the details clouded the main issues. Speaking in a debate in 1981, Lord Crowther-Hunt characterised the response of the Minister (Baroness Young) as ‘a smokescreen of trivia [masking] the consequences of the very serious cuts that the [...] system as a whole is going to

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<sup>12</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 11 and p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, pp. 11-18.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 11-13.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., cc.745-751, p. 3.

have to make'.<sup>17</sup> Some Lords saw through this ideological smokescreen. For example, Lord James in 1981 reminded the Government that

one of their earliest actions was to make massive reductions in income tax that mainly benefited people with incomes of £10,000 a year or over. That is one of the reasons why they are short of money for public expenditure now. The argument behind it was that if you encourage the rich in that way it will give them an incentive, they will all work hard and invent and the wheels of industry will turn - just as we see them doing all the time! It is not working.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, Lord Molloy in 1983 described the "real" issue as being about 'the erosion of opportunities for all our people', as he went on to describe how the Government's policies amounted to 'an increase in opportunities for the wealthy', whereby 'part of the cuts in education will make a contribution to the massive tax reductions for the very well-off so that they can send their children to private schools'.<sup>19</sup> As some Lords realised (as had some MPs), the cuts revealed the ideological path the Government was on.

## **(ii) Cuts and contradictions**

So did the Lords' comments on the cuts - like those of MPs - demonstrate contradictions that helped to build the Government's ideological agenda? Those who supported the Government's cuts included those Lords with the traditional Tory view that higher education had grown too fast since the 1960s.<sup>20</sup> To keep universities as 'centres of excellence', 'contraction' and 'rationalisation' of courses was no bad thing, according to Lord Belstead.<sup>21</sup> Some of those Lords who opposed university cuts did not necessarily oppose cuts to PSHE, considering that the establishment of the polytechnics had been 'a big mistake', resulting in 'over-provision', as Lord Vaizey put it.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Lord James thought that arts and social sciences in polytechnics should be cut, and Lord Annan described the expansion of higher education through the binary policy as a 'folly'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> HL Deb, 18 March 1981, vol.418, cc.761-850, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> HL Deb, 18 March 1981, vol.418, cc.761-850, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Vaizey was one of 50 academics who signed a declaration in 1969, resulting in the the private University of Buckingham, opened in 1976: *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21 and p. 41 respectively. Annan was Provost of University College, London, in the late 1960s and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London from 1978-1981.

Some Lords challenged - as had MPs - the alleged necessity of the cuts by identifying the contradictions in the Government's policy and practice. For example, on the one hand it did not make sense that staff posts had been cut when, on the other, money was spent on "restructuring" or hiring back previously redundant staff as temporary cover or creating 'new blood' posts.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, given that the Government was maintaining that there was a need for a more highly-skilled population, trained in the applied sciences and developing technologies, cutting the very technological universities that were training and educating students in these new subject areas did not make sense.<sup>25</sup> Those opposing Government policy pointed out the contradictions in making reductions when growth was needed to enable Britain to compete in international markets.<sup>26</sup> Others pointed out that, because of tenure, the cuts would not in fact be cost-effective, maintaining that the loss of prestigious academic staff would damage standards to such an extent that institutions' ability to contribute to innovation and growth would be curtailed.<sup>27</sup> Baroness David summed up this chaotic situation, although failing to state how such chaos contributed to the Government's ideological plan:

The Government's policy appears to lack all consistency. What can be more confusing for those in charge, whether in the university or local authority sector, than to be forced to go into an elaborate, time-consuming, painful exercise, planning curtailment of the opportunities they are offering and later, when the powers-that-be realise the extent of the harm they are doing, to be thrown some crumbs and told to rearrange and plan again? How can a service survive and prosper when improvisation appears to be all that Ministers can offer? It is Government by whim.<sup>28</sup>

Other contributions to the debate demonstrated contradictions in speakers' own positions; or else their comments were effectively "hostages to fortune" that could be exploited by Government supporters. For example, Baroness Seear considered that, from her thirty years' experience of working in higher education, there was 'room for both economy and change and that it [was] not altogether a bad thing', even though she did not agree with the way in which the Government was carrying this out.<sup>29</sup> Some peers acknowledged the need for reform but considered that this should be

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<sup>24</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 39 and p. 42; 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.745-751, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> HL Deb, 17 March 1982, vol.428, cc.643-645, p. 2; 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, pp.15-19, p. 42; 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

achieved in collaboration with the higher education sectors.<sup>30</sup> As in the Commons, such comments could be seized on to strengthen the Government's ideological position, as Young showed in praising Seear's contribution and rephrasing it to justify the Government's actions in 'trying to produce a more efficient and cost-effective system, more attuned to the needs of the country and the economy'.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in expressing the view that 'change was perhaps necessary in universities', Baroness David was effectively supporting Government action, however unwittingly.<sup>32</sup> Forceful though many Lords' principled statements were, any contradictory or weak comments fragmented effective opposition and allowed the Government to plug any gaps in their ideological progress.

### **(iii) Contributing to instrumentalism**

Once the Government's instrumentalism became more explicit, so did the views of opposing Lords. As 'an unrepentant élitist', Annan maintained that there should be a hierarchy of 'excellence' with eight universities at the top, using the American model as his guide. This would require the rest to do something "useful". As his fellow Lord Perry stated: 'The rest need something different, something broader, something cheaper.'<sup>33</sup> The polytechnics, Annan stressed, should offer only vocational courses. This reflected the NAB's promotion of that focus, as PSHE especially needed to serve "national needs" for more highly-qualified "manpower", particularly in the developing technologies.<sup>34</sup> The Government should require higher education institutions to spend less public money, according to Annan, who professed himself unable to understand why academic staff and students displayed 'a reluctance to respond to the demands of the market place'.<sup>35</sup> For both those who favoured the Government's more vocational focus for higher education, or who had an élitist view, interventions to cut student places in the arts and social sciences made sense, especially in the polytechnics.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> HL Deb, 19 January 1983, vol.437, cc.1416-1490, p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, cc.732-741, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>36</sup> HL Deb, 24 June 1981, vol.421, cc.1068-1146, p. 14.



#### (iv) **Curbing the Government's ideological progress**

Albeit a rearguard action, the most effective way in which objecting Lords challenged the Government's ideological drive was at the level of detail in the consideration of draft legislation. Objectors could slip in more substantial points to debates on proposed amendments. I consider the two areas where the challenge was greatest, especially in the latter half of the 1980s. These exemplify the Government's ideological drive towards the "marketisation" of higher education - ironically through central government control, by their "nationalising" the means by which it could be freed from dependence on state funding.

##### (a) The free economy: from student grants to loans

Lords representing the Government initially presented the action taken in relation to student grants (such as freezing the grant, cutting various benefits, etc., as noted in Chapters 4 and 5) as primarily 'financial decisions', driven by the need to cut public expenditure.<sup>37</sup> Opposing Lords maintained that what the Government was "really" trying to do in the early 1980s was to abolish grants and bring in loans, as a deliberate way of narrowing access. For example, Lords Molloy and Glenamara challenged the Government to 'come clean' and admit that the Government's intended action would return higher education to 'an élitist privilege'.<sup>38</sup>

Although it seemed in the early 1980s that it was a failure on Joseph's part that he was unable to persuade the Cabinet to proceed towards enacting a student loans scheme, the Government's delay in tackling the thorny issue of student support served as a means of achieving their desired outcome pragmatically, as if by default. With inflation putting a strain on the value of grants and the parental subsidy, the Government's *ad hoc* actions - such as Joseph's attempt to get richer parents to pay tuition fees (rapidly withdrawn as a proposal in 1984) or Government moves from 1987 onwards to withdraw students' access to social security and other incidental payments - caused some students extreme anxiety.<sup>39</sup> As many students were turning to banks for loans to complete their studies, these "loans by the back door" paved the

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<sup>37</sup> HL Deb, 27 November 1984, vol.457, cc.757-759, p. 1; 14 October 1985, vol.467, cc.399-409, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> HL Deb, 2 February 1983, vol.438, cc.803-805, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> HL Deb, 14 October 1985, vol.467, cc.399-409, p. 2; 18 June 1986, vol.476, cc.902-908, p. 2.

way for the Government's preferred solution: a privately-run loans scheme.<sup>40</sup> The Government seemed to espouse expansion and choice but, in fact, did not need to do any more than allow middle class student numbers to carry on increasing overall as financial anxieties were clearly not deterring enough of these applicants from higher education.

Once the Tories realised that their ideological agenda could be served by an expanded higher education system for the middle classes, they moved to cut support for students and bring in top-up student loans. Despite repeated calls from the Lords and other interested parties from early in the first Thatcher administration for an inclusive review of student support, when the time came the Government moved at speed. Without proper consultation with vice-chancellors or polytechnic directors, it introduced a scheme for which the draft legislation was lacking in attention to detail, administrative practicalities and costing.<sup>41</sup> Once the November 1988 Top-up loans White Paper was published as a draft Bill in November 1989, it raised more queries than it answered. When it was referred to the Lords, they worked hard to resolve its shortcomings but the timescale was tight, as the Government was determined that the legislation would take effect from September 1990. In the same way as the Commons had tried to get "extra time" for the university cuts to be implemented, the Lords tried to slow down the start date of the top-up loans legislation, given that so many major flaws were apparent in the draft Bill; but to no avail. The Government antagonised all the interested parties in higher education, including the CVCP who refused unanimously to support the draft scheme voluntarily. However, the Government could of course compel higher education institutions to comply with legislation. The CVCP, the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics (CDP) and other bodies proposed alternatives to the Secretary of State that involved a graduate contribution, for instance through national insurance or a graduate tax levied on higher earners, but he flatly refused to consider these.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> HL Deb, 14 October 1985, vol.467, cc.399-409, p. 3. See also, 27 November 1984, vol.457, cc.757-759, pp. 1-2; 5 December 1984, vol.457, cc.1336-1343, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> HL Deb, 27 November 1984, vol.457, cc.757-759, p. 1; 18 June 1986, vol.476, cc.896-902, pp. 1-4 and cc.902-908, p. 1; 19 June 1989, vol.509, cc.34-42, p. 5; 21 December 1989, vol.514, cc.345-349; 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 7 and p. 15, pp. 21-23 and p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> HL Deb, 19 June 1989, vol.509, cc.34-42, p. 4; 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, pp. 20-21 and p. 34; 19 March 1990, vol.517, cc.100-182, p. 49. See Ch. 4, fn.31.

This was clearly not about saving money or increasing access, as several Lords pointed out. For example, Lord Mackie stated: ‘The Government say that we must save money, but the money for the loans will come out of the Exchequer and there is no certainty at all that it will be repaid.’<sup>43</sup> Lord Boyd-Carpenter asked: ‘[W]hat is all this legislation in aid of?’ He continued by pointing out that ‘according to the Government’s calculations there will be no relief to public funds until well into the next century’.<sup>44</sup> Russell asked ‘whether, with the costs of the administration fully calculated, this scheme will result in a net decrease in public expenditure?’ If not, he asked how the Government was justifying its introduction. Was it, he queried, ‘simply because it is for the good of the students’ souls?’<sup>45</sup> The Government claimed that the scheme would increase access, arguing that more students would enter higher education if they did not have to rely on parental support.<sup>46</sup> However, when the Government was so unwilling to accept a Lords’ amendment to monitor access as a statutory requirement, many Lords expressed their disbelief at the Government’s claims, accusing it of using the principle of access as a cover for an ideological agenda. As Seear put it:

If the Government had really meant what they said about recognising the need for doubling the number of people in higher education, what would they have done? They would not have produced this pathetic little Bill. Months ago they would have got together representatives of the various groups concerned with higher education. Through some kind of commission or enquiry [...], they would have thrashed out the problems in advance and come up with the kind of proposals which could then have been embodied in acceptable legislation.<sup>47</sup>

As became apparent from the draft Bill, part-time students, mature students over 50 and other groups would be disadvantaged or excluded from access to loans as a statutory entitlement. Lord Kilmarnock voiced the opinion of many Lords in failing to see ‘how [the scheme] will contribute to the expansion of higher education’, as the Government’s rhetoric elsewhere had implied. He surmised: ‘That is of course not its avowed purpose. Nowhere is such an aim mentioned.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 21. See also HL Deb, 19 June 1989, vol.509, cc.34-42, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> HL Deb, 19 June 1989, vol.509, cc.34-42, p. 3. See also Russell and others on 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, pp. 8-21, p. 41, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> HL Deb, 19 June 1989, vol.509, cc.34-42, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup> HL Deb, 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1327-1372, p. 18.

As the scheme was not about saving money or increasing access, it became clearer to the Lords that its purpose was primarily to put into practice the Government's fundamental belief that students should support themselves (or be supported by parents who could afford to do so) instead of being supported by the state, as had been the case since 1962. Once the student loans proposals came out, the Government could be more open about the ideological imperative. One Lord in 1990 quoted a DES spokesperson admitting that '[t]he general philosophy is towards self-help, encouraging young people to work their way through college'.<sup>49</sup> For those like Baroness Cox, who deemed that a higher education was 'a great privilege', it was logical that it should not be paid for wholly by the state, as she saw it as a 'personal investment'. Her fellow Tory, Lord Nugent, also considered that

to encourage students into [...] dependence upon the state – that is, the taxpayer – is in my view to undermine the sense of independence and responsibility which certainly I want them to learn. I want to encourage students to see their higher education as an investment in themselves and to see loans as a help from the taxpayer which is to be repayed (*sic*) when they have reached the stage of having a secure job.<sup>50</sup>

Some in opposition realised that this was an ideological agenda. As Baroness Blackstone pointed out, the reason why the Government was not considering other viable alternatives was because they were 'indulging in a certain amount of ideological clap-trap about students being victims of a culture of dependence'.<sup>51</sup> A student loans scheme would set up the necessary link between a student's higher education and their earning power. Instead of simply choosing to study "for its own sake", students would need to be concerned about the debt that would accrue, and so the choice of course would to some extent need to be an instrumental one: it would preferably lead to a job with a high salary. Graduates had to realise that they needed to contribute to the enterprise culture, to reject a liberal notion of higher education whose graduates fulfilled a life of public service on relatively modest salaries. As we have seen, Russell recognised the change of focus: 'It is central to the thinking behind the Bill that it should create an incentive to students to earn higher salaries in order to pay off their loans.'<sup>52</sup> He wondered why the Government was coming forward with a scheme at this particular time, given that they clearly realised that the

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<sup>49</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> HL Deb, 19 March 1990, vol.517, cc.100-182, p. 8.

revenue would not be immediately forthcoming and that student loans were expensive to administer; their motive was surely, then, ‘other than saving public expenditure’. ‘The motive’, he said, ‘was expressed by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the words, “To make students feel the cost of their education”.’<sup>53</sup> Like Russell, Lord Macaulay realised that the administrative shortcomings and high costs inherent in the Bill signified that it was ‘a fake’, a cover, because it hid ‘the reality of what [was] really going on and the purpose behind this very small Bill’, for which the real reason was ‘to increase economic awareness and self-reliance among students’. It would, however, he said, pull ‘the economic rug’ from under poorer students, acting as a disincentive to wider access.<sup>54</sup> Lord Walton also described the scheme as ‘potentially most advantageous to the wealthier students while acting as a potential deterrent to the poorer’.<sup>55</sup>

True to the ideology of the market, the loan would be a contract between the individual student and the provider of the loan. The provider was originally going to be one of the banks but none in the end was prepared to take the risk. Although technically “free” to take out the loan, students were - contrary to the notion of the free market - ‘a captive market’, as Russell pointed out.<sup>56</sup> In the end, a quango (the Student Loans Company) had to be created to administer the scheme, it becoming effectively “nationalised”, even before it had been set up. At the same time as student loans represented ‘the thin end of the wedge to privatisation of higher education’ - as Kilmaronock had commented back in 1984<sup>57</sup> - it became another area that had to be brought under central government control. The free economy had to be made to work by a strong state.

During the Lords’ debates on the Bill, a few spoke in favour of the continuation of a grants system and against the creation of student indebtedness to the state.<sup>58</sup> Many

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<sup>53</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>55</sup> HL Deb, 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1327-1372, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> HL Deb, 19 March 1990, vol.517, cc.312-314, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> HL Deb, 5 December 1984, vol.457, cc.1336-1343, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Those who spoke against the principle of student loans included the Earl of Longford, Lord Mackie of Benshie, Lord Taylor of Blackburn, Lord Macaulay of Bragar (HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, pp. 42-43, p. 21, p. 59 and pp. 50-52 respectively) and Lord Glenamara on many occasions (for example, 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1327-1372, p. 6). For others who spoke against the detail of the scheme, see, for example, HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 22, p. 26 and p. 31, plus many other debates in 1990.

Lords, however, supported the view that students should pay towards their higher education, a point on which Annan considered ‘there was general agreement’.<sup>59</sup> Many Lords thought that grants could not continue in an expanded higher education system, drawing attention to earlier proposals for some form of loan, to be repaid later on an income-contingent basis.<sup>60</sup> Favouring the idea of a graduate tax scheme, Kilmarnock stated that ‘[w]e agree that if a dramatic expansion of higher education is to take place, there will have to be some contribution from graduates whose earning power has benefited from public funds’.<sup>61</sup> Alongside many others, Blackstone supported the CVCP’s plan for a graduate tax, on the grounds of fairness as this ‘would allow the highly paid to contribute more than the low paid’. In her view, ‘some kind of progressive system for recouping the costs of student maintenance would be infinitely preferable to the proposals in the Bill’.<sup>62</sup> The poor drafting of the Bill opened up the opportunity to present alternatives, some Lords putting forward substantial amendments amounting to different schemes, as a tactic to try and change the Government’s course in favour of a graduate tax scheme, but none of this was to any avail.<sup>63</sup> Others (including some Tory Lords) simply opposed the details of the Government’s particular scheme. There was, as Lord Peston put it, ‘an enormous gulf between those of us who believe that we have to look at systems of student maintenance as a preparation for a very considerable expansion of higher education which this country needs and those who support the loan scheme’.<sup>64</sup> However, once it was clear that even many opposing Lords agreed with the principle of students contributing to their higher education, the Government could present disagreements as matters of detail rather than principle. The Lords’ opposition to the idea of student loans and to the detail of the Government’s Bill was substantial - as the voluminous record proves - but the Government was determined to push the legislation through and the Commons did not necessarily have to heed the Lords’ proposed changes.<sup>65</sup> In the end, the Government successfully brought in their top-up student loans scheme

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<sup>59</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 24.

<sup>60</sup> Robbins, for example, had predicted as early as 1964 that governments would be likely to replace grants with loans: see Lal, D., *op. cit.*, p. 17. Robbins proposed this in the House of Lords in 1982: see HL Deb, 17 February 1982, vol.427, cc.564-626, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> HL Deb, 27 February 1990, vol.516, cc.600-723, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> HL Deb, 19 March 1990, vol.517, cc.100-182, p. 48.

<sup>63</sup> HL Deb, 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1327-1372, pp. 1-5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, cc.1310-1323, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> Many Lords’ debates demonstrate the level of opposition. See in particular: HL Deb, 19 March 1990, vol.517, cc.100-182, pp. 46-47. For a summary of the amendments carried by the Lords and accepted by the Commons, see: HL Deb, 29 March 1990, vol.517, cc.980-1033, p. 33.

on time, amended only in terms of some practical details.<sup>66</sup> The Lords had worked hard at devising amendments to make a badly-drafted Bill better. In so doing, they had effectively contributed to the possibility of its acceptance on pragmatic grounds, as many Lords realised.<sup>67</sup> Some amendments were so rushed that they had to be dealt with later by supplementary regulations.<sup>68</sup> Importantly, the process had helped shift opinion, as Lord Jenkins pointed out, even though he did not himself back the scheme or the speed of its introduction: 'The Government should not be too discouraged. Opinion has moved a good deal in favour of the suggestion that in order to finance university and polytechnic education one needs some contribution from students, whether it be through a student loans scheme or a graduate tax scheme. The Government should recognise that that is an advance.'<sup>69</sup> The Lords - including Jenkins - had, however unwillingly, contributed to shifting the ideological ground: indeed, no government has considered the possibility of student grants since.<sup>70</sup>

(b) The strong state: the Education Reform Act 1988

By the mid-1980s the Government was representing the expansion of higher education as if it had been a deliberate policy move on their part. Building on earlier pragmatic responses to circumstances, they were able to seize on the opportunity to lay down their preferred purposes for higher education in the 1985 Green Paper and the 1987 White Paper, and to consolidate structural and governance arrangements in the 1987 draft Education Reform Bill. The latter was, as John Tomlinson (Professor of Education, University of Warwick) pointed out at the time, '*designed* [my emphasis] to be a radical break with the past'. Although his prescient comments (which follow) are particularly valid in relation to schools, we can see how the same principles apply to what the Government was trying to achieve in respect of higher education. Tomlinson continues:

Once [the Education Reform Act] is in place, the principles underlying the provision of public education in England and Wales will be fundamentally different from those of the 1944 settlement and earlier.

The objectives are to create a 'social market' in education, establish a national curriculum and testing system, make education more responsive to economic forces and attract more non-public funding. It is asserted that if achieved these

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<sup>66</sup> For examples of opposition on the detail, see HL Deb, 19 June 1989, vol.509, cc.34-42, pp. 1-6.

<sup>67</sup> HL Deb, 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1327-1372, p. 19; 19 March 1990, vol.517, cc.312-314, p. 84; 29 March 1990, vol.517, cc.980-1033, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> HL Deb, 23 April 1990, vol.518, cc.326-351, p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> HL Deb, 12 March 1990, vol.516, cc.1327-1372, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> See Ch. 4, fn.31.

mechanisms would raise standards, increase consumer choice and make the whole system, including higher education, more accountable.

To establish a social market in education it is necessary to break down the notion and system of a publicly planned and provided education service. [...]

Education needs to be seen as a commodity to be purchased and consumed. There must be significant differences between goods on offer to make choice apparent.<sup>71</sup>

How ironic, therefore, that the major thrust of the Bill was (as we saw in Chapters 4 and 5) to control higher education centrally: the free market required a strong state. Moves such as the setting up of the UFC and the PCFC with a direct line of control to the Secretary of State, the abolition of tenure, etc., express a refashioned - and explicitly ideological - relationship between higher education and the state on the Government's terms, despite their disingenuous protestations in the House of Lords and elsewhere that their policies would give more freedom to higher education.<sup>72</sup>

As with the record on student support, the voluminous House of Lords record on the Education Reform Bill demonstrates considerable opposition at draft stages, on which resistance was mounted by presenting detailed proposals for amendments. The objections were fought out on the level of small - but significant - details, which I group into two overarching concerns: (i) objections to the reformulating of higher education in a business mode; and (ii) objections to the Bill's centralising tendencies.

(b) (i) *Higher education as a business*

To bring about its developing neoliberal vision for higher education, the Government needed to make it operate and behave like a business. The previous systems of grants to universities - as Croham had recommended be continued on a three-yearly planning cycle through a reformed UGC becoming an independent University Grants Council<sup>73</sup> - and of local authority disbursements to PSHE were discarded by the Government. Such schemes were not fit for a neoliberal purpose. The new UFC and PCFC needed to demonstrate a harder business mode of operation, as the Lords noted from the text of the 1987 White Paper, which lay down that

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<sup>71</sup> Tomlinson, J., 'Curriculum and market: are they compatible?' in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> The Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, protested to the Vice-Chancellors: 'Some of you see these policies, taken together, as tending to intrude on the proper freedom of universities to manage their affairs. That is not the direction in which I want to move: quite the reverse': quoted by Michael Brock, Warden, Nuffield College, Oxford, in Brock, M., 'The debate: who'll use these new levers of state control?', in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>73</sup> *Croham Report*, op. cit., p. 1.



[p]ayment of [...] grants from public funds does not imply, in the Government's view, unconditional entitlement to support from the taxpayer at any particular level. The resources made available are intended to secure delivery of educational services which are of satisfactory or better quality and which are responsive to the needs of students and employers. Institutions receiving public funds are accountable for the uses to which funds are put and for the effectiveness and efficiency with which they are employed.<sup>74</sup>

Although not on the face of the Bill, funding would be via contract, which would 'encourage institutions to be enterprising in attracting contracts from other sources, particularly the private sector, and thereby to lessen their present degree of dependence on public funding'.<sup>75</sup> DES guidance explained - by now well into the language of business - that 'institutions will, given reasonable competitiveness as to price and quality, be contracting to provide an educational service or services in exchange for funding'.<sup>76</sup> This was a neoliberal, business model: a customer (the government, ironically the sole customer) contracts with a supplier (the higher education institution) to "deliver" services. If the service is not satisfactory, the contract and funding would be withdrawn. Contracting was opposed by many Lords, understandably 'no less strongly from the political Right than from the Left', as one Oxford College Warden commented.<sup>77</sup> Traditional Conservative Lords were no more in favour of neoliberal practices than those on the Left espousing a socially progressive liberalism. Lords Swann and Beloff, for instance, pointed out that 'not one single Peer' (apart from the Government spokespeople) had defended the concept.<sup>78</sup> Performance indicators would be used 'to assess institutions' delivery of provision contracted for with public funds', a relationship Lord Swann derided as more 'like a supermarket manager dealing with his clients', expressed in 'management newspeak', than a system for funding higher education teaching and research.<sup>79</sup> As Swann queried, how did the Government 'square' the idea of contract funding with its 'professed intentions of liberality'?<sup>80</sup> Similarly querying this contradiction, Annan considered that

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<sup>74</sup> DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, op. cit., paragraph 4.16, p. 31.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 4.17, p. 31.

<sup>76</sup> DES (1987c), 'Changes in structure and national planning for higher education: (iii) Contracts between the funding bodies and higher education institutions', May 1987: London, paragraph 5, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Brock, M. in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>78</sup> HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1561, p. 5; 8 July 1988, vol.499, cc.522-586, p. 5.

<sup>79</sup> DES, 'Changes in structure and national planning for higher education: (iii) Contracts between the funding bodies and higher education institutions', May 1987, paragraph 21, p. 10; HL Deb, 16 May 1988, vol.497, cc.83-173, pp. 39-40.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

it seems odd that the Government, who have been so conspicuously successful and determined to privatise many quangos and other institutions, and to liberate them from bureaucratic control, and who generally say that if we are to progress along those lines, especially in respect of relations between universities and industry, we can do so only if we have much greater freedom of action, have come up with this bureaucratic construction of a university funding council with contracts.<sup>81</sup>

The Government's actions were more akin to 'detailed centralised control', Swann concluded.<sup>82</sup> The Lords haggled over wording in the Bill, such as the Government's proposed use of the word 'payment' instead of 'grant'. But as Lord Chase, representing the Government, pointed out, even if the Government acceded to such amendments, this did not amount to very much: it did not in itself constitute protection against direct government control.<sup>83</sup> The introduction of practices such as contracting in the Education Reform Act, together with related business techniques would, in any case, change how managers discussed the funding and management of their higher education institutions, including the "delivery" of teaching and research.

As we noted in Chapter 4, it was difficult for the Government to remould higher education entirely into a business format because it was not like 'other products'.<sup>84</sup> The Lords pointed out how applying a business model to higher education did not fit well with its practices and traditions, such as academic autonomy and representation. Lord Beloff, for example, urged the Government to explain more fully what contracting would mean, to ensure 'that under the new funding system universities are to be at least as autonomous as they have been hitherto'.<sup>85</sup> Contrary to the (then) standard practice of academic domination of internal and external higher education bodies, the draft Bill indicated that academic membership of the funding councils, and constituencies of staff and students on institutional governing bodies, were not to be in the majority. Opposing Lords managed to broaden the categories of membership in the Act away from such narrowly defined business and commercial interests as first drafted in the Bill, but the representation of both academic and support staff and students on governing bodies was reduced, as befitted their institutions' redrawn purposes. Many Lords objected to these trends. For example, Blackstone described the Government as having 'become somewhat obsessed with

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>83</sup> HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 12.

<sup>84</sup> See Ch. 4, fn.111.

<sup>85</sup> HL Deb, 16 May 1988, vol.497, cc.83-173, p. 43.

representation from industrial and commercial interests' on institutional governing bodies. Peston wondered whether these were 'still education institutions and that academic matters still take first priority'. He was 'most concerned that we seem to have lost sight of that altogether'. He concluded that 'on the whole business people are pretty useless' on university governing bodies, being often 'very well meaning', but not having 'the faintest idea what academic research and scholarship are about'.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Lord Butterworth objected to the fact that the Government was not taking on board the recommendations of the Croham Committee to have academic representation on the new UFC. Lords Grimond and Rochester agreed that there should be an academic majority on the main committees of the funding councils, to guarantee their independence.<sup>87</sup> Russell mischievously wondered, given 'the high quality of British universities', whether 'every British boardroom should contain an academic majority'?<sup>88</sup> To change norms and practices to reflect a different ideology, the Government needed to move higher education institutions away from being predominantly governed by academics themselves to being answerable to business interests and practices instead.

As demonstrated at the time of the university cuts in the early 1980s, tenure was a practice which did not suit a business approach to running higher education. Whether naively or otherwise, the Lord Chancellor (on behalf of the Government) represented the intended abolition of tenure as simply the need to apply a standard business practice. Like any other business, a university simply 'may have an urgent need to make people redundant', he claimed.<sup>89</sup> Vice-Chancellors needed this flexibility as CEOs - they did not resist. According to Beloff and Russell, there was little pressure from the CVCP to preserve tenure because they had traded this in with the Secretary of State in return for certain favours.<sup>90</sup> Despite bitter opposition in the Lords and the eventual insertion of some wording to safeguard academic freedom, the 1988 Education Reform Act duly abolished tenure and made it possible to dismiss academic staff for reasons of redundancy.<sup>91</sup> The draft Bill even sought to insert -

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-18.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-33.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>89</sup> HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 109.

<sup>90</sup> Kedourie, E., *Perestroika in the Universities* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, Choice in Welfare Series, Number 1, 1989), p. 35. See also Ch. 5, fn.118.

<sup>91</sup> DES, *Education Reform Act* (1988), op. cit., section 203, clause 5. For examples of the opposition mounted, see speeches by Russell and Peston, HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 105;

whether by intent or poor drafting - less favourable terms into academics' conditions of employment with regard to redundancy than applied to other sectors' employees. The Lords - particularly Lord Wedderburn - fought hard to achieve the amendment to this. However, many other proposed amendments designed to overturn provisions that weakened academics' and universities' autonomy were not accepted by the Government.<sup>92</sup> The Government largely got their own way: the Education Reform Act was the culmination of the Government's intentions to requisition higher education institutions as ideological state apparatuses, with a view to making them behave more like businesses.

(b) (ii) *Higher education controlled by the state*

The Government needed to ensure that higher education both operated like a business and followed the Government's policy directives to do so, by imposing what Russell termed 'a planned economy of learning'.<sup>93</sup> It was crucial in this scheme of things for the Secretary of State to assume certain direct powers. In PSHE, powers were to be transferred from LEAs to the institutions themselves, "freeing" them from that control, while subjecting them to one more centrally influenced - even if the polytechnic directors failed to realise this.<sup>94</sup> The much-disputed clause 94 in the draft Bill gave the Secretary of State power to confer such additional functions as s/he thought fit on the UFC and the PCFC, although the Government repeatedly stated in the House of Lords and elsewhere that it would only use these powers exceptionally. Some in Government may have believed that what they were actually trying to do through the Education Reform Bill was to devolve power to education institutions and "consumers". As Secretary of State Baker said about the Bill in 1988: 'It is about the devolution of authority and responsibility. It is not about enhancing central control.'<sup>95</sup> Many, however, thought the evidence proved otherwise. The statutory powers of intervention as drafted in the Bill were, according to a submission from the University of Oxford, in direct contradiction to ministers' repeated claims to the

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Morton, 19 May 1988, vol.497, cc.433-486, p. 9; Hatch, *ibid.*, p. 12; Grimond and Beloff, *ibid.*, p. 13; Russell, *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>92</sup> HL Deb, 19 May 1988, vol.497, cc.500-574, p.14; 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 113; 8 July 1988, vol.499, cc.522-586, pp. 36-37 and p. 43. See also Kedourie, E., *Perestroika*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> See fn.2 above.

<sup>94</sup> The desire of the polytechnic directors for independence from the LEAs seems to have rendered them oblivious to the risk that the Government would take greater central control, as the CDP's response to the latter's consultation on the draft 1987 White Paper demonstrates, whereas some PSHE institutional and other responses were more cautious: see Haviland, J. (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 241-253.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Haviland, J. (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 262-263.

House of Commons back in 1981 that the UGC was not - and should not be - subject to ministerial intervention.<sup>96</sup> As one Vice-Chancellor put it to the Secretary of State: ‘You have frequently assured vice-chancellors that these powers would be used only as a last resort, but your idea of a last resort may be very different from future Secretaries of State and their civil servants.’<sup>97</sup> What was the point, queried *The Times*, in the Government taking powers, unless it intended to use them?<sup>98</sup> Seear presented a petition of 20,600 signatures to the House of Lords in May 1988 from ‘members of university communities’ concerned that the Bill would ‘stifle’ universities’ autonomy.<sup>99</sup> Although the powers of the Secretary of State were in the end partly restricted by the Lords’ amendments, the Education Reform Act marked a step change in the state’s acquisition of power over higher education. Writing at the time, Patrick McAuslan (Professor of Public Law at the LSE) highlighted how the Government’s actions threatened the established safeguards cherished by a liberal democracy and promoted a neoliberal agenda:

An important feature of any liberal democracy of which the separation of powers is an aspect is the autonomy and freedom of universities and other institutions of higher education and research. It is no accident that illiberal regimes around the world reject and curb the autonomy of universities, often on the grounds that they are not serving the national interest or are inefficient. It is on these grounds that autonomy is to be taken away from universities and other institutions of higher education and research by the Bill, and they are to be reduced to dancing, by contract, to the Government’s tune.<sup>100</sup>

Whereas one of the UGC’s duties had been ‘to inquire into the financial needs of university education in the UK’, the new UFC would be more answerable to government, by being responsible ‘for administering funds made available to the Council by the Secretary of State’.<sup>101</sup> In business jargon, this reversed the UGC’s “bottom up” advice to government on dispersal of funds to the new body - and thus to universities. In the House of Lords, Swann pointed out that ‘[e]ven the most enthusiastic supporter of this Bill can scarcely deny that it involves throughout a very marked increase in the centralised control of the whole education system by the

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<sup>96</sup> Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>97</sup> Professor J. R. Quayle, Vice-Chancellor of Bath University, January 1988, quoted in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted by Brock in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>99</sup> HL Deb, 18 May 1988, vol.497, c.327.

<sup>100</sup> McAuslan, P., ‘The Constitution: does the Bill offend it?’, in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., pp. 265-266.

<sup>101</sup> DES, *Education Reform Act* (1988), op. cit., vol.1, section 131, clause 4. For differences between the UGC’s duty and the UFC’s new functions, see Brock in Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., pp. 231-232.

Secretary of State'.<sup>102</sup> Lord Hatch went on to identify the ideological process at work, as he concluded: 'That is not an accident; it is part of the philosophy of this Government'. He continued:

[I]t is neither an accident nor a coincidence that throughout the Bill there has been a constant strain of centralisation, a constant theme of "the state knows best" and a constant increase in the powers of the Secretary of State. When that is put together with the other social legislation introduced by the Government - the attack on the trade unions and the attack on local authorities - I suggest that the Bill undermines the very structure of our cultural life.<sup>103</sup>

This is why, Hatch pointed out, he and Beloff were on this occasion unusually in agreement: the Bill was undermining the cherished principle of freedom of expression.<sup>104</sup> Russell recognised that there was 'an obvious tension between the public funding of higher education institutions and the need to preserve their essential autonomy' but this Bill was going too far.<sup>105</sup> The University of London's response to the Bill found the proposals 'not consonant with the need for higher education to remain as independent as possible from the apparatus of the State, even when largely funded by it'.<sup>106</sup> The Education Reform Act 1988 was a milestone in that changing relationship, giving greater power to government over higher education than had hitherto been deemed appropriate.

#### **(v) A neoliberal solution**

The Government's "solution" to concerns about institutional autonomy and academic freedom was - as we saw earlier - to encourage higher education institutions to seek alternative funding: after all, the free market guaranteed all other freedoms. Speaking for the Government in the Lords, the Lord Chancellor in May 1988 affirmed that '[a] diversified funding base is one of the best safeguards of institutional autonomy'. The Government's words and actions were not simply about saving money. What mattered was that universities adopt the right ideology: 'Some university interests assert that the Government encourage private funding solely in order to spare the public purse. That is not so.' Here was a clear expression of the neoliberal ideological imperative to defeat "traditional" or social liberalism, encouraging higher

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<sup>102</sup> HL Deb, 8 July 1988, vol.499, cc.522-586, p. 43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 238.

education institutions ‘to be enterprising in attracting funds’, rather than depending on those from government.<sup>107</sup>

We have seen that the Lords - in the main - considered that not all funding for an expanded higher education system could or should come from government sources, reflecting in part Joseph’s blueprint. We have also seen that many Lords bitterly opposed increased government powers over higher education. Universities were in a cleft stick. As Russell put it in 1988, they were being controlled by government and being enjoined to act more like businesses, but did not have the power to do so. They could ‘neither increase [their] sales nor increase [their] prices’. In these circumstances, the freedoms of an American university seemed attractive even to such a vociferous opponent of the Government as Russell.<sup>108</sup> This accorded with the views of the neoliberal think-tanks who considered (as we noted earlier) that education should be taken out of state control.<sup>109</sup> In the absence of a strong alternative, some Lords were coming to the view that it would be better if higher education institutions were privatised, that is, if they completely cut their ties with controlling, centralising government and became private institutions, seeking their own funds and offering the curriculum they thought best.<sup>110</sup> Ironically, by default, the only option left amounted to adopting the Government’s ideal that some of them at least had originally opposed: it would be better if higher education were not part of state provision at all.<sup>111</sup> Either way, the neoliberal project could succeed.

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<sup>107</sup> HL Deb, 16 May 1988, vol.497, cc.83-173, p. 45.

<sup>108</sup> Kedourie, E., *Perestroika*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>109</sup> The IEA strongly opposed the schools legislation in the Education Reform Bill which it dubbed as government interference in the professionalism of teachers. Its view was that the most effective education system would be set by the market, that is by ‘the consumers of the education service’, not by the government: see Haviland, J. (ed.), op. cit., pp. 28-29.

<sup>110</sup> See, for example, Russell in HL Deb, 28 June 1988, vol.498, cc.1387-1581, p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> Professor A. C. Grayling, latterly of Birkbeck College, University of London, similarly argues that setting up his private institution in 2011, charging undergraduate fees of £18,000 per annum, is the only way to safeguard liberal values against excessive government intervention and demands for accountability, and given the withdrawal of public funding to higher education in the humanities: see Baker, S., ‘Grayling’s plans for tutorials with the stars receive poor notices from disgruntled critics’, *Times Higher Education*, 9 June 2011: available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/416440.article> [accessed 12 June 2011].

## **Chapter 7    Agents, resisters, collaborators**

### **(i) Introduction**

Having seen how aspects of higher education's history could contribute to the Thatcherite hegemonic project, and mindful how the terms of the debate were set in Parliament by Government and Opposition alike, I now turn to the role the funding bodies, trade unions and other groups played in this process of construction.

In a Gramscian sense, people play their part as 'structure and agency interact to make history', as Jessop phrases it, after Marx.<sup>1</sup> The proponents of Thatcherism - Joseph, for instance - were clearly acting in the positive Gramscian/Geussian sense of ideology, attempting to transform one given socio-economic context into another. On the other side, many academic and support staff and students vehemently and repeatedly objected throughout the 1980s to the Government's neoliberal mission for both higher education and the country at large; but individuals were largely able to do little more than react angrily at meetings, committees and demonstrations, and through letters and articles in the "quality" press.<sup>2</sup> Despite this opposition, many of the organisations involved became used as agents - however unwittingly or unwillingly - in this hegemonic process.<sup>3</sup> How did those who might have been expected to resist get drawn into collaborating? How did this work?

Gramsci claimed - echoed by Hayek<sup>4</sup> - that, for an ideology to dominate, the 'professional intellectuals' had to be conquered, so that they could carry out a

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<sup>1</sup> Jessop, B. et al. (eds), op. cit., p. 13. For Marx reference, see Ch. 3, fn.76.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space, I am unable to review all the letters and articles in the press. As examples, see (a) a letter from 37 academics from the University of Bradford at the time of the 1981 UGC cuts: *The Times Higher Education Supplement* (37 academics, University of Bradford), 'Why we must resist the Government's attack on the university system', 6 November 1981, p. 27; (b) the letter from 364 economists to *The Times*, 13 March 1981, criticising the Government's monetarist policies: Booth, P. (ed.), *Were 364 Economists All Wrong?* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2006): available at <http://www.iea.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/files/upldbook310pdf.pdf> [accessed 1 August 2013]; and see *The Economist* online (author not stated), 9 April 2013, 'How Mrs Thatcher smashed the Keynesian consensus': available at <http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2013/04/margaret-thatchers-macroeconomic-legacy> [accessed 2 August 2013].

<sup>3</sup> Back in 1973, Anthony Arblaster pointed out that not just individual academics but the institutions in which they worked were open to being 'shaped according to the particular political priorities of particular governments': Arblaster, A., 'Ideology and Intellectuals', in Benewick, R., Berki, R.N., Parekh, B. (eds), *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: the Problem of Ideology* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> See Ch. 3, fn.72.



mediating role and persuade others to follow suit. The grafting of Thatcherite values onto higher education was achieved not solely by the direct imposition of legislation, although the 1985 Green and 1987 White Papers culminating in the 1988 Education Reform Act reflected a clear neoliberal agenda. A deeper ideological shift occurred more subtly through the higher education state apparatus coming to be reworked and transformed through practice “on the ground”. Althusser’s “subjects” were recruited to implement a changed role for higher education, to internalise this and make it make sense to themselves, so as then to reinforce and reproduce it. In this way, we can understand how neoliberalism was able to permeate higher education, challenge existing values, and move into pole position as the new norm, to come to be understood as everyday common sense.

**(ii) Contributing to the construction of central control**

To show how the process recruited organisations as agents to reproduce ideological domination and manufacture consent, I first consider the role of the two main Government agencies. How did these bodies - the UGC/UFC and the NAB/PCFC - contribute to building the Government’s vision of higher education, or were they effective in resisting? Understandably, the UGC and the NAB largely reflected the characteristics of the sectors they served, and thus replicated the contradictions we noted earlier. Thus, in sum, the UGC’s main concern between 1979-1981 was to conserve “standards”, thereby delivering up cuts in student numbers, while the NAB’s was (with some caveats, as we shall see below) to widen access - but “on the cheap” and in subject areas aligned to the Government’s instrumental purpose for PSHE. What ideological processes worked on the actors concerned in order to gain their consent or compliance so that they came to function as either agents or collaborators in the Government’s ideological project?

**(a) The University Grants Committee as scapegoat**

To take the UGC first: why and how did it move from operating as a buffer between universities and government to becoming - with its successor, the UFC - effectively the opposite, functioning as executor of government policy and thus coming to constitute a ‘stalking horse’ for wholesale change?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 140.

The UGC's ethos was 'liberal, participative and respectful of university autonomy', as Shattock described it. What the furore over the 1981 cuts taught the Government was that it needed a new body that would do its bidding, that would 'be legally separate from government but strictly accountable to it'.<sup>6</sup> It was the Government which eventually abolished the UGC through the 1988 Education Reform Act; but the UGC's ways of working alienated those who should have been in support and this contributed to its downfall. First, the UGC system was by 1979, as Shattock puts it, 'in serious disrepair'.<sup>7</sup> It was 'educationally conservative', reinforced by the fact that 'its members were drawn from universities which themselves were conservative'.<sup>8</sup> Its subject-based system tended to mould, reflect and conserve subjects as they stood. The main committee did not monitor its subject committees, whose poor knowledge (at least in some cases) became apparent in the 1981 cuts. For example, they proposed to cut some courses/academic departments that no longer existed.<sup>9</sup> According to Shattock, the UGC failed to give a lead, particularly in the fast-changing social and educational context of the period 1963-1979. Its conservatism also made it vulnerable - like parts of the Conservative Party - to radical intervention from the New Right, challenging the vested interests of the Establishment. Furthermore, the élite universities had emphasised their national and international role but not always their role in local communities. These factors resulted in the UGC and many universities not having widespread support - when they came to need it - from communities and constituencies of people outside higher education who were at best indifferent to their cause.<sup>10</sup>

A second way in which the UGC's weakness helped to make the Government's ideological onslaught a success was by having no published criteria for distributing cuts so, when this was done badly, the UGC laid itself open to criticism. It saw its relationship with the universities in simple terms:

We give block grants to universities [...]. [I]t is for the university itself to decide on a disposition of resource between a department's teaching and research and so on. This is what is meant by university autonomy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Shattock, M., *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> AUT Executive Committee paper EC/1191, July 1981: UCU archives.

<sup>10</sup> Shattock, M., *ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> Chair of the UGC reporting to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), quoted in Shattock, M., *ibid.*, p. 145.

Its advisory role had grown over the years but it was not constituted to intervene in universities' affairs. Once government cut its resources, the UGC's only two courses of action were to resign or to pass on the cuts to the universities - by cutting either the unit of resource or student numbers, either differentially or across the board. The whole committee did in fact consider resigning (and Robbins added that if he had been in membership he would have done so), rather than implement the Government's cuts, but the members remained in position and carried through the cuts. Shattock considered it was to their credit that they stayed on 'to concentrate on saving the university system', while Labour MP Christopher Price thought that the UGC's mass resignation might have led to direct Government control: in retrospect, highly ironic observations.<sup>12</sup> The absence of explicit criteria for making cuts laid it open to criticism from universities, MPs, unions and commentators alike, with some (including Robbins) considering that an across-the-board percentage cut would have been a better course of action.<sup>13</sup> Once embarked on differential cuts, the UGC revealed not only its inadequate knowledge but also an apparently unfair bias in cutting the technological universities so drastically. Opposition MPs attacked the UGC in the House of Commons: Labour MP Dennis Canavan, for example, called it heavily biased in favour of an Oxbridge élite, whose main concern seems to be to try to give the maximum protection to a privileged minority within the university system without caring about the consequences for some of the younger and more innovative universities that are not hidebound by ancient, ivory-tower traditions.<sup>14</sup> A speaker at an Association of University Teachers (AUT) Aberdeen branch 'teach-in' in December 1981 (to which I return later) similarly complained that the UGC was 'a group of elderly academics whose instinctive reaction was to protect Oxbridge, to protect the conventional and to savage places which are doing anything new, exciting, or innovatory'. The speaker accused it of having 'collaborated in this act of educational vandalism'; and, to boot, of having done so 'with no explanation, no discussion of the basis on which they made their allocations'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Shattock, M., *ibid.*, p. 24; HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.740 and 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1340.

<sup>13</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, cc.342-345; HL Deb, 17 February 1982, vol.427, cc.564-626, p. 11; Kogan, M. with Kogan, D., *op. cit.*; Shattock, M., *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> HC Deb, 11 May 1982, vol.23, c.605. See also criticisms from: Alan Beith, HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.312; Edward Lyons, HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.751; Barry Sheerman, *ibid.*, c.741.

<sup>15</sup> Aberdeen AUT, *Universities against the Cuts: a Report of the Teach-in held at King's College, University of Aberdeen, on Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1981* (Aberdeen: AUT, 1982), p. 21.

These objections clouded the main issue so that the UGC - rather than the Government - was often blamed for the cuts. Not even the Government was satisfied with the UGC's actions taken independently, using its powers to cut student numbers rather than squeeze the unit of resource, which laid the Government wide open to criticism in the House of Commons.<sup>16</sup> Labour MPs were so critical of the UGC's actions that they demanded the Government intervene to reverse them. This allowed the Government - whose cuts to university funding had occasioned the UGC's actions - to take the ideological and moral high ground, turning the situation round to make it look as if they were the ones safeguarding the independence of the UGC and academic freedom. For example, Joseph maintained in 1981 that 'it is not for Ministers to make the allocation'. He continued: 'It is the essence of academic autonomy that decisions should be made by peer reviews.'<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Waldegrave made the Opposition look as if it was proposing government interference in the UGC's relationship with the universities. 'It would be wrong', he said, 'for Ministers [...] to try to direct the UGC about its judgements on academic policies.'<sup>18</sup> Supported by other more traditional Tories, this issue then dominated the discussion, concealing the original point about the cuts themselves. Furthermore, having defended the UGC, Waldegrave could bring his fellow Tory MPs to task for supporting the cuts overall, while - contradictorily - seeking Government intervention and special consideration for universities in their own constituencies. Intervention, he said, was 'a self-denying ordinance in the sense that the House does not directly intervene in the distribution of funds'. 'If one accepts the principle,' he continued, 'it is difficult to oppose the individual distributions.'<sup>19</sup> So it was those in opposition to the Government - and who should have been in support of the UGC - who called with increasing urgency for the UGC to be reviewed. Furthermore, when some universities' failures in financial and academic self-governance came to light later in the 1980s, blame was apportioned not only to the universities concerned but also to the UGC, whose shortcomings made it easier for the Government to justify the imposition of an altogether different form of control.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Shattock, M., *ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>17</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.305.

<sup>18</sup> HC Deb, 27 October 1981, vol.10, c.707.

<sup>19</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.763.

<sup>20</sup> Allegations of financial mismanagement at University College, Cardiff, were reported by a whistleblower direct to Thatcher in 1986. The Government intervened and a management consultancy review was undertaken. By the time the PAC hearings took place in May 1988, a serious financial deficit also had to be investigated at Aberdeen University. - see Shattock, M., *ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

Nevertheless, many commentators realised that the UGC was being used by the Government as a scapegoat. In the House of Lords in 1984, Crowther-Hunt called it a ‘lap dog’ and a ‘poodle’, having now been peopled with government nominees.<sup>21</sup> Other commentators saw the opportunity to advocate its abolition, given it was no longer preserving the independence of universities, having become ‘an agency for their enfeeblement, a useless “quango” whose only purpose is to do to the universities what the Secretary of State for Education and Science would not care to do on his own initiative’.<sup>22</sup> The more liberal-minded Tory MP Robert Rhodes James came to the UGC’s defence: ‘If there is criticism of the present policy, it should surely be directed against the Government and not against the University Grants Committee.’<sup>23</sup> But most interventions in both Houses of Parliament blamed the UGC for not defending the university system as a whole and for implementing Government policy.<sup>24</sup> For example, Labour MP Bob Cryer termed the UGC ‘the handmaiden of the Government’s policy’, as it was ‘playing a subservient and lickspittle role in complying with the Government’s wishes’.<sup>25</sup> The AUT expressed both confusion and dismay about the UGC which had ‘turned in on us’ and was no longer ‘the universities’ watch-dog’ but the Government’s ‘hatchet-man’.<sup>26</sup> At the AUT Aberdeen branch ‘teach-in’, one speaker identified how the UGC had been ‘turned into a protective cloak for the Government against pressure from the universities which the Government has or will have mutilated’.<sup>27</sup> The UGC was acting as a “cover” and criticisms of its conservatism, poor organisation and ill-advised divisive cuts to universities contributed alike to its abolition and the consequent weakening of the universities it had been designed to protect.

Joseph needed to be able to direct university policy without the UGC deciding on its own approach, as he made clear in 1982, determining that

the main thrust of policy for the universities must take due account of policy for higher education as a whole, and of national social and economic policies; and at

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<sup>21</sup> HL Deb, 14 March 1984, vol.449, cc.758-851, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ferns, H. S., *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.322.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, HC Deb, 18 November 1981, vol.13, c.335 and cc.740-741; 11 May 1982, vol.23, cc.605-606.

<sup>25</sup> HC Deb, 21 December 1981, vol.15, c.759.

<sup>26</sup> AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 17 December 1980: UCU archives.

<sup>27</sup> AUT Aberdeen, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-54.

this level there will be some strategic decisions for which it would be appropriate for Ministers to take explicit responsibility and answer to Parliament.<sup>28</sup>

His new practice of issuing ‘letters of guidance’ was made to seem more democratic than the UGC’s deliberations “behind closed doors”. But it was a takeover of matters which would previously have been dealt with by the UGC, or simply by individual universities. As Price (Labour) put it, ‘[n]eed is now defined in the Government’s and not the UGC’s terms’.<sup>29</sup> Although, according to Shattock, by the mid-1980s the UGC had become ‘more active and effective than any since the late 1950s’, its eventual abolition was not the paradox he considered it to be.<sup>30</sup> Despite its initial objections to the early cuts, the UGC had eventually buckled down and carried out the Government’s wishes, but it still had to go. It was not the kind of body the Government needed. A review of the UGC duly took place but was hijacked by the Government to put in place the kind of state apparatus that would be more compliant with - and complicit in - the Government’s ideological agenda. In the 1988 Education Reform Act, the UGC was transformed into the UFC, whose first Chair was Lord Chilver, a close ally of the Prime Minister. The way was now clear for, as Shattock puts it, ‘a radical switch to a market-driven approach to expansion’, overseen by a new body designed to be ‘more managerial, more subordinate to government and much less responsive to the universities’.<sup>31</sup> The UGC and those who should have been its supporters had collaborated – however unwittingly – as agents in its demise.

(b) The National Advisory Body: the means to its own end

How did those involved in setting up and operating the NAB contribute to the New Right’s hegemonic project?

A planning and resourcing body was initially welcomed by the sector in 1982, because the rapid and uncoordinated growth in PSHE course approvals, and the knock-on effects of the university cuts, had made planning and development within and between PSHE institutions under different LEAs extremely difficult.<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1340.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Shattock, M., *The UGC*, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 135-140.

<sup>32</sup> This section draws on my own experience as a senior administrator in this area of work in a polytechnic at the time, and on Harriet Greenaway’s article: Greenaway, H., ‘The National Advisory

Government's July 1981 consultative document planned to take PSHE out of LEAs and transfer co-ordination to a new body, on the lines of the UGC.<sup>33</sup> However, the furore surrounding the UGC decisions meant that a planning body for PSHE was best ushered in quietly, so the NAB was set up simply by Government executive action. PSHE institutions continued to be administered by the LEAs for the time being. The Chair of the NAB's senior committee was the Higher Education Minister (initially William Waldegrave, then Peter Brooke, then George Walden) and the Chair of the Board (the lower tier) was appointed by the Secretary of State. LEA and DES officers (so not those directly involved in operating the institutions on the ground) were in the majority on the Board, to the anger of the polytechnic directors - but at least they now had their own planning body.<sup>34</sup>

As with the UGC, the NAB's operations gave rise to criticisms from those who might have been its supporters. Set up hurriedly, its first few months were chaotic and confusing. It could not concentrate on strategy and PSHE's relationship with the universities but had to work immediately on the Government's agenda: how to implement a 10% cut in real terms between 1982/3-1984/5, as demanded by the 1982 Public Expenditure White Paper. Despite the Chair of the Board's repeated insistence - backed by NATFHE - that the unit of resource could not be lowered any further without damaging standards,<sup>35</sup> Labour MPs blamed the NAB itself, just as they had the UGC, for embarking on cutting student numbers. For example Phillip Whitehead complained that:

[The NAB is] now saying not that there will be a worsening of the staff-student ratio or a diminution of the unit of resource but that in absolute overall terms they want fewer places, fewer courses and fewer institutions in the public sector of higher education, beyond the decimation that has already been visited on the universities.<sup>36</sup>

To devise a rationale for the cuts, the NAB undertook a consultative exercise in 1983, but the Secretary of State was setting the terms of the debate:

It is important that traditional assumptions be questioned [...]. I hope that this debate will include discussions with the UGC on whether the trend towards a

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Body – the polytechnic administrator's viewpoint of a major British development', *Journal of Tertiary Educational Administration*, Volume 6, Number 1, May 1984, pp. 55-62. See also Salter, B. and Tapper, T., *The State and Higher Education*, op. cit., pp. 140-147.

<sup>33</sup> DES, *Higher Education in England outside the Universities*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Greenaway, H., op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, as reported to HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.936. See also NATFHE, *Green Paper – Bleak Future* (London: NATFHE, 1985), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> HC Deb, 29 July 1982, vol.28, c.1332.

homogenous higher education system with the precedence given to 3-year first degrees at the expense of other more vocationally orientated courses is in the best future interests of the nation. As the 18-year-old population declines, it will become increasingly important for the local authority higher education sector to develop its existing ability to cater for a range of ages through a variety of modes of attendance at different levels of study.<sup>37</sup>

The Government was signalling that there should be a brake on the sector's drift towards providing degrees like the universities. They needed to reposition the polytechnics back into the further education system from which they had sprung, rather than let them creep into the university sector. The NAB's 1983 consultative document treads a difficult line between Government cuts and the sector's commitment to access, trailing several proposals (such as extension of access to more part-time and mature students) which the Government could later appropriate for the 1985 Green Paper.<sup>38</sup> But even by being so "flexible", there would either have to be cuts to the sector, or resources would have to be stretched very thinly indeed.

The NAB ended up having to effect the Government's agenda of cuts and this contributed to its eventual demise, and the rise of the Government's ideological supremacy, just as it had in the case of the UGC. The planning methodology which the NAB used was untested, based on poor data and rushed consultation with the sector's officers. Asking institutions which subject areas they would class as low priority antagonised them from the start. On receipt of the returns, the NAB officers had problems co-ordinating and analysing the data. All this made the NAB unpopular with managements and unions alike, just as the UGC had antagonised universities. After bargaining on both sides, adjustments were made and cuts achieved through early retirements and voluntary redundancies, but the NAB had become dubbed predominantly as the Government's agent rather than as the supporter of PSHE institutions as the sector had initially hoped.

For its second planning exercise for 1987/88, the NAB prioritised the development of the Government's preferred subjects (such as engineering, computing and business

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<sup>37</sup> Secretary of State's letter of guidance (February 1983), quoted in NAB, *Towards a Strategy for Local Authority Higher Education in the late 1980s and beyond* (London: NAB, 1983), paragraph 22, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid; DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit.



studies).<sup>39</sup> However, if the NAB sought to maintain the unit of resource and meet the Government's subject demands, this required - as the UGC had found earlier - that student numbers be cut. For the NAB this meant cuts in the Government's "non-favoured" areas - the humanities, visual and performing arts and social sciences. Once inflation and pay rises had been taken into account, the NAB warned by early 1986 that this could require cutting 16,000-18,000 first year student numbers to maintain the unit of resource, amounting to a cut of as much as 50% in "non-favoured" areas. Under pressure, the NAB reworked their figures but their communication to institutions in April 1986 warned that still as many as 9,000 student places might have to be cut from PSHE - the very sector championing access. Polytechnics and colleges reacted sharply to the proposed cuts and lobbied their MPs, many of whom spoke against the cuts in the House of Commons.<sup>40</sup> Like the UGC, the NAB, not the Government, was blamed; and of course the Government sought to distance itself from the decision.<sup>41</sup> Ironically, this led to a degree of accord, from various quarters uniting against the NAB: the Government had to avoid political "fallout" from cutting student numbers in PSHE, as well as in the universities; the Labour Party simply reflected its traditional position on expansion and access; and the polytechnic directors did not want to curb growth in their institutions. At the NAB Committee on 2 October 1986, George Walden, the Chair, informed members that the Secretary of State would not be prepared to accept recommendations for an overall intake which could have the effect of denying access, neither would [he] endorse individual proposals for course closures, the only justification for which was to constrain overall intakes within the total currently proposed.<sup>42</sup>

In the end, the exercise was completed, Salter and Tapper report, 'without a single closure or merger'; but the sector had to get used to "doing more with less".<sup>43</sup>

The Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, announced in December his acceptance of the NAB's recommendation to increase student numbers by 3,000 but in the 'priority areas of science, engineering and other vocational disciplines' and subject to a

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<sup>39</sup> Knight, P., 'The National Advisory Body Planning Exercise 1987-88: a shot in the foot', *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume 41, Number 4, Autumn 1987, pp. 317-328.

<sup>40</sup> HC Deb, 8 April 1986, vol.95, cc.40-41W; 10 June 1986, vol.99, cc.160-161.

<sup>41</sup> HC Deb, 15 April 1986, vol.95, cc.343-344W; 16 April 1986, vol.95, c.383W; 10 June 1986, vol.99, cc.160-161; 8 July 1986, vol.101, cc.151-153.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Knight, P., *ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>43</sup> Salter, B. and Tapper, T., *The State and Higher Education*, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

competitive bidding process.<sup>44</sup> Thus a Tory Government came to be in the forefront of promoting access and expansion - but only on their terms. PSHE institutions were “squeezed” harder as staff buckled down to teaching larger numbers of students on the basis of a lower unit of resource than the NAB secretariat had originally deemed advisable.<sup>45</sup> Neither the Government nor the Labour Party had lost face, and the polytechnic directors could still expand their institutions. And all those involved had contributed to demonstrating that higher education could be delivered “on the cheap”.

In proposing student number cuts, the NAB secretariat - with the support of the CDP and some MPs - had been trying to resist the erosion of the unit of resource and pressurise the Government for funding equal to the universities, but this backfired.<sup>46</sup> When the NAB’s 1987 *Good Management Practice* report recommended *inter alia* independent governance for the polytechnics but within an LEA framework, the polytechnic directors were dismayed: they wanted their institutions to be independent, just like the universities. They called a meeting with the Secretary of State at which they strongly advocated that the polytechnics should be taken out of LEA control.<sup>47</sup> They were pushing at an open door. Effectively they provided the text for the 1987 White Paper: the NAB was abolished and the CDP greeted the removal of the polytechnics from the LEAs as ‘very good news’.<sup>48</sup> The Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, describes how easy it was in the end to take the polytechnics out of LEA administration:

I [...] found out that [the polytechnics] were thirsting to be free of local government. [...] We tried in 1980-81 [...] to move polytechnics out of local authority control, but it got nowhere – the whole proposal ran into the sand. But I learnt from this experience. When we did it in 1986 it went through easily – it was among the least controversial things which I did. Former Labour MPs working in the sector looked upon me almost as a hero. [...] [T]hey wanted independence and more academic freedom to run their institutions. They wanted greater business and managerial freedom even more than academic freedom. [...] They wanted to be able to get on and expand, and this was a time in which this was the big expanding area of higher education.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> HC Deb, 19 December 1986, vol.107, cc.721-723W.

<sup>45</sup> See Ch. 4, fns.51 and 57.

<sup>46</sup> HC Deb, 26 October 1984, vol.65, c.936.

<sup>47</sup> Knight, P., ‘After the storm, a brighter era dawned’, *The Guardian*, 20 March 2007: available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2007/mar/20/highereducation.comment> [accessed 19 October 2012].

<sup>48</sup> NALGO letter, 3 April 1987, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Ribbins, P. and Sherratt, B., op. cit., p. 94.

Less euphoric than the polytechnic directors, the PSHE support-staff union - the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO) - claimed that '[t]his will not be the prosperous free-for-all expected by many who have sought independence for polytechnics in the past'.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, Opposition MPs characterised it as another step towards centralisation. But, with the CDP on their side, the Government could make the Opposition look as if the latter was against the polytechnics.<sup>51</sup> PSHE and the NAB had served their purpose but the Government realised it could go further: it could cut all ties between the LEAs and higher education and abolish the NAB. The Government could now subject both 'nationalised' sectors to curbs on funding, as had successfully been applied to the universities since 1979. The action of the polytechnic directors in pushing to become more like the universities - together with the Vice-Chancellors' collaboration with the Government, as we noted earlier<sup>52</sup> - contributed to the Government's imposition of greater control over both national funding bodies. An expanded higher education system could be brought closer together and under the control of a central government working to a neoliberal agenda.

(c) The new agents: the Polytechnics and Colleges  
Funding Council and the Universities Funding Council

The 1984 joint UGC/NAB statement demonstrates the growing cross-binary collaboration that might have resulted - if history had worked out differently.<sup>53</sup> What the Government needed instead was a competitive ethos, centrally organised and driven. The polytechnics 'came of age', but at the expense of weakening the universities, and only on the Government's terms - which by 1987 Baker could confidently set out.<sup>54</sup> Polytechnics had to be given 'a more effective lead from the centre' so that they could enjoy

the reward of success and enterprise in meeting new national needs, in place of a system giving undue weight to local interests.

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<sup>50</sup> NALGO letter, 3 April 1987, op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> HC Deb, 1 April 1987, vol.113, cc.1091-1100.

<sup>52</sup> For collaboration on the 1988 Act, see Ch. 6, fn.90. In relation to the 1981 cuts, Tory MP Robert Rhodes James was struck by 'how certain vice-chancellors were denouncing the Government in public while privately urging us to carry on as we were': Rhodes James, R., op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> Joint statement in UGC, *A Strategy for Higher Education into the 1990s: the University Grants Committee's advice* (London: HMSO, September 1984). See also Shattock, M., *The UGC*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> HC Deb, 1 April 1987, vol.113, cc.1091-1100.

In particular, polytechnics should be free from local constraints and encouraged to build on their individual strengths so that some at least can become recognised leaders in particular vocational and technological fields.<sup>55</sup>

With the new framework inscribed in the 1988 Education Reform Act, the Government was in a position to exercise practical and ideological control over higher education centrally through financial constraints and selective initiatives, via the agency of the new funding bodies, under the cloak of greater openness that the contracting model seemed to demonstrate. Once the polytechnics had provided the benchmark for lower costs, the Government's intention - that costs per student had to be kept down - started to become accepted. Despite both sectors' efforts to regain year-on-year level funding, the Government could permit student numbers to rise only once it was certain that this would be on a lower unit of resource.<sup>56</sup>

In Althusserian mode, the Government had finally gained control of its ideological state apparatus, which could in turn be expected to reproduce the dominant ideology. Once the funding councils were staffed with those who either supported or could not resist Thatcher's ideological mission, then it also followed that internal higher education management structures and practices had to change accordingly.<sup>57</sup> As one contemporary commentator realised, there would be 'a greater stress upon the role of *management* within polytechnics and colleges, especially insofar as there has been a concern to express a corporate image and identity as a platform for the bidding process'.<sup>58</sup> A whole range of business techniques was brought into use: contracting; short-term planning models; the 'increasing selective deployment of resources on particular priorities with clear conditions attached to their use';<sup>59</sup> and - as we noted in Chapter 6 - there was now minority academic membership on the funding councils

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<sup>55</sup> DES, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, op. cit., paragraph 4.6, p. 29.

<sup>56</sup> The Chevening Discussion Paper (op. cit.) decried the fact that universities had been 'particularly successful in defending traditional unit costs'. PSHE, however, had played the game 'less successfully' with its unit costs having fallen some 20% since the early 1980s but 'with no obvious collapse of quality'. Peter Scott confirms that unit costs in universities 'remained steady in the first half of the 1980s [but] were cut by 5 per cent in the second half': Scott, P., *The Meanings of Mass Higher Education*, op. cit., p. 25. The Secretary of State announced on 15 November 1989 an increase of 10% in university funding but, importantly, this was not in "real terms", as the AUT pointed out in *Universities and National Needs: evidence submitted to the Department of Education and Science to highlight the needs of universities* (London: AUT, June 1990), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Watson and Bowden point out (op. cit., p. 1) that the terms "the Government" - on the one hand - and "the Department" or "the Funding Council" - on the other - start being used interchangeably so that 'by 1997 the administrative and political *agenda* had apparently merged completely'.

<sup>58</sup> Watson, D., 'The contracting environment: contracts and the implications for history', in *PUSH Newsletter*, 1990.

<sup>59</sup> DES, 'Changes in structure', May 1987, op. cit., paragraph 9, p. 4.

and on higher education institutional committees. Administrators became managers, polytechnic directors and vice-chancellors became CEOs, mission statements and strategic plans were drawn up, academics were offered “staff development” more suited to training business professionals than teachers of higher education students. It was, of course, reasonable to expect those using public funds to account for expenditure. But the need to demonstrate openness and efficiency was not the main point. What mattered much more was the need to revolutionise the internal culture of higher education institutions, now that their external relationship to the state had been changed. Higher education had to be moved from grudgingly accepting that there was no alternative, to a position of internalising and actively reproducing the new ideology, through using its terminology and practices on the ground.

### **(iii) The resistance**

Two groups offered the possibility of objections to - or a brake on - Thatcher’s ideological project. The first was the trade unions.<sup>60</sup> The second was dissenters in the Tory Party itself, comprising two sub-groups: (i) the traditional and/or more liberally-minded Conservatives for whom the Government was going too far with university cuts and in promoting higher education’s links with employment; and (ii) the extreme neoliberals - the “free marketeers” - for whom centralised control had gone too far and who thought that the Government was not going far enough in opening up higher education to the market and privatisation. Taken together, these “resisters” are strange bedfellows. In part, they posed a challenge to Thatcher’s project but - particularly unions - could either be ignored or vilified for their extreme “ideological” positions, opposed to the Government’s plain “common sense”.

#### **(a) The trade unions**

It is not within the scope of this thesis fully to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the higher education trade unions in the 1980s. Rather, the task here is to highlight - concentrating mainly on the two major academic staff unions, NATFHE and the AUT - to what extent their resistance impeded the Government’s ideological project;

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<sup>60</sup> The campus unions were the Association of University Teachers (AUT), the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE), the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO), the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staff (ASTMS), and the National Union of Students (NUS).

and, if it did not thwart it, how weaknesses or contradictions in their positions contributed to the ideological drift towards the Government's goals.

For much of the 1980s, the unions were fighting hard battles on lecturers' pay and combating the threat of compulsory redundancies - battles which they won. At the national level, the Government did not entertain the idea of involving trade unions at all in policy discussions. This meant that union resistance to Government budget cuts and policy documents was inevitably reactive, one step behind the Government. No wonder the latter held the ideological advantage. The staff and unions were often in shock from the power of the ideological onslaught.<sup>61</sup> Prior to 1979, they had become used to local and national government support and funding. Politicians might have argued about the extent to which higher education should be expanded but they had not generally been against it or its self-determined values *per se*. Public expectation was that higher education should and could be progressively extended to more of the population. Higher education staff - especially tenured academic staff in the elite universities - were accustomed to being in a privileged and respected position in society. They were not used to being almost completely ignored. They were not practised in justifying their existence or managing their operations in times of austerity. Ironically, and crucially, they were not used to having to form arguments or construct an ideological position on the subject of higher education itself. They were ill-prepared to counter a government intent on challenging the very worth of higher education and their profession. The resistance was not co-ordinated effectively across the binary line and it was difficult - as we saw earlier - to gather sufficient public support against the cuts - 'a small reverse with sad consequences for a relatively small minority', as Joseph put it<sup>62</sup> - or to change the way higher education was being reformed. In the main, union resistance was not strong enough to dent the Government's ideological progress.

What would have constituted effective resistance? There would have had to have been a realisation of the ideological process taking place and a strategic approach to countering that ideology. From my research in the teaching unions' archives, it is clear that a set of papers from the Aberdeen AUT branch 'teach-in' attended by 400

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<sup>61</sup> See Ch. 1, fn. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Keith Joseph speaking on Radio 4, 29 November 1981, quoted in AUT Aberdeen, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

people on 5 December 1981 is the only document from that source to provide evidence of a concerted union attack on the Government's ideological agenda. At that event, a Labour councillor highlighted for the university participants the evident irrationality and contradictions inherent in the cuts, but how this signalled an ideological attack in progress:

In Lothian Region, the Secretary of State has taken nearly £10 million from our education budget, which concerns the mass of children in the region, while two Education Acts this year have resulted in increased grants to private schools. This government wants to cut only some aspects of public expenditure, and there is a class logic in their decisions.

What lessons can be learnt from Lothian's struggle with the Secretary of State? First, never compromise. [...]

Secondly, it is folly to think that you can fight alone. You cannot have socialism in one Region; and you cannot have "no cuts" in one university. We failed partly because of our own mistakes, and partly because of the failure of certain elements in the labour and trade union movement. [...]

The Universities also face this danger of a divided campaign: of university being set against university, department against department, colleague against colleague, academics against technical and manual staff, and staff against students. The struggle of one is the struggle of all, and that must be understood if this government is to be defeated.<sup>63</sup>

In other words, unless higher education mounted a concerted counter-ideological attack on Thatcherism, the efforts of individuals or particular bodies acting on their own were likely to fail. One contributor described how the Scottish AUT had tried to persuade the Principals of the Scottish universities to resist the cuts *en masse*, but all had, in the end, spoken in support only of their own university. It was another instance of "divide and rule" which gave the Government an ideological advantage. Supporting the Labour councillor's views, an AUT National Executive member also identified the ideology at work, as he pointed out the apparent contradictions:

[The Secretary of State] is daring to tell us that less means better. We are asked to believe that this government looked impartially at the system of higher education in this country, and decided that a cut four times greater than the average cuts in public expenditure (15% instead of an average cut of 4%) is just what higher education needed to make it better.<sup>64</sup>

A student contributor similarly highlighted the contradictions at work:

The universities have been told to cut student numbers this year, while applications from home students to universities has gone up by 7%. That means

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<sup>63</sup> AUT Aberdeen, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

we are limiting access even more. It means that the universities are being forced to make themselves more elitist.<sup>65</sup>

What the Government was doing made sense only if viewed as part of an overall ideological plan, as a Bradford speaker concluded:

They are undermining, indeed, trying to liquidate, a wide range of basic gains in democracy and opportunity - basic democratic rights [...]. We are talking about policies for universities which are part of an overall policy by the present government.<sup>66</sup>

A University of Sheffield member similarly concluded that the Government wanted to undermine higher education as a whole, and he criticised the AUT's weakness in adopting a position that defended universities individually against cuts. The AUT's counter-attack was insufficiently robust: the Government would simply cut another university, thus retaining a small group of universities while the remainder, together with the polytechnics, would become broader-based or technological teaching institutions for the masses.<sup>67</sup> Another speaker pointed out how the Government's ideological onslaught on the universities was designed to make them more compliant, more conservative, and thus more open to being undermined politically:

In the present situation, the universities are in no state to respond to the needs of society. Unless the pressure is relieved by reversing the cuts, they will become more inward-looking. Academics will be concerned only about keeping their jobs, and not about what they should be doing in their jobs.<sup>68</sup>

Another speaker also realised the strategic game being played:

[A]s the government moves to reduce student demand for places, by cutting the real value of grants, one begins to suspect that there is something resembling a plan involved. Various pieces of the programme are emerging bit by bit.<sup>69</sup>

What was really going on, participants realised, was that the Government was using universities as a means of achieving central government control:

[The Government's] policies are clearly incompatible with safeguarding the future of free expression and the pursuit of scientific research. When people speak here about totalitarian and corporatist tendencies in their attitude towards local government and education it is a real thing. Everybody who works in a university knows that the process has already begun. As soon as you threaten a workforce with redundancy, a portion of that workforce puts its head down in the hope that it will not be picked off when the shooting starts. They do not express themselves as

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 56.



freely. They do those things that people tell them are contributing positively to the future of the institution, or of the nation.<sup>70</sup>

The speaker concludes that ‘the attack on universities is not an accidental side-swipe, because the government is looking for somewhere to save some money to justify monetarism’. What was happening, he claimed, was ‘the beginning of thought control’, ‘the imposition of central authority’.<sup>71</sup> It was part of an ideological endgame. As a Strathclyde University member realised, the Government’s actions towards universities were part of their plans to ‘[pass] into private hands the production of goods and services’.<sup>72</sup> It was part of a much wider assault, and he stressed that

this understanding must influence the campaign to defend [goods and services]. There must be a united and imaginative fight within the universities, but we must also look to the struggle outside. What did you do about the Lothian Region’s struggle against cuts? Or about the fight for jobs at Linwood, and at Lee Jeans? If you did nothing, do we not have to think again about the relationship between our fight and the struggles going on in the community at large?<sup>73</sup>

But in the main, head office documents and publications from the early 1980s demonstrate the campus unions’ impotence at the national level in the face of the ideological struggle in progress. This is particularly so in the case of the AUT, reflecting the shock felt by a sector moving ‘from complacency to panic’, as a branch AUT document put it.<sup>74</sup> For example, the minutes of a 1979 AUT Council meeting weakly state that ‘[t]he message to the new Government in terms of maintaining standards was that it would be silly for them to carry on impoverishing the universities because in so doing they were impoverishing the country’.<sup>75</sup> In his address to the AUT Council meeting in December 1979, the AUT President concludes that ‘[t]here is more to life than the production of material wealth, important though that may be’; but he would have had trouble convincing the Government of this version of “reality” - or many members of the general public, attracted by the possibility of attaining it.<sup>76</sup> AUT pamphlets in the early 1980s simply state - rather than argue - universities’ intrinsic worth, together with the expectation

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>74</sup> AUT Aberdeen, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> AUT Council meeting, 17 May 1979, minute 8: UCU archives.

<sup>76</sup> AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 20-22 December 1979: UCU archives.

of pre-1979, or even increased, funding.<sup>77</sup> The union takes it as a given that ‘[a]s far as one can measure in financial terms the contribution made by universities to the nation, it is undoubtedly true that in relation to public money invested in them, the nation as a whole makes a financial gain’.<sup>78</sup> It seems unable to understand why universities could not just carry on the way they were, ‘quietly [...] fulfilling their responsibility’.<sup>79</sup> In its evidence to the Education Select Committee in March 1980, the AUT expresses its belief that ‘without central direction universities have proved willing and able to adopt a flexible attitude towards subject demand and provision of courses and [that the Association sees] very little reason why the universities cannot be expected to continue this process’.<sup>80</sup> AUT papers from this period reflect a deep despair and incredulity at what is taking place. One President describes it as ‘frightening [...] that any Government should so blindly adopt policies which threaten the quality and extent of the higher education system that the nation has so proudly developed over the past forty years’.<sup>81</sup> A pamphlet from 1980 asserts: ‘It is no way for any Government to run the university system of an advanced, industrial nation.’<sup>82</sup> The Association was not used to taking direct action. Even a branch motion calling for mass resignation from university committees making cuts did not get the support of the Executive Committee.<sup>83</sup> The authors of the 1980 pamphlet seem scarcely able to believe that university funding had been cut: ‘The Government financial support of universities will not cover known or expected costs unless economies are made by the universities in their expenditure.’<sup>84</sup> Constituting an “own goal”, the pamphlet continues by pointing out what the Government itself might well have said: ‘Universities have no significant sources of income other than Government finance.’<sup>85</sup> There is no realisation that the rules of the game were changing, that universities could no longer expect automatic state funding but were to be forced to participate in the market. In relation to the cut of the overseas student

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<sup>77</sup> AUT, *Universities at Risk* (London: AUT, January 1980).

<sup>78</sup> AUT, *The Universities’ Contribution to the Nation: a Report* (London: AUT, 1980), paragraph 5, p. 2. See also AUT, *Universities and Higher Education – the Case for Expansion* (London: AUT, March 1985), p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 14-16 May 1981: UCU archives.

<sup>80</sup> Evidence to the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts: the Funding and Organisation of Courses in Higher Education, AUT Executive Committee paper EC/1017, 2 April 1980: UCU archives.

<sup>81</sup> AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 14-16 May 1981: UCU archives.

<sup>82</sup> AUT, *Universities at Risk*, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>83</sup> AUT Council meeting minutes, 15 May 1980: UCU archives.

<sup>84</sup> AUT, *Universities at Risk*, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

fees subsidy, the AUT pamphlet complains that ‘there is no transfer of public funds from overseas students to home students’.<sup>86</sup> As if assuming that the Government did not appreciate what it was doing, the union points out that ‘[a] substantial proportion of university income will be subject to unknown and imperfect market forces’. It assumes that ‘[i]t might have been expected that the Government, before rushing in with its decisions on overseas students, would have assessed carefully the quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits to Britain of foreign students’, that decisions should not be taken ‘for purely financial reasons with little regard to academic merit’.<sup>87</sup> The union apparently does not understand the ideological process in which it is involved, that what the Government was actually trying to do was to undermine universities’ expectations of government funding and support and force them to participate in the neoliberal marketplace. But the union simply admonishes the Government, stating that ‘[s]imply driving university students away from arts subjects will not automatically increase the number of science students’.<sup>88</sup> The union did not realise that the individual policies and their execution did not need to make sense for the ideology to succeed.

The AUT was resolutely opposed to the UGC’s selective approach to cuts in 1981, but even this could look as if it was against the UGC and not the Government.<sup>89</sup> University staff and unions and the sector bodies, the CVCP and the CDP, lobbied their MPs effectively to speak out in the House against the cuts; although, as we saw earlier, the message became fragmented as MPs mainly represented their particular constituency. Stronger criticisms are apparent in union documentation from the mid-1980s. For example, the AUT’s March 1985 pamphlet - responding to the Government’s consultation prior to the 1985 Green Paper - roundly condemns Government policy, although the analysis is limited to attacking the Government on its failure to fund higher education adequately for the nation’s needs, rather than identifying the Government’s ideologically-determined agenda.<sup>90</sup> The argument that higher education should be expanded - or at least restored to previously planned levels - was valid (similar to that put by the Labour Party in Parliament) but the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 7, p. 8 and p. 9 respectively.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 14-16 May 1981; and AUT briefing letter to Branch Secretaries, 15 June 1981: UCU archives.

<sup>90</sup> AUT, *Universities and Higher Education – the Case for Expansion*, op. cit.

hardline Thatcherites were unlikely to take any notice. Assertions about the ‘positive investment’ that should be made in universities, as opposed to ‘the purely negative cost of wasted talent and unemployment’, not backed up with statistics to prove their case, was unlikely to diminish the Government’s ideological intent.<sup>91</sup>

Most strikingly, it is apparent from the documentation that higher education staff’s ability to mount a coherent response, let alone attack, was hampered to a significant extent by the fact that a “divide and rule” was set up in each institution and across institutions as cuts were proposed or effected, with the arts against the sciences and *vice versa*, and department against department. Furthermore, the two separate sectors were represented by separate trade unions. From time to time all the campus unions combined to mount a concerted resistance, in collaboration with the NUS, such as the relatively large (11,000) mass lobby of Parliament on 18 November 1981.<sup>92</sup> But, for the most part, even though there were official cross-binary and cross-union discussions, the unions responded separately to Government policies and this fragmented their opposition. Joseph effectively pointed this out in his 12 February 1982 response to the AUT General Secretary. As the AUT had calculated the cuts to academic posts only, Joseph could use his overall figures on costs and savings to obfuscate that particular challenge.<sup>93</sup> AUT papers are particularly striking in their almost complete lack of reference to PSHE. The university union clung steadfastly to its side of the binary divide, fearing that its abolition would give rise to some teaching-only universities.<sup>94</sup> The effect was to fragment union opposition rather than strengthen the AUT’s case for research-led universities. From the other side of the binary divide, NATFHE was backing the NAB’s call for a higher education review and rational transbinary planning, considering it ‘unrealistic to suggest that students seeking humanities places in universities can be diverted to vocational and technological courses in the public sector. The future distribution of students between sectors [...] can only satisfactorily take place if an evenhanded transbinary

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> See Ch. 5, fn.6.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Keith Joseph to Laurie Sapper, AUT General Secretary, 12 February 1982: UCU archives.

<sup>94</sup> In his address to the AUT Council meeting 19-21 May 1983, the President expressed the union’s reservations about ‘idealistic talk about breaking down barriers [which] will serve merely as a cover for rationalisations intended to reduce provision and staffing and to convert some universities into teaching-only institutions’: UCU archives.

approach is adopted, with genuine co-operation between NAB and UGC.’<sup>95</sup> However, NATFHE’s very defence of PSHE is at times expressed as an anti-university stance. For example, in defending the continuation of arts and humanities subjects and of research in the sector, the union’s arguments were mainly financial: this provision was cheaper in PSHE than in the universities.<sup>96</sup> They were in effect, even if not intentionally, helping to prove to the Government what could be done with less, given that ‘the public sector system for assuring objective quality and comparability from one institution to another is superior to that of the universities’.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, in defence of short, sub-degree and two-year degree courses in the polytechnics and colleges, the union promoted PSHE’s ‘flexible courses to meet student and employer needs’ and the ‘relevance’ of the provision.<sup>98</sup> NATFHE was providing the Government with its script: degrees could be shorter and public expenditure on higher education could be kept down.<sup>99</sup> This was not constructive in terms of building cross-binary resistance to the cuts as a whole.

AUT HQ did express in speeches from time to time some realisation of the wider ideological context, as one AUT President put it: ‘At a time when three million are unemployed it seems that the government is prepared to find more money to make more people unemployed because it wants a smaller university system and reduced opportunities for eighteen year olds.’<sup>100</sup> Expressing their objections much more tactically and strategically than earlier, an AUT Press Statement in 1982 pointed out that ‘the Government had just approved a compensation scheme to throw 5,000 university teachers onto the dole queues whereas for a lesser sum of money those university teachers could be kept at work’.<sup>101</sup> This was reinforced in a joint unions’ publicity flyer in April 1982.<sup>102</sup> However, on the outbreak of the Falklands War, it was - as the AUT realised - a bad time to be trying to get press coverage.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> NATFHE, *Green Paper – Bleak Future*, op. cit., paragraph 15, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., paragraph 11, p. 3, and paragraph 20, p. 5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., paragraph 27, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., paragraph 21, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Interestingly, the 1985 Green Paper rejected a move to two-year honours degrees overall but supported a NAB proposal ‘for a limited experiment’ to test the idea of them ‘for the most able’: DES, *The Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, op. cit., paragraph 6.7, p. 26.

<sup>100</sup> AUT President’s Opening Address to Council meeting, 16-18 December 1981: UCU archives.

<sup>101</sup> AUT Press Statement, 1 February 1982: UCU archives.

<sup>102</sup> Joint unions’ flyer ‘Cuts in Universities: A New Form of Madness’, April 1982: UCU archives.

<sup>103</sup> See Ch. 3, fn.41.

Although the unions proved unable to counter the Government's ideological onslaught in the early 1980s, their opposition had been clear. However, towards the end of the 1980s, the evidence demonstrates a shift at national level, as the unions are drawn into collaborating on terms set by the Government. As resources were released and the Secretary of State, Kenneth Baker, embarked on expansion, the two sectors lined up to compete for a share of the market in student numbers, especially mature students. The AUT's General Secretary admonished universities for having 'so far made so little progress in extending access to higher education to non-traditional students', as she identified the need for the universities to change as 'essential for reasons of social justice, cultural vitality, and sheer economic utility'. It was important, she said, to '[change] ourselves to meet both what the country needs and what is wanted by our student clients'.<sup>104</sup> The "reality" of diminishing resources and the desirability of treating students as 'clients' was now not just on the Government's agenda but on the AUT's - and, to boot, the union had even adopted the Government's language of the marketplace.

(b) The Tories

In what ways did anti-Thatcherite tendencies within the Tory Party constitute any kind of resistance to, or at least put a brake on, the Government's ideological assault on higher education?

(b) (i) *The traditionalists*

We have already seen that even the more traditionally-minded Tory MPs in the main supported Government cuts to higher education and the legislation of the 1980s, despite the contradictions inherent in simultaneously representing their constituents' interests. Some Tory MPs, Lords and educationalists were not in favour of the Government's emphasis on the instrumentalisation of a university education; nor did they welcome the centralising moves of the late 1980s. For example, MP Enoch Powell - reminiscent of Newman and Mill - thought that universities should be 'dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, regardless of the consequences or applications of the knowledge thus acquired'.<sup>105</sup> For this, they needed 'the freedom to pursue, and to teach others to pursue, knowledge for its own

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<sup>104</sup> AUT and SCUE, *Widening Access*, op. cit: speech by Diana Warwick, AUT Secretary, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Powell, E., *Of Universities and Polytechnics* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1991), p. 5.

sake in whatever guise it presents itself [as that is universities'] very essence'.<sup>106</sup> He saw no contradiction in the state providing 'the lion's share' of the resources, this being 'an act of faith' from one generation to the next. He considered that the Government should not align higher education to employment, it being a 'fatal fallacy [...] to try to turn the world inside out and make economic progress the criterion of the pursuit of knowledge'. PSHE could train people in the 'study of the processes in which an adult industrial population will overwhelmingly be involved', in 'activities which follow and obey economic forces, the workings of supply and demand in the market'. Research should be reserved for the universities 'where knowledge sought for its own sake is the only prize on offer'. Universities should not be under state control as there was 'something about a university which is naturally antipathetic to the state. That is its autonomy.'<sup>107</sup> Similarly, a Conservative student at the AUT Aberdeen debate defended 'the investment' in university education as

not merely in technical skills, such as are provided by courses in engineering, or medicine, or business administration. The investment is much more fundamental, and it cannot be measured purely in terms of economic utility. Universities play a vital part in the development and dissemination of those virtues and values, which are the basis of a free and decent society. We must be wary of fashionable attacks on "useless" subjects, such as history and literature. The purpose of universities is not simply to produce technicians, but to develop that intellectual and personal character, which may be of inestimable value to the individual, and to the society which he serves.<sup>108</sup>

However, this liberal higher education would be suitable only for a few, as Powell confirms: 'Given the spread of aptitudes and personalities in any population, it is unlikely that more than a minority of each generation will be irresistibly attracted and accordingly benefited by exposure to the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in a university environment.'<sup>109</sup> Given the built-in élitism, these views did not constitute a threat to the Government's vision, which - by the end of the 1980s - could be seen more clearly: that the bulk of higher education should serve government-dominated instrumental purposes. And, given that, it could of course expand.

*(b) (ii) The "free-marketeers"*

As we saw in Chapters 3 and 6, the neoliberal "free-marketeers" led and influenced the Government's thinking, and wanted to go even further. Joseph had argued that it

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> AUT Aberdeen, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>109</sup> Powell, E., op. cit.

would be better - morally - for universities to be liberated from state subsidy as this would bring about their financial and academic independence. The think-tanks were critical of the Government's cuts in the early 1980s and the centralising moves later on, so did this constitute a challenge?

As we have seen from some of their number in the Lords, the blueprint of the neoliberal "free-marketeers" was that higher education institutions should become private, like the University of Buckingham (set up by the CPS in 1973). Some prominent neoliberal academics argued that the post-Robbins expansion of a state-funded higher education system had led necessarily to central - and ideological - control. Deepak Lal (Professor of Political Economy, University College, London) characterised the 'open ended commitment of public expenditure which the Robbins principle entails' as 'indefensible'.<sup>110</sup> He and others accepted the Government's need to reduce public expenditure but considered that cutting university funding was doing irrevocable damage and would result in the loss of prestigious academic staff to the USA. A dependency on the state, it was argued, had the harmful effect of government being able to dictate to universities how their public funding should be spent - or cut.<sup>111</sup> Elie Kedourie (Professor of Politics, the LSE) described the controls and legal powers which the Government was taking over the universities as 'paradoxical at a time when the cry is so loud for parental choice in school education, and opting out of local authority control'. Reflecting the views of Earl Russell,<sup>112</sup> Kedourie pointed out the contradictions: 'Why it should be thought right and necessary for universities to be submitted to a regime akin to that of a command economy is quite obscure.'<sup>113</sup> He considered it 'quite mysterious [that] a Conservative administration should have embarked on a university policy so much at variance with its proclaimed ideals and objectives'.<sup>114</sup> Even Robert Jackson (the Higher Education Minister), Kedourie reported, had 'frankly avowed that what the Education Reform Act had effected in universities was nationalisation - nationalisation of higher education funding, he called it'. But Jackson had maintained that 'it was a mistake to see the Act as a centralising measure', but that 'on the contrary: it will enable us "to strike in the direction of decentralisation" '. How,

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<sup>110</sup> Lal, D., op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>111</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>112</sup> See Ch. 6, fn.2.

<sup>113</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds*, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>114</sup> Kedourie, E., *Perestroika*, op. cit., p. x.



Kedourie queried, could it be claimed that ‘decentralisation’ could be achieved ‘through extreme centralisation’? Surely ‘the world described by Mr Jackson is, to borrow a Hegelian expression, an inverted world’?<sup>115</sup> Lal attacked the same contradictions:

In July 1988 Mr Kenneth Baker, so it seemed, *nationalised* Britain’s universities, contravening the principles professed by the Government which he serves. For is not this Government committed to enlarging freedom and developing a free market economy? [...] Mr Baker can plausibly cloak himself in the pragmatic garb of a traditional Tory who has followed post-war *dirigisme* to its tidy conclusion. But it should be noted that Thatcherism (at least as proclaimed) is based on defending a set of principles whose objective is the demise of socialism, whilst Mr Baker’s nationalisation of universities must go beyond the wildest dream of any socialist - if only they could regain power!<sup>116</sup>

He continued:

At a time when the Government, by privatising industry, is turning its back on decades of *dirigisme* it is ironic that it should appear to be doing the reverse in respect of universities.<sup>117</sup>

Indeed so. However, it is also ironic that these “free-marketeers” seemed not to recognise the irony of their own position. Lal *et al* could go further than the politicians, providing the solution to what they saw as the problem: ‘[P]rivatisation of Britain’s universities remains essential not only for their future but also to resolve the most ironic paradox of the contemporary political scene’.<sup>118</sup> But, ironically, he recognised that ‘public action might be required to “force them to be free”!’.<sup>119</sup> Universities should not be a publicly-funded state commodity to which there was universal entitlement, but should operate in the free market, ‘[taking] their chance in a hazardous world where, like everyone else, unless they know how to swim, they will surely sink’.<sup>120</sup> Ferns maintained that there would be no need for the state to plan or fund student numbers because the market would decide ‘[t]he size of the university population [...] [to] be determined only by that part of society which freely chooses to use and support them - not by politicians and civil servants’.<sup>121</sup> Kedourie argued: ‘If it is a public interest that the young should be educated, then let those who have the greatest interest in their welfare, namely their parents, themselves

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 5, p. 8 and p. 9 respectively.

<sup>116</sup> Lal, D., op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Lal, D., op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>120</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds*, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>121</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 35.

attend to the education.<sup>122</sup> As Lal pointed out, as almost 22% of university students (at that time - 1989) came from private schools, surely their parents could afford to pay university fees too?<sup>123</sup> There could be some student subsidies through grants or loans and, if students were paying for their education ‘by hire purchase’, they would be more careful with taxpayers’ money.<sup>124</sup> Expressing the neoliberal belief in the market, Ferns concluded that ‘some universities are bound to use their independence well. Others may go under. Bankruptcy, not government, will sort the sheep from the goats.’<sup>125</sup> His colleague John Burton (an Economics lecturer, University of Birmingham) argued that the polytechnics should similarly be given independence from the state.<sup>126</sup>

As some Lords had also maintained, Kedourie argued that bringing higher education out of state control and privatising it was the only way to safeguard liberal - as opposed to utilitarian - values.<sup>127</sup> Contrary to Powell’s views, Kedourie considered that the Robbins Report’s insistence on university autonomy could not be reconciled with their dependence on state funding.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Burton warned that, if government regulation were to continue, ‘the system is eventually likely to evolve into one of fully centralised direction of higher education’.<sup>129</sup> Lal juxtaposed Newman’s liberal views with those of Jackson who (speaking at the University of Cambridge in 1988) stated ‘that the Government’s interest in higher education - while it embraces [...] the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake - also has a stronger, more dynamic element in it which is this sense of the way in which higher education is important in the *functioning* [my emphasis] of a modern society’.<sup>130</sup> It was a mistake, Lal thought, to assume that the acquisition of a higher education contributed to national economic growth, that ‘relevant’ and vocational courses should predominate, that costly official checks and performance indicators were needed to measure universities’ contribution to growth and whether the government’s investment was giving ‘value for money’. He considered that the

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<sup>122</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds*, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>123</sup> Lal, D., op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>124</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>127</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds*, op. cit., pp. 8-9; see also Kedourie, E., *Perestroika*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>128</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds*, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>129</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>130</sup> Lal, D., op. cit., p. 11.

requirement for universities to provide more places in science and technology to be grossly interventionist (and, to boot, foolish, vindicated - he maintained - by the shortfall in women taking up these places).<sup>131</sup> Reminiscent of Joseph's view we noted earlier,<sup>132</sup> Lal criticised the use (by Joseph's own Government!) of central planning mechanisms, with their large number of officials, papers and 'obsessive momentum, aspiring to a scientific exactitude'.<sup>133</sup> Governments were able to do this, he claimed, because higher education institutions and their students were heavily dependent on state funding. Kedourie proclaimed that a university is 'not a business' and should not be subjected to the language and methods of the commercial sphere, such as contracting, nor central controls more akin to the Soviet Union, such as 'manpower planning' and 'social engineering'.<sup>134</sup> If privatised, universities - fewer in number, of course - could be set up by whoever would fund them and run the way they wished, as Sidney and Beatrice Webb had founded the LSE, or using the US model of commissioning research and consultancy from private corporations.<sup>135</sup> Diversity and choice were needed because, as Burton argued, 'the genuine guarantor of an objective search for truth is the existence of competition in the production of knowledge'.<sup>136</sup> Privatisation was in the universities' best interests. So although these commentators were opposed to the centralising tactics of the Thatcher Governments, they did not constitute a threat to the progress of the ideology because they shared the same goal: the neoliberalisation of the universities.<sup>137</sup>

#### **(iv) Turning resistance into collaboration and acceptance**

Despite the objections of many in higher education to the Government's neoliberal agenda, the organisations and groups involved in planning and resourcing institutions and representing their staff became used as agents in the Government's hegemonic process. It was possible for the Government to exploit the divisions between and across the two sectors, together with the operational shortcomings and ideological contradictions in the sector bodies, and to use government power to put its own

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>132</sup> Ch. 3, fn.68.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>134</sup> Kedourie, E., *Diamonds*, op. cit., p. 14; Kedourie, E., *Perestroika*, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>135</sup> Ferns, H. S., op. cit., p. 7; see Ch. 3, fn.126.

<sup>136</sup> Ferns, H. S., *ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, Ferns, H. S., *ibid.*; Barnes, J. and Barr, N., *Strategies for Higher Education: the Alternative White Paper* (London: Aberdeen University Press, LSE, 1988).

structures in place. To privatise higher education outright might have been the wish of some neoliberals but, by the end of the 1980s, a more complex process was taking place. The Government had begun to shape and requisition an expanded and state-controlled higher education system to help it rework society in a neoliberal mould. Exploiting the contradictions, the Government had nationalised higher education in order to neoliberalise it. Those within had been led - whether in confusion, by compromise or by default, through lack of alternative policies - into a state of collaboration. By the end of the 1980s, higher education - or at least its policymakers and managers - had started to accept and take on the Government's preferred policy directions, and to internalise and reproduce the new values, practices and language as the only common sense way of "delivering" higher education.

## **Chapter 8    Conclusion: ‘Coherence comes at the end of the process.’<sup>1</sup>**

### **(i)    The question**

Why and how did the shift from an inherently liberal to an explicitly government-led instrumental view of higher education take place and take hold? This thesis has considered the development of the relationship of higher education to the state under the New Right governments of Britain in the 1980s, on which basis, I maintain, that question can best be answered through the ideological model I have employed.

I considered in Chapter 1 aspects of others’ accounts of higher education’s history, noting some commentators’ claims that, once British higher education had become predominantly state-funded and had moved from an élite to a mass system, governments would - as if automatically or inevitably - make higher education serve their interests. In that sense, the Robbins Report can be said to represent not the quintessential expression of universities’ liberal values - as is often claimed - but the beginnings of greater government control over higher education, ushering in all that followed. On the one hand, it can be seen as another expansionist policy of the post-war social democratic welfare state, extending higher education to more students, entitled to state-funded grants. On the other hand, the Report can be seen as marking a much more explicit and direct relationship between the state and the higher education it was funding. While not denying that universities as consumers of public money and educators of others should operate some forms of self-regulation, financial accountability and academic peer review, these are not issues with which I am concerned here. What I have been seeking to establish is that the relationship between the state and higher education re-drawn under Thatcher was the outcome of an ideological process in pursuit of hegemony. This process was in part achieved through the implementation of a deliberate agenda and in part unfolded in the way ideology functions to distort reality, play on contradictions and build consent.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gove, Tory Secretary of State for Education, quoted in Millar, F., ‘Gove is careering towards an omnifiasco over the baccalaureate’, *The Guardian*, 7 January 2013, p. 34: available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/jan/07/gcse-ebacc-michael-gove-reforms> [accessed 8 January 2013].

## (ii) The ideological explanation

I therefore analysed how a publicly-funded and autonomous university system, free at the point of delivery for most undergraduate students since 1962, was reconstructed radically between 1979-1990 into being understood as answerable to, and at the service of, a state whose governments attacked existing academic values in order to put neoliberal norms, values and practices in their place.<sup>2</sup> Was it not contradictory that the Thatcher Governments ended up wanting to requisition higher education for their cause? One might have expected New Right governments to have privatised it but this did not happen.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the Thatcher Governments (and their successors) kept - and even expanded - higher education as a state-run concern, strengthening central controls over it. Although this might seem paradoxical, in so doing they secured its participation - slowly but surely - in their ideological cause, making it operate explicitly as an ideological arm of the state.<sup>4</sup> To understand how that was possible, I considered how an ideology is produced, functions and succeeds. I drew on two interpretations of how ideology works: first, as a set of ideas whose development and shifts I tracked through documents and debates; second, as a medium for framing, transmitting and embedding those ideas, functioning through universalising from selective and partial presentations of reality, and recruiting agents to help construct consent. The first needed the second to make it work. Once higher education was destabilised, and in the absence of strong alternatives, the ideological process could work on the contradictions inherent in both the social democratic consensus and in Thatcherism to shift ideas and practices to serve the construction of a neoliberal version of reality. We have seen that the Thatcher Governments made use of various incoherent and contradictory ideas and practices,

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<sup>2</sup> Labour MP Roland Boyes noted: ‘As history shows that Right-wing Governments always find it necessary to attack their country’s intellectuals, and as the Government values are leading to the erosion of democratic rights and freedoms and civil liberties, was it not entirely predictable that our universities and academics would be similarly attacked?’ - HC Deb, 21 May 1985, vol.79, c.868.

<sup>3</sup> See Ch. 4, fn.5.

<sup>4</sup> In 1993, Lord Annan summarised the situation (HL Deb, 6 December 1993, vol.550, cc.791-792, my emphasis): ‘The HEFC was set up, not like the UGC as a buffer between government and the universities, but as *an arm of government under direction of the Department for Education*. Let me not mince words. The Government treat universities like so many piles of dung. The Government no longer trust universities to assess their own activities. They intend to reshape higher education, taking business as their model, giving universities a bottom line as low as possible and adding a few increments to some to take account of special excellence in teaching or research. The excellence is to be judged by quangos set up to push the universities around. [...] The Government have announced a programme of massive de-regulation. Why not start with a little de-regulation of the universities? The Home Secretary has said that the police are hampered in fighting crime by excessive paperwork. The universities are hampered by exactly the same thing at the moment.’

in an *ad hoc* and pragmatic fashion, but nonetheless as part of an ideological “endgame” to which some were deliberately - and others unknowingly - party. The Governments were able to promote their ideological agenda by taking advantage of the contradictions in their and their opponents’ ideas and of situations as they arose. There had to be a “new deal” between higher education and the state so that the former, as Stuart Maclure realised (writing in 1992), could help to ‘create a nation of enterprise and to discredit the “dependency culture” associated with the forty years after World War Two’. Higher education institutions were ‘to be paid for doing what the Government tells them to do, or not paid at all’, as Maclure summarised it.<sup>5</sup> Through an analysis of the documents and parliamentary debates, I have demonstrated the hegemonic process whereby higher education was brought to operate according to neoliberal practices and values, a new consensus emerging from the New Right’s zealotry to acquire political, organisational and intellectual domination.

### **(iii) The struggle for hegemony**

But was domination in fact achieved? And how can this be judged? I use four ways in which to assess whether a successful challenge was made to a liberal higher education system and whether its relationship to the state changed fundamentally.

The first is to consider the extent to which the system withstood the onslaught of the neoliberal attack. In comparison with the extent to which neoliberal values and moves towards privatisation were imposed on other public services in the 1980s, higher education was remarkably resilient to neoliberal incursions - at the time. Although cuts destabilised the institutions, no university closed and neither university nor polytechnic academics were made compulsorily redundant. University academics held on for a while to long-established liberal traditions and practices, such as tenure, that would be dislodged only by legislation passed towards the end of the 1980s. The polytechnics opened up access to higher education; and their independence in 1988, followed by acquisition of university status and degree-awarding powers from 1992, are seen by many as liberalising moves, strengthening

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<sup>5</sup> Maclure, S., *Education Re-formed: a Guide to the Education Reform Act* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Third Edition, 1992), pp. 96-97.

higher education overall.<sup>6</sup> Many students unable to find university places went to PSHE institutions instead. Higher education thus expanded in the 1980s, with many more students undertaking degrees. The early radical proposals, such as student vouchers and the withdrawal of all state funding from higher education institutions, recommended by the CPRS, were a step too far for many liberal-minded Tory MPs and did not command sufficient political support to be enacted.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Tory MPs' opposition to Joseph's proposals to charge tuition fees delayed their introduction until the 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

While many New Right gurus and advisers came from academe, the majority of academics held on to their liberal values (whether in "social democratic" or "conservative" mode) unscathed, as Anderson commented in 1992:

The new Right had always been relatively weak in the academy, and lacked the cadres to impose its vision at large. The great bulk of the British intellectual establishment held fast to its moderate liberal verities, indifferent or hostile to creeds of either Left or Right. The deep structures of its inherited outlook remained largely unshaken through all the zig-zags of British politics in these years.<sup>9</sup>

As part of the Establishment, traditional universities reflected conservative British values, which Thatcherism attacked but did not destroy. While the polytechnics and their vocational subjects expanded, a liberal university education at the "top" universities was - and still is - available and is still considered in popular terms to be the "best" higher education to be had, especially for the élite. Furthermore, such an education came increasingly to be offered more widely by the polytechnics themselves. Nevertheless, others - including many students - now see higher education in much more instrumental terms. In many - albeit by no means in all - universities and departments what was once a student-teacher learning relationship is being replaced by a predominantly consumer-producer relationship.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Department for Education, *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* (Norwich: The Stationery Office, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> See fn.3 above.

<sup>8</sup> See Ch. 4, fn.31.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, P., *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>10</sup> Levidow, L., 'Marketizing higher education: neoliberal strategies and counter-strategies', in Robins, K. and Webster, F. (eds), *The Virtual University? Knowledge, Markets and Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 227-248: available at [oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk) [accessed 1 September 2013].



A second way of assessing the extent to which neoliberalism succeeded in undermining a liberal higher education system is to consider what factors contributed to changing that system to reflect neoliberal values. The challenge came about in a number of ways. First, the selective UGC cuts made in response to government cuts to the university grant in the early 1980s shocked and disoriented universities. This was not just because it was a resources cut, but also because an external body (the UGC, which universities had previously characterised as on their side) was deciding for them which subjects in which universities should be cut, and for financial rather than academic reasons. This constituted a direct intervention in their affairs. Second, in denying (at least initially) a higher education to many, the cuts undermined the view that had held sway since the end of the Second World War that a university education was worthwhile *per se*, irrespective of the subject chosen. Third, as PSHE's response was progressively to cut the unit of resource, this would come to result in weakening higher education as a whole - an acceptance of government funding at a lower unit level. As the quality of liberal higher education declined, for example in terms of contact hours and class sizes, so its traditional value became less clear and harder to defend. Fourth, higher education institutions started raising much more of their income from private sources, thus beginning to pave the way for what was to develop in the 2000s. Fifth, and relatedly, successive reports and legislation impressed upon higher education the need to reject liberal values and a higher education "for its own sake" (except for the few) and to see it instead in instrumental terms, predominantly as a preparation for employment, with the result that the liberal arts and humanities were "de-valued" during the period, with some areas of the social sciences being positively vilified. Sixth, and continuing and developing the instrumental trend just outlined, reports and legislation imposed nationally determined requirements of accountability (both financial and academic) upon individual higher education institutions, undermining notions of academic autonomy and self-regulation, and needing internal administrations, governing bodies and external quangos at once to manage compliance and encourage entrepreneurial responses to extra cash incentives. Seventh, the practice of students being funded at public expense - that is, the very idea of a full-time student - was eroded, it being no longer accepted that they could draw on a living maintenance grant and have tuition fees paid at public expense, so that all but the richest students had to rely on a combination of student loans and "working their way through college". Eighth, the

Thatcher rhetoric engendered what Maclure calls ‘a heightened public anxiety’ against higher education (as against all public services), leading people to think of it as a drain on “taxpayers”, rather than a valued public resource.<sup>11</sup> The status of academics was undermined: they were no longer seen as an esteemed profession but, rather, as inhabitants of “ivory towers”, out of touch with “the real world”. British intellectuals - as Anderson puts it - ‘now felt not so much, perhaps, disaffected as disestablished’.<sup>12</sup>

A third way of assessing the extent to which a neoliberal approach to higher education had become accepted by the end of the 1980s is to consider how the social, historical and cultural norms of the sector contributed to the ideological process of neoliberalising itself and the wider British context. In the preceding thirty years or so, government moves had tended to reinforce the hierarchical divide between the universities and the further education sector: for example, the remit of the Robbins Report did not include aspects of higher education taking place in the further education colleges.<sup>13</sup> Higher education remained dominated and divided by whether institutions were inside or outside a unitary university system. The situation was further confused, rather than ameliorated, by the Labour Government’s binary policy, even though this expressly identified a new public sector of higher education to challenge the universities’ prestige. To counter this, universities would increasingly seek to differentiate themselves in a hierarchy of “research-led” institutions. In an attempt to preserve the universities’ higher unit of resource, which supported their ability to undertake research, the UGC cut student numbers in the early 1980s - but this led to PSHE expansion, often in subjects (such as business studies, IT, etc.) that accorded with – and thereby strengthened - the Government’s instrumental view of higher education. So instead of there being more new universities with more students (which would have happened if all the Robbins’ proposals had been carried through and student numbers had risen in response to market demand), the way the two sectors were positioned by the 1980s encouraged them to compete - something encouraged by a hierarchical higher education structure that discouraged collaboration. Furthermore, as Peter Scott has pointed out, ‘the binary policy let the universities off the reform hook’ back in the 1960s, as some of the PSHE institutions,

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<sup>11</sup> Maclure, S., *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, P., *op. cit.*, p. 198

<sup>13</sup> See Ch. 3, fn.92.

supported by the peer review system operated by the CNAA, took the lead on pedagogical developments and support for “access” and “non-traditional” students. As Scott continues, ‘the existence of “alternative” institutions cast university development in an entirely new, and possibly more conservative, light’.<sup>14</sup> Their conservatism laid them open to a stronger ideological challenge, especially given the contradictions inherent in their wish to remain independent and autonomous, while drawing almost exclusively on public money and with very little accountability. To keep a liberal higher education for the élite meant that greater differentiation would increasingly have to be drawn between the “excellence” of the “top research” universities and all the rest, which would be more closely aligned to training and employment - the instrumental needs of neoliberal governments.

A fourth way of judging the extent to which neoliberalism came to dominate as the prevailing ideology in higher education is to judge it not simply by what the Thatcher Governments managed to achieve at the time but to consider - briefly - the legacy of neoliberalism post-Thatcher. As noted in Chapter 1, Hall explains how material practice can ‘change the nature of the terrain itself’ and bring about ‘a new balance of political forces’.<sup>15</sup> How an ideology is “materialised” (in Althusser’s sense), becomes clearer when viewed retrospectively. It might well not always have seemed at the time as if neoliberal values had obtained a foothold in higher education but - with the benefit of hindsight - we can now see how the practice of neoliberalism has “changed the terrain” of higher education, and indeed of British society as a whole. As Michael Gove, Tory Secretary of State for Education, commented in 2013 (on another matter): ‘Coherence comes at the end of the process.’<sup>16</sup> Almost as if following Althusser, Joseph had realised that not all reforms could be put in place immediately but that it was important to set up basic structures and pass initial legislation.<sup>17</sup> As Stuart Sexton reflected in 1987 (on a matter concerning schools):

[T]he mistake has been to assume that we can get from where we are now to where we want to be in one giant stride [...]. After a hundred years of state-managed education, it will take more time to accommodate the schools, the

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<sup>14</sup> Scott, P., *The Crisis of the University*, op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>15</sup> See Ch. 1, fn.71.

<sup>16</sup> See fn.1 above.

<sup>17</sup> See Ch. 5, fns.67 and 97.

teachers and above all the parents themselves to a system of free choice; from a producer-led system to a consumer-led system, which is what it ought to be.<sup>18</sup>

The story of this “long revolution” is about ‘bringing views which were once regarded as unacceptable into common currency’, thereby changing ‘the boundaries of debate’, as Maclure describes it.<sup>19</sup> In time, as Schwarz points out, ‘yesterday’s outrage becomes tomorrow’s norm’.<sup>20</sup> The struggle for hegemony in higher education would take time to accomplish; but it is a measure of its success that it has now become possible to propose legislation firmly embedding the neoliberal agenda - such as charging £9,000 annual undergraduate tuition fees, withdrawing public funding from arts and humanities subjects, and considering the extension of degree-awarding powers and the university title to commercial enterprises.<sup>21</sup> These kinds of changes were impossible under Thatcher; her achievement, rather, was to make what was once politically impossible become increasingly politically inevitable, to paraphrase Friedman.<sup>22</sup> The neoliberal “battle of ideas” - in higher education, as in other areas - was initiated under Thatcher; it defeated its initial opponents by the mid-1990s; and it is now capitalising on those successes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sexton, S., *Our Schools: A Radical Policy* (Warlingham: Institute of Economic Affairs Education Unit, 1987). Andrew Denham drew attention to this quote in his *Think-Tanks*, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Maclure, S., op. cit., p. 165. By 1992, Anderson confirmed how ‘an unabashed capitalist ethos’ had taken hold under Thatcher, concluding: ‘The best evidence of this political ascendancy was the transformation of the Labour Party under it, the most enduring single achievement of Thatcher’s rule. Here lies, indeed, the central difference between the conjunctures of 1963 and 1991.’ - Anderson, P., op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>20</sup> Schwarz, B., op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> BIS, *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> See Ch. 1, fn.64.

<sup>23</sup> As John MacGregor (Secretary of State for Education and Science in 1989) later pointed out: ‘[T]he Labour party, having opposed so much of what we carried through in the 1980s, have now come around to the recognition that we were right, and will not attempt to reverse most of the reforms. Listening to Tony Blair’s speeches recently, I have been struck by the extent to which he is claiming that the Labour party would pursue policies which, when I and other Secretaries of State were taking them through Parliament in the 1980s, were being bitterly opposed by Labour spokesmen [...]. This is just another example of how the Conservatives won the battle of political ideas in the 1980s, and of how politics have now moved firmly on to our ground.’ - Ribbins, P. and Sherratt, B., op. cit., p. 7. Demonstrating this shift, New Labour Minister for Further and Higher Education in 2002, Margaret Hodge, expressed to Vice-Chancellors her bemusement that universities as autonomous and independent institutions ‘expected a guaranteed and permanent underwriting of their activity and funding by the state’ and that she wanted to ‘enable the market to play a much stronger role in determining student choice and research investment’: Clare, J., ‘Failing universities to lose government funding’, *The Telegraph*, 12 September 2002: available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1406954/Failing-universities-to-lose-government-funding> [accessed 2 May 2012]. By 2010, Tory Cabinet Office Minister, Francis Maude, announced that the new Coalition Government would be looking to push through ‘more vigorous reforms’, building on the work of both Thatcher and Blair: Wintour, P., ‘Minister: we’re more radical than Thatcher’, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2010, p. 1.

#### (iv) Embedded neoliberalism

The Thatcher Governments had initially seemed intent on returning university provision to pre-Robbins days and making PSHE institutions into providers of vocational courses only; and in both cases on reduced funding as part of public expenditure cuts. However, it became apparent to them in the mid- to late 1980s that they could turn an expanded higher education system - over which they had by then acquired central control - into an ideological arm of the state, in order to “liberate” it. What had seemed ideologically incoherent turned out not to be: centralisation was a route to the marketisation and commodification of higher education.<sup>24</sup>

It was necessary for Thatcher and her followers to appropriate the higher education system because its extension beyond the élite to others in the 1960s and 1970s had shown that expansion could lead to a loss of government control. If too many students became too critical of established power structures, higher education institutions might all too easily turn into an institutionalised oppositional force and this would destabilise capitalism. The Thatcher Governments needed to regain control not just over the economy, to favour their own interests, but also over “the ruling ideas”. Instead of casting higher education into the private domain, the Thatcher Governments realised they could turn it into a re-formed and explicitly ideological state apparatus. They could use the state to attack the state, so to speak, and to assist in embedding their ideology at a deeper level. A neoliberal re-interpretation of the purpose of a higher education was to be achieved not simply by government *diktat* but by building on contradictions to arrive at a re-presentation of “reality”. Liberal ideas and practices could be appropriated and transformed to meet other ends. For example, academic practices of peer review in research and teaching could be used as the means to build compliance to a market-led agenda, centrally controlled. Then surveillance becomes no longer necessary as the inmates come to police themselves, as Barnett puts it.<sup>25</sup> Grudging acquiescence could be turned into active support, thereby shifting the terms of the debate and ensuring that new codes of practice and behaviour became internalised and would endure. In Marxian terms, capitalism needed a subservient labour force. Education, as Althusser recognised,

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<sup>24</sup> See Ch. 4, fn.139. Similarly, in 2013, schools are being forced to come out of ‘the control of elected councils and into the hands of central government and private sponsors’: Monbiot, G., ‘With threats and bribes our schools are forced to be “free”’, *The Guardian*, 5 March 2013, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Barnett, R., *Beyond All Reason*, op. cit., p. 46.

needed to be appropriated as an ideological state apparatus to make the system work.<sup>26</sup> Those studying and employed in higher education not only needed to adopt neoliberal values themselves, but the structures in which they worked needed to be changed to reflect and institutionalise those ideas, beliefs and practices, so that they would be reproduced for others to perpetuate. And the coherence would come once neoliberal practices and values had become adopted and “owned” (in the jargon) by those who had originally opposed them.

With the conversion of many intellectuals and university managers to neoliberal ways of thought and modes of expression, the ‘logic of competition’ has now been internalised ‘deep into how universities work’, as Callinicos puts it.<sup>27</sup> To take just one example: Collini has to challenge his colleagues to recognise the process that has occurred (with specific reference to the Research Excellence Framework):

[W]e need to try to use a more adequate language in public discussion lest these officious abstractions start to colonize our minds. One reason why measures such as these do not now provoke more vociferous opposition is that over the past three decades our sensibilities have been numbed by the proliferation of economic officialise: “user satisfaction”, “market forces”, “accountability”, and so on. Perhaps our ears no longer hear what a fatuous, weaselly phrase “Research Excellence Framework” actually is, or how ludicrous it is to propose that the *quality* of scholarship can be partly judged in terms of the number of “external research users” or the range of “impact indicators”.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, with the higher education state apparatus on board, similar forms of expression, ways of thinking and behaving can be reproduced and passed on to others, as Harvey explains: ‘[O]nce the state apparatus made the neoliberal turn it could use its powers of persuasion, co-optation, bribery, and threat to maintain the climate of consent necessary to perpetuate its power’.<sup>29</sup> If change becomes internalised and embedded, then further changes are possible and seem “natural”.

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<sup>26</sup> See Ch. 2, fns.73-76.

<sup>27</sup> Harvey, D., op. cit., p. 40; Callinicos, A., *Universities*, op. cit., p. 11. For a vigorous defence by a Vice-Chancellor of the need to apply market principles to higher education, see Waterhouse, R., ‘Serve the customer’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 20/27 December 2002, p. 14. He considered that universities were ‘just another service industry and must respond to the market’. Similarly, a fellow Vice-Chancellor Steven Schwartz (the then VC of Brunel University and Chair of a Government inquiry into university admissions in 2004) asserted that universities should operate a free market in admissions based on student vouchers. He added: ‘If funding followed students through the use of vouchers, universities would be cut loose from quotas and allowed to enrol as many or as few students as they wished.’ - quoted in Association of University Administrators, ‘Press Digest No. 364’, 20 August 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Collini, S., ‘Impact on humanities’, op. cit. See also Robinson, A. and Tormey, S., op. cit., for a detailed decoding/debunking of New Labour language in the 2003 higher education White Paper.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, D., op. cit., p. 40.

In exploring why the idea of publicly-funded higher education is under threat in Britain today, James Vernon argues that '[p]reventing the headlong rush to a new idea of the consumer-orientated and profit-centred university requires more than outrage [and] protest'. He emphasises that

[w]e must first try to understand how we arrived at the point where a redirection of public funds to support sub-prime loans for student-debt-financing of higher education seemed natural and inevitable. It is no longer sufficient to nostalgically invoke a better idea of the university, of a golden age of public funding, without understanding how it became so vulnerable to a critique that has eventually eviscerated it.<sup>30</sup>

An ideological analysis of what happened to higher education under Thatcher shows us how a new relationship of higher education to the state was constructed. However, we do not need to consider that construction as the only possible outcome of the history of higher education prior to 1979 nor the only "natural", "common sense" response to the contexts and issues of the 1980s up to the present day. It is instead the result of government decisions being strengthened and opponents' compliance assured through an ideological process that, once understood, can be challenged so that other alternatives can be built.<sup>31</sup> Although people are the products of circumstances, they also have the potential to change them.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Vernon, J., 'Canary in the coal mine', *Times Higher Education*, 1 December 2011: available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/canary-in-the-coal-mine/418284.article> [accessed 16 April 2012].

<sup>31</sup> Challenging Joseph's claim that between 10,000-20,000 student places per year were 'inevitably' going to be lost from the universities as a result of the early 1980s' cuts, Cliff Slaughter (University of Bradford) queried (AUT Aberdeen, op. cit., p. 36): 'What does the word "inevitable" mean? It is not inevitable at all. It is a decision of the government - unless Sir Keith believes that the decisions of this government are part of the natural order of things! It is not inevitable, and it is not inevitable that the government will stay in office either.'

<sup>32</sup> Editor's Introduction to Engels, F. and Marx, K., *The German Ideology*, ed. Arthur, C. J. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 23.

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