

Labour's Neighbours: Re-conceptualising the Ramsay Street boom and British politics from Thatcher to Blair¹

This article considers two overlapping phenomena: the huge popularity of the Australian soap opera *Neighbours* in Britain during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the failure of the Labour Party to mount a successful electoral challenge until the leadership of Tony Blair. It argues that *Neighbours*' appeal – community focussed, friendly, classless, unthreatening, a mixed economy, and in some ways small 'c' conservative – was precisely the platform that Labour needed to convince voters (particularly women and those living in suburbs) that it failed to reach between 1983 and 1992. *Neighbours* offered an albeit imagined and fictionalised window into Bob Hawke's Australia that many of the British electorate found attractive, but until the Labour party tapped into such support, significant numbers of 'floating voters' would continue to back the Social Democratic Party and, subsequently, John Major's Conservatives. There were generational dynamics at play here - with the 8 in 10 12-15 year olds who had been gripped by the show in 1990 unable to vote at earlier elections, but joining the franchise in time for the first Blair landslide of 1997. *Neighbours* was of course not the only influence on such voters, but it was a meaningful one.

Key words

New Labour, Kinnock, Hawke, Keating, Australia, Television

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Introduction

In 1990 around twenty-one million viewers gathered in British living rooms to watch a dramatic conflict play out. With 97% of UK households then owning a television set, and satellite viewership still a minority preserve, this was certainly an age where the terrestrial channels could achieve huge audiences.² As such, a screening of Roger Moore's last James Bond film *A View to A Kill* (16.9m), the end of series four of John Thaw's *Inspector Morse* (16.2m), and, in a more strung out affair, the downfall of Margaret Thatcher's tenure in Downing Street all had viewers tuning in in their droves.³ But, save England's heart breaking elimination from the FIFA World Cup to West Germany on penalties (and here we have to aggregate BBC and ITV viewing figures), there was no more watched event on British screens in 1990 than the events depicted in a fictional, somewhat humdrum Australian suburb: the Ramsay Street cul-de-sac of the soap opera, *Neighbours*.⁴ Screened on 26 February 1990, an episode depicting a failed attempted robbery was far from the emotional high of the crowd pleasing wedding of Scott and Charlene Robinson (Jason Donovan and Kylie Minogue) a little over a year earlier. But this in a sense only spoke to the show's success. Between 1988 and 1991, an episode of *Neighbours* was one of the top three programmes broadcast on British television every year.⁵ It would take until November 1995, with the televising of Martin Bashir's tell-all interview with Princess Diana, for a non-sporting programme to eclipse *Neighbours*' February 1990 rating. The soap was a cultural phenomenon.

Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) rankings of the most watched British television programme, 1988-1991⁶

Year	1988	1989	1990	1991
1	<i>Eastenders</i> (24.2m)	<i>Crocodile Dundee</i> (21.8m)	<i>Neighbours</i> (21.2m)	<i>Coronation Street</i> (20.5m)
2	<i>Bread</i> (21m)	<i>Neighbours</i> (20.5m)	<i>Coronation Street</i> (19.2m)	<i>London's Burning</i> (18.7m)
3	<i>Neighbours</i> (19.6m)	<i>Only Fools and Horses</i> (20.1m)	<i>Only Fools and Horses</i> (18m)	<i>Neighbours</i> (18.8m)

Neighbours had begun broadcasting in Australia in March 1985, reaching Britain in October 1986 as part of a shake up to BBC 1's daytime fare. Initially shown in morning and afternoon slots, from January 1988 it settled on lunch (1.30pm) and teatime (5.35pm) transmissions. As the *Liverpool Echo* put it when trumpeting the higher profile timeslot, 'the main thing newcomers need to know is that it centres on three households in a middle class street and there is not much they

can get up to without the rest of Ramsay Street knowing.’⁷ Later in 1988, the same paper declared that ‘its success has been attributed to its wide ranging appeal to all age groups – from granny down to pre-school age children, in fact almost anyone who can sit in front of a television set!’⁸ This cross-generational appeal was a strong part of the show’s ethos. Its creator Reg Watson (also behind the British soap *Crossroads*) drew some scepticism from his scriptwriters by not allowing the main characters – the Robinson, Clarke, and Ramsay families – ‘to swear, smoke, drink excessively, take drugs or commit violence,’ but, as per his 2019 *Guardian* obituary, ‘this was a big part of its appeal – and of course allowed for airing during daytime hours.’⁹ Unlike the homegrown *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*, *Neighbours* was made for five days a week ‘strip’ transmission: incentivising BBC commissioners to view it as good value for money. It was a constant, and popular, presence on British screens.

Much of the academic literature on the programme has sought to explain such unique success in a small island 10,000 miles away from its nominal setting. There are obvious modern cultural connections between the UK and Australia – from The Ashes in cricket to Barry Humphries and Rupert Murdoch in broader media culture – which perhaps gave an Australian soap a greater shot in Britain than it would have elsewhere. But the stark differences in the show’s fortunes in even the Anglophone world are worth articulating. For Stephen Crofts, although attempts were made in the early 1990s to launch the show in North America, *Neighbours* was unable to succeed in the US as it was too ‘wholesome’ and thereby not ‘raunchy’ enough for audience tastes (there were also concerns as to whether audiences could understand the Australian accent).¹⁰ Even amongst nations with a greater imperial link to Australia – such as Canada and New Zealand – the show would hover on the edge of cancellation, sometimes disappearing from screens for years. For British audiences, however, the ordinary cheeriness of its Erinsborough (deliberately almost, though not quite, an anagram of ‘Neighbours’) setting has proven a consistent and key selling point. As Sue Ward, Tom O’Regan and Ben Goldsmith observe, ‘as an emotionally uplifting and morally unproblematic soap with a focus on cosy everyday depictions of middle-class suburbia, it became an appealing alternative to the bleak and confronting themes of social realism in existing British soaps, as illustrated by *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street*.’¹¹ Elsewhere, Stuart Cunningham and Elizabeth Jacka have argued that ‘the general optimism...of *Neighbours* was seen to function within the high-density urban experiences of many UK viewers as ‘an alternative universe, one ruled by goodwill and common sense’ – a kind of inspirational fantasy in family and community relations.’¹² Whilst American reviewers noted its ‘admirable niceness’ was undone by being ‘fatally benign,’ their British equivalents generally saw virtues in both such attributes.¹³

The contribution of this article is to situate the success of the programme and reactions to it into the world of party politics, and thereby help explore, in particular, the path the British Labour Party took during the *Neighbours* 'boom' on British screens – taking the story from the leadership of Neil Kinnock until the dawn of New Labour. As yet, very few studies have connected such dots. Marie Gillespie's pioneering work on the popularity of *Neighbours* amongst London Punjabi communities in the early 1990s includes something of her school age participants' family views (majority Labour voting, with the feeling that Asian families had been hit hard by the proposed 'poll tax'), but these are asides in a wider study.¹⁴ Likewise, *Neighbours*' communal and cooperative ethos can be read into wider analyses of Australian concepts of 'mateship' and its political uses, though often such studies avoid reference to the show itself.¹⁵ More substantially, Crofts has argued that *Neighbours* 'anodyne' and 'depoliticised' ethos makes any direct political lessons difficult to glean – save, perhaps, a form of imperial nostalgia.¹⁶ As we will see, though not without some truth, this latter verdict should be challenged – the popularity of *Neighbours* on British screens was neither insignificant for the politics of the 1980s, nor can its significance merely be ascribed to a longing for empire, or as some vicarious way to 'visit' Australian relatives.¹⁷ To be clear, there were of course many explanations for Labour's success in 1997: Tony Blair was a skilled and usefully unthreatening politician, the Conservative government was wrought by personal scandal, a reputation for economic incompetence, and splits over Europe.¹⁸ Tactical voting too played its part.¹⁹ But by mining archival material within the Kinnock papers at Churchill College and elsewhere – together with newly generated correspondence from figures both the heart of the Labour Party and *Neighbours* itself – a fresh perspective is possible on a crucial period in recent cultural and political history.

Materials and Methods

This article argues that a re-conceptualising of reactions to Ramsay Street as a deeply political space can make a distinctive contribution to four literatures. The first concerns the broad relationship between popular culture and political change. To date, the literature on this has explored the role of both politicians who draw on the charismatic 'star' qualities of celebrity – Jacinda Ardern, Barack Obama, and Justin Trudeau forming recent examples – and those otherwise famous names who have entered the political sphere in one form or another, usually to promote a particular cause (from Charlie Chaplin and Charles Lindbergh's differing views on intervention in the Second World War, to Jane Fonda's commitment to getting America out of the conflict in Vietnam).²⁰ Such studies have illuminated the role that prominent individuals can play in shifting public opinion, but, by their very nature, they are often 'top-down' accounts of high political machinations. In the second case, they are also somewhat speculative – we know that a

celebrity was interested and spoke out on a cause, and we know (usually) that there was a shift in policy, but connecting the causal dots is not always easy. How voters understood their endorsements, much less how far they were convinced by them, remains underexplored – a product to some degree of the lack of polling data which this article seeks to navigate.

Here too this article seeks to nuance the widely held view, expressed in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, that 'more television watching means less of virtually every form of civic participation and social involvement.'²¹ Particularly amongst the young, Putnam notes, increased televisual consumption leads to 'civic ignorance, cynicism, and lessened political involvement.'²² As a programme where, at its height, 83% 12-15 year olds claimed to watch the show 'every or most days' – together with the febrile political climate of 1980s and 1990s Britain – *Neighbours* forms a useful test case of the interplay between an ostensibly apolitical form of television and audience understandings of the world around them.²³ Whilst the literature has alighted on obviously subversive anti-Thatcher critiques – *The Young Ones* on television, or rave culture per se – if we are seeking to navigate the more managed path Britain took from Thatcher to Blair it may be that other forms of culture, such as the less overtly challenging *Neighbours*, have much to teach us.²⁴

As Joe Moran has noted, even when it comes to the narrow field of viewing habits, we should look past the headline moments 'ingrained in collective memories' and towards 'slowly accrued habits and rituals'.²⁵ For example, as David Cowan has illustrated, when it came to audiences reacting to the interwar period drama *When The Boat Comes In*, there was 'considerable overlap between the relatively socially-isolated letter-writers to the local press [about the programme] and those who looked wistfully back on the communal life *Boat* depicted. Watching *Boat* reminded them of the social connections they missed.'²⁶ Part of the suggestion of this article is that *Neighbours* helped fill a similar void in late 1980s and 1990s Britain. As late as 1995 the show was still pulling in a daily audience of over 12m (over 1 in 5 of the general population) – and still held a majority share of those watching television in its timeslot.²⁷ The satellite and digital television age would eventually drastically undercut its fortunes, but memories of *Watching Neighbours Twice A Day* would mark the experience of many 1970s and 1980s born Britons in particular.²⁸ And so, if Chris Moores has rightly characterised the late 1980s promotion of Neighbourhood Watch schemes as incorporating the 'hum-drum, banal, ambiguous; an 'ordinary'...form of Thatcherism,' this article argues that *Neighbours* tells us much about political mores over the short and medium term, too.²⁹ In doing so, it builds on the valuable work of scholars such as Nick Garland and Daisy Payling in illuminating Labour politics beyond power brokers in Westminster.³⁰

The second area of intervention constitutes the transnational creation of political ideologies. The radical free market right and its ability to ‘think the unthinkable’ during the post-war consensus period of increased state intervention was undeniably aided by transatlantic dialogue, travel, and organisations such as the Mont Pelerin Society.³¹ Bill Clinton and Tony Blair were then subsequently linked by a suspicion of state monopoly, a desire to win elections, and particular policies like tax credits in their *March of the Moderates*.³² But such a narrative – the problems of imposing a common cross-border story aside – arguably overplays the role of think tanks in the transmission of ideas, and is of course Anglo-American centric. There may be much the *Dreamworlds of Race* can tell us about the intellectual elite, but universities, businessmen, and authors are not the only loci of ideological expression.³³ Politicians usually make their choices within the Overton Window – which they can help move, but which is often shifted by events beyond their individual control. The viewing habits of millions of potential voters certainly fall into the latter category.³⁴

There are also questions of geography. Though the D.C.-London axis has particularly distinctive contributions, interrogating the Antipodean world’s influence on modern British politics has much to tell us, too. Certainly structurally, as Rob Manwaring observes, Australia and the UK have much in common: ‘the parties are similar, and with the obvious exception of Australian federalism, the political systems are similar.’³⁵ Likewise, for Ross McKibbin, despite the First World War having had a more distributive impact on Australian society than in Britain, ‘as social systems, despite outward appearances, they were very similar.’³⁶ Such commonalities have doubtless laid the groundwork for Glen O’Hara and John Stewart to illustrate the strong personal connections between figures such as Clement Attlee and the future New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser, and the intellectual importance prominent Labourites such as Ernest Bevin, Hugh Dalton and Hugh Gaitskell placed on the electoral and policy successes of the Australian and New Zealand Labo(u)r Parties.³⁷ In surveying more recent times, including the chronology and locality of this article, David O’Reilly has argued that ‘comparing the Blair–Brown era and the period of Labor party government in Australia under Hawke and Keating – unfolding as they did near a decade and a half apart – produces some quite startling analogies.’³⁸ There are limitations to this view – and areas including presentation where Clinton’s New Democrats remain the better ‘fit’ for Blair’s foundational model, as Chris Pierson notes – but we should take seriously the idea that the world projected by *Neighbours* was indeed a potential snapshot of Bob Hawke’s Australia (largely, to be sure, fictionalised and imagined), and served as a means by which the British electorate could comprehend, and be subjected to, a less adversarial alternative to Thatcherism.³⁹ The fact that they bought into this world so readily may tell us much – including a corrective to the notion of an ever

weakening of ties between Australia and her former imperial metropole.⁴⁰ As we will note, not all of the impression it presented was true – but the pleasant, amiability of the Australia *Neighbours* at least hypothesised was key.

As such, the third area this article intersects with concerns the utility of individuals' testimony – both expressed in interview form, and through focus groups. Here we may not completely rehash the general qualitative versus quantitative debate that has long informed the social sciences, but instead note its more direct relationship to the period in question. Certainly the role of focus groups as organised by Deborah Mattinson or Philip Gould have long been written into the New Labour story – both negatively (in the sense they symbolised the party supposedly jettisoning its beliefs) and positively (that it was listening to the people). But interest goes beyond the biographical contribution of these famous individuals. As Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has insightfully observed, 'New Labour's use of focus groups garnered much criticism. But focus groups allowed politicians to understand more deeply the electorate's lives, concerns, and aspirations.'⁴¹ For Mattinson, indeed, when voters were enamoured with New Labour they also saw them as the very type of positive engagement that Sutcliffe-Braithwaite outlines.⁴²

This article broadly agrees, and follows a recent turn towards the qualitative. In Jon Lawrence's well reviewed 2019 *Me, Me, Me?* ten social science field surveys carried out from the late 1940s until the 2000s were mined to offer a new interpretation of community in post-war England. There are clearly limits to such an approach (in Lawrence's case eight of the ten case studies being located within fifty miles or so of London), and we should be careful not to overclaim, but utilising such testimony can indeed help us 'to understand the different ways in which ordinary people have sought to reconcile individualism and community, self and others, in their own lives.'⁴³ In the case of the Labour Party in the 1980s and 1990s, the perennial problem remained how to interpret their own quantitative and qualitative findings that suggested that whilst many British people held left leaning values, they were not voting for the party that purported to offer them.⁴⁴ Through views on the communal world of *Neighbours* – thoroughly collated by Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) researchers on behalf of BBC executives keen to ensure the license fee payer was receiving value for money (with sample sizes far in advance of conventional political polling) – we see British audiences articulate a world they wanted to experience, free from the constraints of doing so in a directly or indirectly partisan setting.⁴⁵ In getting voters to compare politicians or parties to an animal, drink or car, focus group organisers have long utilised so-called 'projective exercises.'⁴⁶ This article takes such allegorical practice a step further.

Fourthly, issues of gender – and the blind spots produced by it – should be noted. In part, this article again seeks to reach the views of hard to reach, sometimes apolitical (at least as self-defined) voters. As Deborah Mattinson suggests, ‘getting people to come along to political focus groups, given how uninterested people are, has always been problematic.’ In the 1980s, the recruiter for Labour’s focus groups told Mattinson that ‘my girls just aren’t interested in politics and can’t find anyone else who is either – they’re used to inviting people to groups on things they want to talk about – like TV adverts – especially the ladies.’ The solution here was to avoid ‘the dreaded ‘p’ word’ and make events about something else, such as ‘local schools, family finances, health.’⁴⁷ Even where findings could be gleaned, however, there were problems of getting the intended audience to listen. During the Kinnock era, Mattinson and Patricia Hewitt continually faced an uphill battle to get a male dominated Labour leadership structure to act on the data in front of them. Delivering a seminar on the gender gap in voting patterns to Labour’s upper echelons, they faced an ‘all-male audience, with the exception of Jo Richardson.’ There, ‘the men [they encountered] were not noisy but some read papers as we spoke.’⁴⁸ Even when appealing to self interest – women shifting to Labour in 1987 had accounted for most of the party’s gains at that election – many within the party were simply disinterested. Given that overall turnout amongst women was, if anything, marginally higher than men at every British General Election from 1979 to 1997, there was no electorally pressing case to ignore women’s perspectives.⁴⁹

Analysing a programme whose adult audience was predominantly female offers new insights into the type of voter Labour failed to reach in its long period in opposition. Supportive networks of real life neighbours have rightly been re-written into the stories of working mothers in postwar Britain, and adding reactions to *Neighbours* into the mix may further our understanding of such figures daily lives, their aspirations, and politicians treatment of them.⁵⁰ At the very least, unlike those other two major cultural exports of 1980s Australia – *Crocodile Dundee* and *Foster’s* lager – *Neighbours* avoided explicitly pitching itself at men.⁵¹ The trust placed in it, principally, by working or stay at home mothers to entertain but not shock their children should not be ignored. Women and their evolving place in society were a key part of the ‘New Times’ theorised by Stuart Hall, Martin Jacques and *Marxism Today* – a sign of increasing ‘diversity, differentiation and fragmentation’ in modern economies.⁵² The intersection of a changing world (or, rather, due to the lack of childcare options for would-be full time working women – sometimes the *desire* for a changing world) and a form of everyday stability, often conservative in its content, *Neighbours*, has mirrors in the general challenges and subsequent orientation of the British Labour Party.

As time passed the working class made good ‘Mondeo Man’ in 1997 and, even more aptly, public sector working and household managing ‘*Holby City* Woman’ in 2010 would deliver on some

of the subtext of this article. Here then, it is argued that consumption habits give a steer as to the type of world voters want – they are not the only such avenue, nor is such projection a fool proof process, but given the limitations of conventional opinion polls in numerous recent elections, it may be time again to look at such techniques. The contention here is that the popularity of *Neighbours* was an early harbinger for the politics of New Labour: the ‘personal, plain, personal and positive’ story Mattinson and Hewitt told campaigners to articulate.⁵³ It does not posit the image of a Gould or Mattinson furiously taking notes at 5.35pm every day – trying to convert Ramsay Street into a viable path to Downing Street (neither watched the show, in any event).⁵⁴ Nor is the thesis without a reasonable upfront counterpoint: if Erinsborough was so identified with Labour, how do we account for 1992 (or indeed 1987)? Some of this can be dealt with through the general story of Blair and Brown’s modernisation (leading the party away from the somewhat condescending ‘I told you smugness’ and idea that ‘consumption...was purely negative’ view of the world identified by the cultural historian Frank Mort), but there is a further contextual element.⁵⁵

In essence, this article endorses the generational theorist Karl Mannheim’s view that ‘every present performance’ will draw on ‘handed-down data, for the most part unconsciously,’ and that there may be something ideologically formative for those experiences undertaken ‘about the age of 17, sometimes a little earlier and sometimes a little later.’⁵⁶ Early impressions of the world, in short, both matter and last – and across the country the young watched *Neighbours* in staggering numbers. And so, it seems likely, did so-called ‘Worcester woman’ – narrowly defined as being in her thirties, with children, and living in a marginal seat – who would become part of the folklore of Tony Blair’s rise to office. As the data in this article suggests, the strong likelihood is that she and her future Labour voter children were tuning into *Neighbours* a few years earlier. In 1992 the demographics were not quite in the then opposition’s favour. But as the Labour Party changed its offer, and those who had experienced *Neighbours* most regularly came of voting age, 1997 would be a different story. There would be no overt engagement with Ramsay Street viewers in the manner of Bill Clinton famously playing his Saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show* – but New Labour benefitted from the dreamscape *Neighbours* had laid down. At a quarter to six or so, for many years, British viewers had the de facto choice of tuning into a world of new possibilities – or the reality of Conservative Britain on the Early Evening News on ITV. To the groups mentioned above, in particular, this was not a close contest. As such, the argument here is that Ramsay Street circa 1990 was a reasonable suggestion of the type of positive mood music that would famously, and successfully, claim that ‘things can only get better’ seven years later.

Hawke's Australia

To understand *Neighbours'* impact on British politics it is necessary to briefly sketch the Australian political scene which formed its (mostly unspoken) backdrop. In March 1983 the Labor Party's new leader, Bob Hawke, won a stunning upset electoral victory – gaining a swing of 3.6% and securing 75 of the 125 seats available in the House of Representatives: the largest defeat of an incumbent government since 1949.⁵⁷ Included in the 24 gains from Malcolm Fraser's Liberal Party were two Victorian seats – Chisholm and Deakin – which bisected the east Melbourne suburban world where *Neighbours* would be produced and filmed.⁵⁸ Neither constituency had returned a Labor MP since the Second World War, and Hawke's ability to carry such areas spoke to the new electorate he appealed to. As local newspaper *The Age* noted, a win in such 'outer suburbs will generally prompt a successful candidate to glowingly describe an electorate as a "microcosm of middle Australia."'⁵⁹ Pin Oak Court – which doubled for the set of Ramsay Street – was exactly the type of 1970s new build, mostly owner occupied suburb which had increasingly been persuaded to vote for the ALP.

To do so, Hawke, only a member of the House of Representatives since 1980 having led the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) for a decade, staked his claim for the premiership on *Bringing Australia Together*. This was not quite the *Neighbours* theme tune's philosophy that 'with a little understanding, you can find the perfect blend,' but, again, there were parallels. Hawke's own parliamentary seat of Wills – including the 'unremarkable suburb' of Coburg and former industrial but rapidly gentrifying Brunswick – sat in North Melbourne suburbia around thirty minutes from the programme's set.⁶⁰ He thus had an understanding, and grounding, in the world of *Neighbours*. It was through such voters that the party had been renewed, and to whom it now had to increasingly cater.⁶¹

As O'Reilly notes, 'just as with Blair and Brown in 1994, when Hawke and Keating came to the leadership of their party in 1983, they inherited, and immediately began building upon, processes of internal reform initiated by their immediate 'modernising' predecessors' – with Hawke's predecessor Bill Hayden playing the Kinnock role.⁶² After thirty years of perpetual opposition (save Gough Whitlam's rather dramatic 1972-75 administration) such steps were necessary to secure power – though, as Chris Pierson shows, where specific promises were made, the 1983 election campaign was waged on a relatively conventional Laborite programme.⁶³ Indeed, like Bill Clinton during his 1992-93 transition, it was only when treasury officials made Hawke and Keating aware that the financial picture was more parlous than their opponents had let on that they finalised their *volte face*: away from classic left wing demand management and towards a

deregulatory focus on making the market work in a socially progressive way. Like Blair's occasional references to Attlee and Wilson's modernisation, Hawke and Keating then continued in office to present relatively radical changes as part of long standing tradition. As Keating wrote in 1987, 'both Curtin and Chifley [Labour Prime Ministers of the 1940s] fully appreciated that growth and jobs were central to any attempt to make Australia a fairer and more effective society for all. ...[and] in continuing to pursue this growth objective, the Hawke Labor Government is operating completely within the tradition of the Labor movement.'⁶⁴

Such claims would be heavily contested, but they were at least heard. As Neil Kinnock recalls, 'Bob Hawke was, on all occasions, very friendly to me and he seemed to think of himself as the planetary granddaddy of international Labour.' This 'meant generously, even copiously, offering "tips" about strategy and much worldly wisdom.' Certainly, 'not all of that was usable because it had a mainly Australian, rather than British, application - but it's the thought that counts.'⁶⁵ Much of this was engendered not only by Hawke's natural confidence, but his record. In four subsequent elections (1984, 1987, 1990 and 1993) the ALP would retain power – increasing its majority in the house in all but the 1990 election. Although eventually swept from office by John Howard's Liberal Party in 1996, their achievements in thirteen years of government were considerable.

As such, Hawke and Keating were difficult to pigeonhole for Britain's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. On the one hand, under Hawke and Keating the ALP essentially bought into the notion that increasing global competitiveness (particularly around the Pacific Rim) meant that western economies had to deliver tax cuts to survive. Consequently, the top rate of Australian income tax fell from 60% to 47%, and as Keating told Labour's John Smith during a visit to London, there was 'no point having a rate over 50% because people just avoid it.'⁶⁶ Given British Labour would go into the 1992 election pledging to introduce just such a rate (with the Tories by then committed to the maintain the 40% Nigel Lawson had bequeathed), this was arguably an endorsement of Thatcher's worldview. Liberalising the Australian banking system, floating the dollar, and a shift from collective to enterprise bargaining were further areas where broad consensus between Australian and British governments was possible. For Pierson, 'Labor was willing to countenance a quite rapid growth in income differentials through the 1980s and early 1990s as the price of economic growth.'⁶⁷ It was such thinking, argues Elizabeth Humphrys, that suggests Australia formed a polity where, contrary to a general historiographical focus on the New Right, the organised trade union movement 'contributed to the formation of hegemonic neoliberalism' through its acceptance of the Hawke-Keating reforms.⁶⁸

On the other hand, crucially, the proceeds of growth were used in a Blairite rather than Thatcherite manner. As Keating put it, their new ALP was offering ‘a more efficient Australian economy moulded with a Labor heart.’⁶⁹ As such, ‘the poor did share to a degree in the fruits of the growth that took place in the 1980s.’⁷⁰ Significant new investments in the Australian education system dramatically increased the number of children completing high school – from 3 in 10 in the early 1980s to over 7 in 10 by the end of the ALP’s tenure in 1996.⁷¹ Likewise, the permanent establishment of a universal healthcare system (expanding the previous piecemeal attempt under Whitlam in the 1970s) required significant new capital – and a buoyant economy to underpin it. As with the Cameron Coalition in Britain after 2010 (at least rhetorically), John Howard’s Liberal Party would have no option but to commit to retain levels of spending in areas that a Labo(u)r government had rendered politically durable. As with Blair and Brown, moving the political dial on both issues required multiple terms in office. For actor Geoff Paine, who played Dr. Clive Gibbons on *Neighbours* during the mid 1980s (returning to the show in 2017), there was certainly ‘a new feeling of optimism with the new Hawke government. He’d come through the union movement, appealed to both business and working class audiences and like Tony Blair, had a younger man / not so stuffy charisma about him.’⁷² In many ways Hawke and Blair were political soulmates – with the young Blair meeting Hawke on a trip to Australia in 1982, and following his government’s fortunes closely thereafter.⁷³

A major discontinuity between Australia and Britain however was that much of the Hawke-Keating government’s credibility had been built on the successful implementation of a Prices and Incomes Accord between the administration and the ACTU. As Humphrys shows, this was not without trade offs, but it was an agreement that nominally sought to limit wage rises, inflation, and thereby job losses simultaneously through concerted action. Despite early reservations, including by Keating, crucially, by the late 1980s, this was clearly working.⁷⁴ Such success in turn flew in the face of both the recent realities of 1970s Britain, where Harold Wilson’s ‘Social Contract’ between the British trade unions, the government, and business had broken down, and the very underpinnings of Thatcherism – that such agreements would always break down because the unions could not be trusted. Arguably such views would form part of Blair’s *weltanschauung*, too. Down Under, ‘chastened by the evidence of ‘loss without limits’ experienced by trades unions under Thatcher in Britain, the ACTU preferred a strategy of negotiated change with a broadly sympathetic Labor government.’⁷⁵ As Paul Kelly summarised, ‘opinion among many economists was that Australia was recycling failed incomes policies from the British Labour Party.’ As it mostly functioned however, ‘the Accord gave the unions access to government but the government sought union responsibility.’⁷⁶ Given Hawke’s own lack of restraint when leading the ACTU in the

1970s there was no small irony here – to Kelly he was ‘a reformed arsonist selling a fire prevention policy’ – but it largely stuck.⁷⁷ Hawke would tell Kinnock that ‘he knew that relations with Unions and business were more manageable with power than without power.’ Kinnock, in turn, joked ‘that I was keen to find out.’⁷⁸

It was partly this disjuncture that led to frosty relations between London and Canberra during the 1980s. As Humphrys illustrates, some of this was confected – and represented a clash of personalities rather than policy – but there was certainly a disjuncture of language. For Margaret Thatcher, after all, Australia represented the triumph of rugged individualism, not the cosy, mutually appreciative cul-de-sac life of Erinsborough. As she told an audience in Melbourne in August 1988, ‘you have had a long and distinguished history since Captains Matthew Flinders and John Murray first visited Port Phillip Bay. You also have the particular distinction of having been founded unofficially by individual enterprise, and that is still reflected in the sort of city and state you are today.’⁷⁹ Many of the questions Thatcher faced during her 1988 visit to celebrate Australia’s bicentennial reflected the feeling that the nation had long been deprioritised by British Prime Ministers (she had previously made only two fleeting visits early in her premiership), and her answers in this regard did not always satisfy the local media. More pointedly, she also refused to endorse the administration of Bob Hawke even where there were relatively easy and uncontroversial avenues to do so. When asked by Kerry O’Brien of Channel 10 what similarities she saw ‘between “Thatcherism” and the policies of the Hawke Government in Australia,’ she replied that ‘it is not for me to say’ before launching into a broad point about the sagacity of Adam Smith.⁸⁰

The feeling was mutual. In his memoirs, Hawke later commented that whilst Thatcher ‘was the hardest working head of government I ever met’ and she was ‘always extraordinarily well briefed,’ she could also be ‘less than straightforward’ and ‘there is so much of her philosophical approach to domestic and international politics that I cannot share.’⁸¹ Thatcher’s opposition to sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa was a clear point of disagreement, but views on domestic economies also provided bones of contention. In this vein, Peter Morris, Hawke’s Minister for Industrial Relations, gave a speech in September 1989 to the ACTU intending to presage the next decade of Labor rule. Eulogising the success of the Accord, Morris claimed (like Kinnock) that Scandinavia and Germany were the inspiration for much of the type of public-private partnership the ALP sought.⁸² In a barnstorming and undiplomatic intervention, he also made clear the world he did not want: ‘Thatcherite Britain...an economic and social disaster’ where productivity gains were ‘accounted for not by industrial expansion but by the fall in the number of people working in industry.’ The future, he asserted, ‘lies with countries which are prepared to

innovate, produce and sell, not those which simply dig, chop and sell off.’⁸³ Thatcher’s Britain and Hawke’s Australia could appear in many ways at fundamental odds.

Interpreting Neighbours

By 1989, such digs were much easier to make, and more likely to land. In June that year, in one of his most famous set piece speeches, Britain’s Shadow Chancellor John Smith joined the queue. With inflation then in excess of 8%, one of Thatcher’s key monetarist goals lay in tatters. Together with disagreements between Chancellor Nigel Lawson and Thatcher’s economic adviser Alan Walters, the general impression had arisen that all was less than harmonious in Downing Street. And so Smith took to the dispatch box. ‘Although [Lawson] and the Prime Minister are neighbours, [the Chancellor] should take account, as many of us who are aficionados do, of the theme song of the *Neighbours* programme which we hear twice a day on BBC television.’⁸⁴ Whatever their genuine long term viewing habits, in preparation, Smith’s office had certainly joined the millions of Britons watching the show that week. Whilst Smith and his advisor David Ward were redrafting the speech the previous afternoon, another member of the team, Ann Barrett, was glued to the BBC making sure they got the lyrics exactly right. Later in the evening they continued to sing the theme, leading Ward to jokingly remark that he ‘was worried that anyone wandering past the...office would have been forgiven for thinking everyone had gone stark raving mad.’⁸⁵

Thus, on 7 June 1989, Erinsborough entered the House of Commons. At 4.54pm, around forty minutes before British audiences would once again hear the tune, Smith began: ‘Neighbours—everybody needs good neighbours. Just a friendly wave each morning helps to make a better day. Neighbours need to get to know each other. Next door is only a footstep away. Neighbours—everybody needs good neighbours. With a little understanding, you can find a perfect blend. Neighbours should be there for one another. That’s when good neighbours become good friends.’ Twisting the knife, he added that ‘the Chancellor of the Exchequer may be a good neighbour, but Walters and [fellow monetarist guru Brian] Griffiths are the good friends.’⁸⁶ The Commons, including the future Conservative leader William Hague, fell about laughing.⁸⁷ As backbench MP Giles Radice recorded in his diary, ‘the look on Lawson’s face when John is talking about Walters is a dead giveaway.’⁸⁸

Despite the fame of this incident, given the transmission times of *Neighbours*, it seems unlikely that many parliamentarians can really have been ‘aficionados’ of the show. Writing in 2021, Neil Kinnock suggests ‘there would not have been many Labour MPs who were familiar with *Neighbours* but some of their kids might have been.’⁸⁹ Certainly the Labour MP Tony Worthington found the soap ‘appalling’ – partly because it was crowding out homegrown Scottish

programming.⁹⁰ His socialist colleague Lord Graham could not ‘abide’ *Neighbours*, though conceded ‘the rest of my family think it is marvellous.’⁹¹ Likewise, the Conservative member for Banbury, Tony Baldry, jokingly wondered ‘whether I am culturally qualified to be a Member of Parliament.’ After all, ‘the last time I saw an episode of *Coronation Street* was when I was in my teens, and I do not think that I have ever seen an episode of *Neighbours*.’⁹² All this followed in a long tradition of televisual ignorance. As Joe Moran points out, Harold Macmillan had feared the rise of television as a replacement for the source of his family’s wealth – books, and ‘Harold Wilson and James Callaghan made rather arch references to *Coronation Street*.’⁹³

More broadly, such reticence spoke to an inability to successfully engage with celebrity and consumption of pop culture as a harbinger of a viable path to Downing Street. Labour had attempted this – but in a manner that was arguably tokenistic, and certainly geared towards a politics that differed from the issues usually highlighted on Ramsay Street. One example prior to the 1987 election was Red Wedge activists including the musicians Billy Bragg and Richard Coles meeting with Peter Mandelson and the Labour communications team to discuss ‘some specific policies, principally gays, Cruise [missiles], and broadcasting.’ In the light of a leaked memorandum from Patricia Hewitt in Kinnock’s office arguing that ‘the loony Labour left is taking its toll’ on Labour’s support, including ‘the gay and lesbians issue,’ Coles’ band ‘the Communards [were] feeling very uneasy about what they perceive to be the Party’s backtracking on support for gay rights.’⁹⁴ In both musical cases the level of fame (and fan base) being engaged with by Labour sources was clear (Bragg’s last album had reached No. 8 in the charts, with the Communards latest effort one place higher).⁹⁵ But the trade-offs of associating with figures who could be portrayed as radical were also manifest.

Whereas *Neighbours*’ innate social conservatism could be seen through the lack of even a minor gay male character until 1994, Labour had a complex coalition of supporters to manage – and thus a more difficult task. *Neighbours*’ strategy – well into the twenty-first century – was generally to take an eventually progressive view on gay rights when the issue was raised, but also to very rarely mention the issue at all.⁹⁶ This reflected the topic’s controversy across Australia (Victoria decriminalised male homosexuality in 1980, Tasmania only in 1997), and thus a difficult conversation was mostly avoided by simply not having it.⁹⁷ By contrast, in the 1980s Labour was publicly buffeted between the politics of Bragg and Basildon. As Colm Murphy has shown, such dilemmas led the Kinnock leadership into something of a fudge – and thereby adopting the strategy of arguably ‘de-emphasising, though not, abandoning, pro-minority politics.’⁹⁸

Such positional attitudes sat alongside Labour's concurrent worry that 'many young people continue to be persuaded by Tory ideas about freedom, choice, individual enterprise...and that an American lifestyle a la *Dynasty* is the last word in sophistication.'⁹⁹ Labour's messages to such groups were therefore that the breakaway SDP were 'a bunch of middle class wimps who don't know what the real world is like' and that Thatcher was 'a menace to the NHS and the environment,' failed to 'take women's rights seriously,' and 'support[ed] Apartheid in South Africa.'¹⁰⁰ Such tactics improved the parties standing amongst the youngest voter (rising from 33% of the 18-24 vote in 1983 to 39% by 1987, and 38% in 1992), but even here Labour proved unable to win a plurality of 25-34 year olds until the first Blair landslide. As Chris Clarke has persuasively argued, the left's negative narrative regarding societal ills such as 'neoliberalism' has led it to see enemies and conspiracies everywhere, and not to acknowledge what progress there has been (including, latterly, the 1997-2010 government) in recent decades.¹⁰¹ Even amongst younger voters it could look muddled and miserable: an unattractive electoral combination.

Voting patterns by age at British General Elections, 1983-1997¹⁰²

Age	Labour 1983	(Cons)ervatives 1983	Labour 1987	Cons. 1987	Labour 1992	Cons. 1992	Labour 1997	Cons. 1997
18-24	33%	42%	39%	32%	38%	35%	49%	27%
25-34	29%	40%	33%	39%	37%	40%	49%	28%
35-44	31%*	41%*	28%	45%	36%	40%	48%	28%
45-54	31%*	41%*	31%	45%	31%	47%	41%	31%
55+	27%	47%	31%	46%	34%	46%	40%	36%

NB: in 1983 there was not separate data for 35-44 and 45-54 year old cohorts. The data presented here is for the combined 35-54 category.

All this was a stark contrast to the appeal of *Neighbours* – as can be traced in responses to Mass Observation during the period. As one Welsh grandmother put it: 'I watched Neighbours – another easy to watch Australian soap. All the family can watch, nothing ever happens that can offend or embarrass and lots of happy faces to brighten the day.'¹⁰³ A mother of two in her early thirties likewise felt that it was 'interesting and easy to watch. The characters aren't extreme in any way.'¹⁰⁴ A father of three in his early sixties meanwhile objected to his sixteen year old daughter watching the 'bland' Neighbours, though conceded that he himself had 'no wish to watch a 'soap' as there can never be any dramatic conclusion to one of them.'¹⁰⁵ Though much attention was placed on the show's breakout stars Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan, the often repeated notion that viewers – particularly women – watched the show purely due to the romance between two attractive lead characters does not tell the whole story. Indeed, when asked in 1991 whether the

show had become ‘less interesting’ since the pair had left, a similar minority of men (38%) and women (41%) attested to this view.¹⁰⁶ It was *Neighbours*’ homeliness, rather than its heartthrobs, which drew audiences in. Although its transmission time certainly enabled children and stay at home parents to watch more than others, its hold was strong across the generations.

Responses to the questions ‘Do you ever watch *Neighbours*’ (1988-1990) and ‘Have you watched *Neighbours* in the last couple of months’ (1991)? – BARB weeks 18/1988, 3/1990, and 29/1991

Age	Viewership 1988	Viewership 1990	Change (1988-1990)	Viewership 1991	Change 1990-1991
12-15	81%	83%	+2%	78%	-5%
16-24	67%	80%	+13%	70%	-10%
25-34	50%	63%	+13%	53%	-10%
35-44	48%	58%	+10%	55%	-3%
45-54	42%	51%	+9%	45%	-6%
55+	32%	40%	+8%	36%	-4%

A positive and unthreatening message accounted for much of this, and was manifestly different to the content in domestic soaps like *Eastenders*. Again, contributing to Mass Observation, a Tory voting mother in the south west found the fare in Albert Square ‘increasingly depressing’ (*Neighbours* was ‘the only soap I watch regularly’) whilst our aforementioned Welsh grandmother thought the show had ‘good story lines’ but ‘they should laugh more.’¹⁰⁷ For the future comedian Josh Widdecombe (born in 1983), ‘characters on *Grange Hill* would go through teenage pregnancies or drug addictions, which felt a little heavy for a show broadcast at the same time as [children’s game show] *Fun House*. You didn’t get this kind of drama with *Neighbours*.’¹⁰⁸ It was this – together with the different rhythms of living – that kept the 12-15 year old demographic so loyal. Whilst there was no discrepancy between the 83% who professed to ‘ever’ watching the show and the same figure who watched it ‘every or most days,’ the equivalent numbers for 16-24 year olds were 80% and a reduced (if still sizeable) 62%. *Neighbours* engendered a loyalty across the generations – but most fervently amongst the youngest viewers.¹⁰⁹ Although its popularity was clearly broad, it most directly spoke to the future - rather than current - younger voter.

There is a particular point pertinent to generational theory here. As noted in our introduction, embedded within the desire of those who had launched *Neighbours* was to create a dialogue between the generations. Thus, for the sociologist Norbert Elias - Mannheim’s sometime collaborator – one of the key intergenerational questions was the degree to which the world led to ‘the opening or narrowing of channels of opportunity’ for the young.¹¹⁰ 1980s Britain was something of an exemplar for the latter: an education budget that saw ‘greater “economies” in the

departmental budget than [even] those asked for by the Treasury,' 'bleak employment prospects' for teenagers once leaving school, and the prospect of doing governmentally mandated *Training Without Jobs* at the end of it, through the YTS scheme.¹¹¹ It was the dichotomy between the reality of this world, and the dreamy nature of Erinsborough – where the older generations were embodied by the hardworking, flawed, but mostly fair Jim Robinson, or the kindly Helen Daniels – that cemented its importance to young.

Such an upbeat ethos was key. Whilst *Eastenders* was thematically and visually dreary, respondents to BARB audience surveys referenced both the Australian climate and lifestyle as key parts of the 'escapism' they were buying into when it came to Erinsborough. But such escapism was not just visual and, for Widdecombe, partially 'missed the point'.¹¹² In the late 1980s, after nearly a decade of Thatcherism, viewers pointedly did not want a free for all where the villainous succeed. Whether that represented a victory of Thatcher's anti-criminal rhetoric, or a rebuke of the type of divisive society her economic policy had wrought, is open to interpretation. Certainly, viewers of soap operas worried about characters like *Eastenders*' Pauline Fowler and, whilst finding characters such as 'Dirty Den' Watts entertaining, ultimately hoped they would get their comeuppance.¹¹³ *Neighbours* operated on a different set of stakes – less bleak and, due to the differing timeslots, less thematically challenging to younger viewers. But its cheery tone was the real separator. As Widdecombe notes, the show 'didn't crush our dreams too early. The characters had relationships that went wrong, but they didn't ruin their lives and by the next day they were smiling.'¹¹⁴

Not everyone was enamoured with the programme, however. In 1990, one Reading exporter bemoaned the lack of uptake on an offer he had made to help local businesses crack the newly burgeoning East German market: 'they're all [too busy] watching *Neighbours*.'¹¹⁵ Others highlighted the nonsensical recovery times of the lead characters. As one newspaper columnist asked, 'will someone please explain why after missing no more than two episodes, I find that Helen [Daniels] who had been in a coma from her stroke is now back at home as normal as you please.'¹¹⁶ More substantial criticisms came from Westminster, however. In May 1991 the then Schools Minister Michael Fallon called for *Neighbours* to be removed from British screens altogether. Shows such as the Australian soap were harmful to Britain's children and served to 'dull their senses, making teachers' jobs even harder.' Labour's Jack Straw mostly agreed. *Neighbours* was 'a pretty trashy programme.' The answer was however not an outright ban, 'but to get parents to ensure that their children don't watch more than a limited amount of television.' Martin Flannery, the Labour member for Sheffield Hillsborough, was less measured: 'we are facing many problems in Britain – unemployment, NHS cuts – and all Mr Fallon is worried about is *Neighbours*.'¹¹⁷ A few

weeks later, on the back of teachers in the Birmingham area using scripts from the show to discuss the Australian dialect, other MPs – including Roger King and Anthony Coombs (both Conservative) – argued that the show had no place in the classroom.¹¹⁸ The programme had again become a political football.

Yet such puritanism flew in the face of the experiences of viewers as expressed to BBC Researchers. In 1990 a trifling 7% of *Neighbours* viewers found it ‘unsuitable for children’ – a figure that, even as it incorporated ‘raunchier’ use of extra-marital affairs with greater frequency through the decade, had only reached 11% by 1996.¹¹⁹ And whilst scarcely one in four (27%) viewers in 1990 ‘considered it to be a high quality drama’ this was no great concern: ‘nearly six in ten [58%] believed that this type of drama did not need to be high quality.’¹²⁰ Writing in *The Independent*, Frank Barrett possibly stretched hyperbole a little far: ‘children recognise *Neighbours* for what it is: modern day Shakespeare.’¹²¹

Rather than a threat to morality, respondents to BARB researchers stressed the underlining decency and, if anything, small ‘c’ conservatism of the show. In their qualitative interviews, one middle aged (45-54) woman noted that ‘generally good prevails over evil so sets a good example to young people.’ A slightly younger (35-44) father argued that *Neighbours* gives ‘me an opportunity to talk through social issues with my children.’ The ‘harmless, sexless stories about everyday people’ also pleased an older (55+) woman. As Geoff Paine notes, this reflected deliberate choices by the producers: ‘the test was could adults and kids watch the show without either getting embarrassed, or the kids asking “what does that mean?” So, in a way, the show had to work for 12 year olds.’ As such, ‘it meant the writers had to be careful about dealing with particular words and concepts. Sometimes it got bizarre - I played a doctor that could say Daphne was expecting a baby, but couldn’t say the word ‘pregnant’.¹²² Such were the limitations of a post-school timeslot – and it least meant the show did not run into the ire of Mary Whitehouse, who took issue in 1985 with *Eastenders*’ ‘violence,’ ‘bad language,’ and ‘demoralising situations.’¹²³ Its erstwhile Australian rival on ITV, *Home and Away*, occasionally moved into such controversial terrain, too. Overall, the fact that, as one man (35-44) put it, *Neighbours* ‘doesn’t tax the brain,’ was a virtue and not a criticism.¹²⁴

The show blended a technological newness with an appeal to an imagined past. As the *Irish Independent* put it in February 1988, ‘it is modern and recognisably of our time – the kitchens are fully equipped with modern domestic technology – and yet it is nostalgic in this important respect: it recalls the neighbourliness which for so many people today is a thing of the past.’¹²⁵ *Neighbours*’ most enduring storyline – the relationship between Scott and Charlene – also mixed liberal and

conservative sentiment. A teenage couple who experience an off-again on-again courtship, the pair soon became the show's most sellable product. As such, (Australian) viewers had an unusually large amount of power in deciding their fate. In May 1987, the magazine *TV Quick* asked its readership whether the couple should live together (this being actively discouraged by several characters on the show on the grounds that, at 17 and 18 years old, they were too young). With 70% in favour, and both Donovan and Minogue defending the couple as capable of making their own decisions, producers bowed to popular, arguably liberal demand. Yet they simultaneously appeased conservative sentiment: not only should they live together, but the pair should marry as well.¹²⁶ Like an adroit politician, the show had responded to public opinion in an agile manner that felt organic – and clearly proved successful in both Britain and Australia.

***Neighbours* and the British voter**

Despite its obvious overall appeal, the 1990 BARB research did throw up criticisms worth engaging with, however. For one younger (25-34) woman, *Neighbours* presented 'a distorted view of life – no unemployment, middle class values with no ethnic minorities or class variations.' On one level, the point about racial demography was clearly true. It was eight years into the show before a set of non-white regular characters appeared, long after Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants had become part of the fabric of Melbourne life.¹²⁷ 'White Australia' continued on screen, thus, for over two decades after its legislative end in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹²⁸ Indeed, when *Neighbours* introduced its first non-Caucasian family in 1993 (the Lims from Hong Kong), their entry to Ramsay Street was marked by a storyline where they were accused of eating the Martin family's dog. Watching on, 'even at the age of ten,' Josh Widdecombe 'couldn't help but think, "*this cannot be fucking happening*."' ¹²⁹ It was partly this plot that led Bruce Gyngell, then chairman of Kerry Packer's Nine Network in Australia, to argue that '*Neighbours* and *Home and Away* represent a society which existed in Britain in the 60s before people began arriving from the Caribbean and Africa.' Aside from this misdating here (the emblematic *Empire Windrush* ship reached Tilbury Docks in June 1948), it was his remark that 'the Poms delve into [these soaps] to get their quiet little racism fix' that ignited fierce debate. Speaking for the BBC, executive June Dromgoole noted that Gyngell's was a 'personal viewpoint' that 'doesn't seem to be shared by up to 15 million viewers,' and, instead, *Neighbours*' success 'can be put down to its honest and positive portrayal of relationships between friends and families across the generations.'¹³⁰

When Marie Gillespie surveyed 80 Asian school age children as part of her 1992 PhD thesis on attitudes to television in Southall, West London (nicknamed 'Little India' from the 1950s onwards), she encountered results that proved and disproved the later Gyngell thesis. Asking the

teenagers what current soaps lacked, the casting of too few Asian characters secured a plurality (36) of votes, outdoing even the desire to show more ‘sex’.¹³¹ Likewise, when asked which soap they would axe from British screens, the very white and rural *Emmerdale Farm* was by far the winner: ‘irrelevant to the majority’ for one, and ‘old-fashioned [and] dull’ to another. That said, the most popular show – amongst their own families and the school itself – was *Neighbours*.¹³² With 50 of the 80 surveyed choosing it as their favourite soap (far eclipsing *Home and Away*’s 15), the escapism, horizon opening possibilities, and relatable parables regarding notions of right and wrong (all chosen as the key reasons why ‘watching soaps is useful’) illustrated the show could reach people of different backgrounds.¹³³ As Geoff Paine recalls, ‘did *Neighbours* reflect the ethnic mix of our cities? No, not really. But it portrayed a society where a plumber could live next door to a doctor and architect in an almost classless way. I wish that sort of equality was real.’¹³⁴

The argument that *Neighbours* was purely for the comfortable middle classes also deserves interrogation. In terms of viewership, *Neighbours* had assembled the type of cross-class coalition of which Labour (and, to be fair, the Tories) could only dream in the late 1980s. As the show boomed in popularity its gains across the classes were roughly uniform. It remained a programme of the working class, but bolted on significant middle class support. So-called ABs (professionals including managerial and white collar workers) and DEs (semi-skilled, unskilled and the unemployed) experienced similar 12-13% rises in viewership as the show grew in popularity from 1988 to 1990. Though AB viewership subsequently tailed off more extensively by 1991, the absolute numbers of such viewers may also be more impressive: a 5.35pm transmission did not allow much time to travel back home to watch the soap, particularly for those with longer, office based commutes. The average commute in the late 1980s for a full time worker was around 25 minutes – with typical commute lengths increasing further up the income ladder.¹³⁵ By 1990 a majority of people in every class category were tuning in to *Neighbours* – whilst Labour did not secure a majority of *any* category until 1997.¹³⁶

Responses to the questions ‘Do you ever watch *Neighbours*’ (1988-1990) and ‘Have you watched *Neighbours* in the last couple of months’ (1991)? – BARB weeks 18/1988, 3/1990, and 29/1991

Class	Viewership (1988)	Viewership (1990)	Gains 1988-1990	Viewership (1991)	Gains 1990-1991
AB	41%	54%	13%	44%	-10%
C1	48%	57%	9%	50%	-7%
C2	50%	58%	8%	54%	-4%
DE	49%	61%	12%	55%	-6%

Famously, winning voters away from its DE base was the dilemma faced by Labour in the 1980s and 1990s – one ultimately failed under Kinnock but which, under Blair, was delivered with spectacular success in 1997. Some of this was about class and economics – but much was also tone. As Mattinson described when reflecting on 1980s Battersea, ‘it was clear that part of the battle was going to be to attract a wider selection of, well, normal people to join the party.’¹³⁷ Her contacts noted that whereas Conservative members were felt to be ‘people who would turn up and make a rice salad and get involved with the PTA,’ their Labour equivalents agonised ‘over arcane points of detail’ and were generally ‘sort of lonely and socially odd.’¹³⁸ Little wonder that Mattinson’s then flatmate Jenny soon dropped out of attending local meetings, ‘preferring to spend Wednesday evenings at home watching *Dallas*,’ and occasionally popping back for a drink in the pub afterwards. Whereas *Neighbours* voiced the concerns of ordinary people in a familiar vernacular, Labour meetings were places where ‘both the format and the vocabulary [were] a little intimidating.’¹³⁹

Labour’s vote share by class, 1983-1997

Class	Labour 1983	Labour 1987	Change 1983-1987	Labour 1992	Change 1987-1992	Labour 1997	Change 1992-1997
ABC1	16%	18%	+2%	22%	+4%	34%	+12%
C2	32%	36%	+4%	40%	+4%	50%	+10%
DE	41%	48%	+7%	49%	+1%	59%	+10%

In late 1992 the Labour MP Giles Radice produced his famous pamphlet *Southern Discomfort* which argued, broadly, that voters in key southern English marginals like Harlow, Stevenage, and Slough associated the Labour Party with the electorally toxic combination of high taxes, militant trade unionism, and a lack of aspiration. Though there *was* a specific geographic issue, the problem was also arguably worse than the pamphlet title suggested. As Radice summarised, ‘those marginal seats where the Labour Party did badly *outside* the South tend to be constituencies with ‘Southern’ characteristics...a suburban location, high home ownership, and an above average population of white-collar and skilled manual workers.’¹⁴⁰ Since the mid 1980s Philip Gould had been arguing for ‘language that would be heard and understood in southern suburbs.’¹⁴¹ Labour, as yet, could not carry the British versions of middle class, suburban, Erinsborough.

As part of his research, Radice commissioned a survey of the floating voter in his southern marginals. All were parents aged between 25 and 50, who ‘had voted Conservative but had seriously considered voting Labour.’ The male interviewees were ‘employed as engineers, electricians, printers, salesmen, clerks, painters and decorators and plumbers.’ The women, many

of whom worked part time, were ‘shop assistants, typists, receptionists and hairdressers.’¹⁴² Aside from the turnover needed to sustain the soap’s plot – and the addition of one or two unusual professions for similar reasons - such sectors broadly mirrored the world of Erinsborough: a constituency Labour needed to win over, just as Hawke and Keating had, de facto, in 1983.

Original Neighbours’ characters and their professions within the show¹⁴³

Character	Profession (dates worked where available)
Danny Ramsay	Student (1985), Bank teller (1985-86), Pool Salesman (later)
Maria Ramsay	Housewife (1985)
Max Ramsay	Plumber (1960s-unknown)
Shane Ramsay	Diver, landscape business trader (1985-87), chauffeur (1986), labourer (1986)
Daphne Clarke	Stripper, Receptionist (both 1985), Coffee Shop Owner (1985-88)
Des Clarke	Bank teller and then manager (1985-90)
Helen Daniels	Retiree (1985-1997)
Jim Robinson	Engineer and generic businessman (1960s-1990s)
Julie Robinson	Bank teller and hotel receptionist (1985-92)
Lucy Robinson	Newspaper delivery girl/student, model, personal assistant, and then head of Lassiters World Wide Corporation (1985-present)
Paul Robinson	Air steward, engineering student and subsequently villainous businessman/owner across hotel, real estate, and newspaper industries (1985-present)
Scott Robinson	High School/University Student (1985-87), Journalist (1988-89)

It was only after the unexpected defeat in 1992 that calls within Labour to listen to such ‘home and family oriented’ suburban voters – including those women ‘less likely to buy or read a daily paper [who generally preferred] soaps and popular drama’ – really began to gain traction.¹⁴⁴ For Radice, this involved emphasising ‘opportunity for all and fairness rather than the unachievable equality of outcome.’¹⁴⁵ In short, ‘a genuinely classless approach in politics and society’ – the same language Geoff Paine used to describe the imagined world of Erinsborough.¹⁴⁶

The case was clear here. Between 1983 and 1987 Labour had begun to make inroads into the female vote – adding about 6% compared to its derisory 26% tally under Foot (the equivalent gain for men was 2% - to take them to 32%). Between 1987 and 1992, however, although women’s

support for Labour rose to 34%, this was eclipsed by the 37% of men (a 5% gain) willing to vote for Kinnock at his second election. Whilst John Major lost male voters (41% in 1992 compared to 43% in 1987), he experienced a marginal *gain* under women (44% compared to 43%). As Deborah Mattinson found, many voters saw Labour as ‘outdated, male and aggressive,’ and some had ‘adopted what some in the Labour Party would describe as “Tory” aspirations such as home ownership.’¹⁴⁷ Worcester woman voted for the Conservatives, Erinsborough woman was not yet sufficiently convinced to vote for Labour.

Labour’s vote share by gender, 1983-1997

Gender	Labour 1983	Labour 1987	Change 1983-1987	Labour 1992	Change 1987-1992	Labour 1997	Change 1992-1997
Male	30%	32%	+2%	37%	+5%	45%	+8%
Female	26%	32%	+6%	34%	+2%	44%	+10%

Responses to the questions ‘Do you ever watch *Neighbours*’ (1988-1990) and ‘Have you watched *Neighbours* in the last couple of months’ (1991)? – BARB weeks 18/1988, 3/1990, and 29/1991

Gender	Viewership (1988)	Viewership (1990)	Change (1988-1990)	Viewership (1991)	Change (1990-1991)
Male	41%	51%	+10%	45%	-6%
Female	54%	64%	+10%	59%	-5%

By contrast, the gains made in *Neighbour*’s viewership in this regard during its rise were fairly uniform – though women’s loyalty remained stickier during its downturn. As one late 1980s viewer remembers, Kylie Minogue’s Charlene Robinson was key: ‘with respect to the early Charlene years I think that, whilst every UK advertisement and soap now has a female in a traditional male role (such as a car mechanic) these days, this was happening with *Neighbours* 35 years ago, so that was pretty pioneering.’¹⁴⁸ The woman mechanic (Carla Bonner’s Steph Scully and Bonnie Anderson’s Bea Nilson) or builder (Zoe Crammond’s Amy Williams) would prove a trope that would last well into the twenty-first century. *Neighbours* told a narrative that was often empowering, did not appear tokenistic, and certainly proved popular amongst women – in 1990 almost two thirds of whom saw it as a programme ‘for people like me’ and liked the stories (less than 1 in 2 men said similar for either).¹⁴⁹ By contrast, Labour had had a problem amongst women voters for decades, and, as David Jarvis noted regarding the 1920s, there was a significant ‘sense of female alienation from a “beer and butt” culture of Labour and trade union politics [which]

equated socialism with machismo and the unacceptable face of male aggression.¹⁵⁰ With the 'gender gap' in voting intentions rising to a maximum of 12% during the 1970s, such issues had not gone away.¹⁵¹

Philip Gould, Peter Mandelson and Patricia Hewitt had heard about Labour's disastrous electoral position with women as far back as November 1985. Listening to an all day presentation from the advertising agency Abbott Mead Vickers, they were given an insight into the views of 48 women aged 25 to 44. As Gould later recorded, 'they were frightened: they saw society breaking down and their instinct was to retreat from it into their families.' 'There's no morality anymore,' Gould heard, 'it's all about greed and hate [and] you can't trust people if you don't know them.'¹⁵² Whilst Labour 'waste money on useless things...[such as] parks for gays and lesbians in Camden,' the 'things people associated with the Conservative Party were the things they themselves wanted; all the imagery associated with them was aspirational.'¹⁵³ For Gould, this was abhorrent.¹⁵⁴ As he noted of his own childhood spent outside of Woking in the south of England, 'the party I loved instinctively was to betray the people who lived here; its natural supporters; ordinary people with suburban dreams who worked hard to improve their homes and their lives; to gradually get better cars, washing machines and televisions.'¹⁵⁵

By the late 1980s and early 1990s such televisions were mostly showing *Neighbours*. And, as the *Los Angeles Times* noted – to picture the show 'think of a pleasant suburban street in Melbourne [where]...even tragic car accidents and ill-fated love affairs can't mar the optimism that permeates the neatly clipped lawns and dull split levels [of housing]'.¹⁵⁶ For Peter Pinne, Vice President at the Grundy Company which produced *Neighbours*, the show's British success could be explained by the fact that 'they love the sense of community, the family atmosphere which as most Australians know, is mostly fictitious.' Certainly it had drawn many in – as the *Liverpool Echo* noted towards the end of 1988, 'if you still doubt the power of soaps to project images, talk to the staff at the Australian High Commission in London. Over six months, they have been bombarded with more than 200,000 applications to emigrate to their country as the result of *Neighbours* appearing on our screens.'¹⁵⁷ For Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper, *Neighbours* provided a vision of something that is 'lacking in the personal lives of many people in Britain today, particularly a sense of personal commitment and caring in the community.'¹⁵⁸ The identification of the Labour Party – or associated elements such as Militant – with political extremism had stuck, and rendered it an unacceptable platform to broker such a society – particularly in the southern marginals. For all the good work Kinnock had attempted, only a wholesale reboot could begin to convince a significant number of Erinsborough viewers to change their vote.

In the mid to late 1980s, David Owen and the SDP had tapped into something of this vacuum – with 23% of women and 24% of 18-34 year olds voting for the Alliance in 1987. As Matthew Taylor, elected for the Alliance at that election later claimed, ‘there was real value to be unlocked from our Liberal beliefs and ‘centre’ positioning - decent, well meaning, environmental, community champions, local hard workers’ – terms not so divorced from explanations of *Neighbours*’ high viewership.¹⁵⁹ The Welsh grandmother who liked the ‘lots of happy faces’ of Ramsay Street was certainly one traditional Labour voter tempted by Owen. As she wrote in a 1987 Mass Observation election diary, ‘right up to the eve of the election I was going to vote for the Alliance but Mr Kinnock said vote Labour not SDP to get a Tory out.’ Other members of her family did indeed ‘vote Alliance in the hope of getting the local Tory out.’ Eventually sticking with Labour, she acknowledged that whilst some of the aspirational appeal of Thatcherism was ‘human nature,’ she could not ‘see how the needy could benefit without socialism.’ For her, ‘working people feel safer with a Labour government.’¹⁶⁰

A more steadfast dual convert to the politics of Owen and the world of Erinsborough was Peter Bacchus – who co-founded the Neighbours Appreciation Society (initially the Soap Appreciation Society) at Cambridge University in 1987 and served as its president. Bacchus, who joined the SDP around the same time, ‘was broadly interested in what was being proposed by bringing traditional liberals together with David Owen and his grouping.’¹⁶¹ Writing in 2021, he remembers also being ‘invited to a lot of the university conservative events, as I was involved in the [Cambridge] union and there was a lot of cross over, but those folks mostly seemed like weirdos.’¹⁶²

On the *Neighbours* end of things, some of the impetus here was clearly social: ‘we realised that university societies were given a budget, on a modest scale, to recruit members and organise events. We therefore applied and were given some funds which we could then use to go on pub crawls and organise parties.’ But there was a particular attraction for teenagers – engendered in part by scheduling. For Bacchus, ‘I sat A levels in 1987, and *Neighbours* was really popular then. I used it to provide structure to my revision in the run up to exams - pretty much the only break I would take each day.’¹⁶³ Many of his university cohort had done similar, and *Neighbours* became ‘a platform to get together at pubs in the evening.’ With a £2 annual membership fee the society raised £122 during the 1988/89 academic year – a quarter of which was spent on providing refreshments to its 61 members, and a third on the logistics of hosting its Christmas Party.¹⁶⁴ It was evidently an enjoyable occasion, as Bacchus recalls: ‘it ended up in my room, during which time a Christmas tree made of empty Castlemaine 4X cans was constructed, and stayed there for about 3 weeks or so.’¹⁶⁵

Such levity aside, part of *Neighbours*' appeal was about a world outside the big state: 'I think the sense in Australia that opportunity was open to anyone and that there was nothing to hold you back, was in step with the Thatcher philosophy of the late 80s.'¹⁶⁶ Bacchus had gone 'from a pretty ordinary non-selective school environment to Cambridge, and so that was my sense at the time.' He 'later lived in Australia for around 10 years...and obviously Australia isn't necessarily like that - but I think that is definitely how Brits viewed it, and probably still do.'¹⁶⁷ *Neighbours* helped break down some of the stuffiness of late 1980s Cambridge and was in some respects 'a great leveller': it represented an ostensibly 'very shallow, unpretentious and uncontroversial' world which removed barriers between students of public and state school background.¹⁶⁸

This cross-pollination was viewed as true of *Neighbours*' host country, too. For Bacchus, 'Australia, albeit quite a socialist environment in some ways (high income tax rates, Medicare provision, powerful traditional unions), is an intensely liberal place notwithstanding. Personal freedom is paramount and the environment is pioneering.'¹⁶⁹ In general, Bacchus remarks: 'people naturally live in communities, and want to look after each other, but they also want to be successful and not be told what to do. They also don't like being portrayed as victims all the time.'¹⁷⁰ As he continues, 'this statement could probably apply in a discussion about *Neighbours* vs U.K. soaps, or a discussion about politics in Australia versus opposition party politics in the UK.'¹⁷¹ The notion of community was in flux, and beginning to transcend old norms.

When travelling around the UK for her 'New Times Towns' articles in the late 1980s, Beatrix Campbell observed the difficulty the British left had had adjusting 'from a political tradition which for a century cradled the notion that the factory was the crucible of consciousness, and that the new model army would be forged in its heat.'¹⁷² Instead, a new Britain had emerged – from the Livingstone of Japanese and American global corporations to the 'Thatchergrad' of Basingstoke, 'unimpeded by planning, by civic pride, or by community politics,' but also economically booming.¹⁷³ In the latter's shopping precinct 'social congress is reduced to one simple act: consumption.' Here 'the citizen is only a consumer' and the 'place dies at night.'¹⁷⁴ In place of this new reality, Erinsborough formed something of a Third Way – certainly capitalist, including a buoyant service sector with a café, hotel, and bar in its central complex, but also a place where community had not died – and where the difficulties imposed by deindustrialisation could be obviated by just not working them into the show's plot.

The classless, aspirational and communal nature of *Neighbours* was a contrast to some of its potential British rivals. Speaking ahead of his new Channel 4 show's launch in 1982, creator

Phil Redmond noted that ‘the people living in *Brookside* would be mostly of working-class background.’¹⁷⁵ This reputation was only cemented when, in the late 1980s, one of its stars Ricky Tomlinson, stormed off set after the show ‘had tried to dodge important social issues.’ For Tomlinson, these included ‘the disqualification of Liverpool’s 47 Labour councillors’ for delaying setting new local rates to meet central caps imposed on them by Thatcher’s administration in Westminster.¹⁷⁶ Moving from Merseyside to Greater Manchester, *Coronation Street*’s amiability and gentle comedy arguably placed it closer to *Neighbours*, but it too had been created to provide a platform to ‘watch ordinary working class people doing ordinary, working class things.’¹⁷⁷ The fact that its fictional Weatherfield setting was a thinly veiled version of Salford – itself the backdrop for Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*, a classic working class interwar novel and then film chronicling northern poverty – buttressed its Labour friendly credentials, as did the parliamentary endorsement of Deputy Leader Roy Hattersley.¹⁷⁸ And when it came to *Eastenders* (mirroring Hattersley, Labour MP Tony Banks declared himself the de facto member for its fictional Walford), East London was portrayed as a place of ‘abortion, robbery, prostitution, fighting, nervous breakdowns, unemployment, [and] drugs.’¹⁷⁹ Such content, the *Irish Independent* noted, served to reinforce ‘middle class prejudices and trapping the poor even deeper in their own stereotypes.’¹⁸⁰

In electoral terms *Neighbours* was therefore offering something different. Unlike the major British soaps, it had no innate geographic ‘patch’ – for context, *Coronation Street* was regularly the highest rated programme in the North West, as was *Eastenders* in London, presumably aided by their locally familiar content.¹⁸¹ Thus, whilst Brookside Close, Coronation Street, and Albert Square would have fallen squarely within solidly Labour constituencies, Ramsay Street was the type of imagined place – transposed to British shores – that it needed to win in order to gain power. Precision is difficult, but many of the gains in viewership *Neighbours* made across its 1988-1990 rise appear to have involved trading viewers in traditionally ‘Labour’ parts of the country for parts of the south. In the two years from May 1988, for example, *Neighbours* viewership fell around 8% (43% to 35% of potential television viewers) in Central Scotland, whilst rising 4% in both the South and South East (23% to 27%). In the same period, the show went from the 3rd to the 4th most popular show in Yorkshire, whilst rising from 3rd to 1st in the South West.¹⁸² Labour clearly performed well with some of these viewers, but not enough. When asked to picture the Labour party, one 1992 floating voter had told Deborah Mattinson that if it ‘was a person it would be an old man in a cloth cap with a pipe and a pint’ – perhaps (if slightly stereotypically) an image not unknown to Coronation Street viewers.¹⁸³ As such, until Labour developed a language and an

imagery more in tune with *Neighbours* rather than 'Corrie,' and certainly the type of viewer who latched onto the Australian soap in its boom period, others would step into the breach.

Old Neighbours, New Labour

For a brief yet crucial period, John Major was just such an acceptable alternative. As Joe Moran notes, 'hailing from suburban Surrey via Brixton, Major projected himself as a cardigan-wearing, plain-speaking sort, evoking a nation of county grounds, warm beer and 'invincible green suburbs'.¹⁸⁴ Whilst Geoff Paine believes *Neighbours* appeal was in part to 'the vision of a sunny classless society,' Major too spoke of his desire to build a 'classless society' – presumably a little greyer – as he entered Downing Street for the first time in November 1990.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, his 'association with middle England was an attempt to find less confrontational rhetoric and imagery for policies that remained broadly Thatcherite.'¹⁸⁶ His cheery ordinariness, famously delivering stump speeches whilst standing on a soapbox in the 1992 election, was contrasted successfully with Labour's bombastic, somewhat Americanised Sheffield rally in the run up to polling day. In his post election study, Radice found voters recalling Major's 'quiet strength' and not 'promis[ing] the earth' as distinct positives.¹⁸⁷

It was when he broke with this homely image that he lost support. Although the economic humiliation of Black Wednesday would wreck his premiership soon after winning the contest against Kinnock, Major's position with Erinsborough watching Britain was fatally undermined by his 1993 conference call for the country to 'get back to basics.' His claim that, despite much change in recent years, 'underneath we're still the same people, the old values - neighbourliness, decency, courtesy - they're still alive, they're still the best of Britain,' was solid Ramsay Street friendly sentiment. But when he appealed to 'those old core values' of family and loyalty, such words would soon ring hollow in the face of numerous extramarital affairs from backbench Conservative MPs and ministers alike.¹⁸⁸ Such soap opera (of sorts) may have been mildly entertaining as tabloid fodder, but 1990s Britain was not about to vote for it. As Josh Widdecombe (growing up in a Labour voting house in the south-west) observed, 'my first exposure to British politics in the '90s was as much about the implosion of a party that at one time felt invincible as the rise of a shiny new party based around a suspiciously charming and charismatic leader.'¹⁸⁹

Fundamentally, *Neighbours* was about projecting a nominally apolitical but still clear sense of decency and community - a concept that was embedded within the rhetoric of New Labour and its leader. As Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle claimed, the Scottish writer John Macmurray was a significant influence on the young Tony Blair – and constituted a figure 'whose philosophy centred on a blend of socialism and Christianity and who promoted the concept of community as

a way of living.¹⁹⁰ It had been through two Australians, Peter Thomson and Geoff Gallop, that Blair had begun exploring such issues whilst at Oxford in the 1970s, and, despite the cogent reservations of Sarah Hale that his engagement had been quite thin, it clearly stuck with him to some degree.¹⁹¹ Certainly, some of the emphasis from his supporters on the concept was doubtless about eliding questions regarding Blair's own middle class upbringing. As Mandelson and Liddle argued, 'it was Macmurray's interpretation of Christianity through the idea of community, rather than personal experience of extreme poverty and hardship, that inspired Blair's political awakening.'¹⁹² But in writing a foreword to a collection of essays by Macmurray, Blair stated that he had become convinced of his arguments for situating 'the individual firmly within a social setting' – after all, 'we cannot ignore our obligations to others as well as ourselves.'¹⁹³ For Gould, 'the idea that individuals are defined by their relationship to the community, not in isolation from the community, is Blair's grounding idea, his core political insight.'¹⁹⁴ This would prove a useful way of talking about change, and the mutual ties which bind, without explicitly resorting to the type of class based dogma Labour's leader condemned elsewhere, and which had proven unelectable through the 1980s.

When it came to New Labour's working class appeal, communitarian language on crime and the economy cut through. Here views on *Neighbours* provide useful insight. By mid-1991, Mark Little's Joe Mangel was far and away the most popular character on *Neighbours* for British viewers. With 83% of British viewers liking him a little (22%) or a lot (61%), his closest competition was his wife, Kerry Bishop (75% - 23% and 52% respectively). In a sign of the show's innate conservatism, when it came time to write Bishop out of the show, the only logical way the screenwriters could come up with was to kill her off – divorce or simply moving away viewed as beyond the pale. Little – a stand up comedian by background – had previously injected his comedy with a 'laconic, quintessentially Australian manner,' and was concerned about 'the politics of living and hanging on to his individuality in a world thick with clones.' When portraying the working class Mangel, he 'tried to put into the character a couple of things that don't make him too reactionary in his outlook or a dumb person.' 'Just because he's a working class coot,' Little noted, 'he doesn't have to be dumb.'¹⁹⁵ A single father who, after some scrapes, broadly comes good, Mangel would prove one of the show's most enduring characters. Notions of respect, and a plain spoken decency, would also mark Blair's leadership.

'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' would become the soundbite that encapsulated this new stance – itself partly a product of Clinton and Giuliani's America, though here there were Erinsborough parallels, too.¹⁹⁶ As Geoff Paine reflects on the show, 'characters may have experienced a traumatic childhood, mental illness or even prison, but when they move

into Ramsay Street, they will be absorbed into the wider family and expected to be caring, honest and loyal.' Throughout its run, 'bad people will continue to test the street's inhabitants – until they, too, end up dead or written out.'¹⁹⁷ The notion of sinning against the community, and receiving due punishment for doing so, united both *Neighbours* and New Labour's worldview. Indeed, for Blair, the central insight was that, although the perpetrator of a crime may have come from deprived circumstance, they very often offended against those of a similar social standing, and thus the community, and there was therefore nothing 'progressive' about being soft on crime. Previously, Thatcher had emphasised being 'tough on crime' over attacking its root causes (indeed, arguably, she exacerbated them), but she had been smart enough to adopt the language of community as its antidote. Reflecting on her controversial claim that there was 'no such thing' as society, she defended her position, but also noted, 'there is a concept of nationhood; there is a concept of community, the village, the town, working together, the neighbourhood. It is the neighbourhood, really, isn't it?'¹⁹⁸ In 1989, she further linked this to crime prevention: 'we are getting far more Neighbourhood Watches now and the areas - my area is one - where we have got the Neighbourhood Watch, do you know what we are finding, first the number of burglaries are going down because they all look around the street and say "Ah, I have not seen that person before" and duly report it; but also we are finding that neighbours are beginning to know one another who did not know one another before.'¹⁹⁹

This worked because significant numbers of voters found the Labour Party broadly negative and condescending in the late 1980s, whilst retaining an at least residual memory of 'positive' recent Conservative actions including the right to buy – a policy which continued to resonate well into the 2000s.²⁰⁰ By contrast, under Blair, Labour after 1994 became seen as a positive, upbeat party, and Conservative attack ads warning of a 'New Labour, New Danger' as mean spirited, 'implausible and offensive.'²⁰¹ By November 1994, soon after Blair had announced his intention to ditch Clause IV, Gould's focus groups found that the 'most common response is, "I am going to give them a go."²⁰² Certainly this reflected the symbolic action of ending Labour's largely theoretical millstone of being committed to wholesale nationalisation, but also the general mood music of a young, family oriented leader. Women in particular appreciated the 'start of a new approach to politics.'²⁰³ It was actually as Blair became more specific with the policies he would introduce in office that the focus groups would occasionally wobble.²⁰⁴

To broker an end to the Thatcher regime, Labour needed to speak the language of *Neighbours*. Geoff Paine moved to London briefly in 1988/89 and saw some of the 'the tail end of the Thatcher ruptures.' As he remembers, 'back then there was constant talk of real estate values and council flats being sold for crazy amounts and a brittle sense of grab what you can while you

can.’ It was clear that ‘daily life was still tough for most people and the split between those who had and those who didn’t was palpable.’ To replace this, Tony Blair, in his 1995 conference speech, spoke of a ‘new moral purpose for our nation, to build a new and young country.’ Here, ‘old divisions [would be] cast out’ and ‘never again do we fight our politics by appealing to one section of our nation at the expense of another.’ It was a world where ‘your child in distress is my child, your parent ill and in pain is my parent, your friend unemployed and helpless is my friend, your neighbour, my neighbour.’ ‘That,’ he asserted, ‘is the true patriotism of a nation’ – but it was also sentiment viewers had encountered in a fictional Australian form every afternoon.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

In reconciling the language of ‘responsibility, opportunity, and community,’ the global Third Way arrived at a formula that eventually obviated the excesses of Thatcherism on the one hand, and eliminated the electorally toxic elements of the ‘old left’ on the other. Certainly, as noted in our introduction, Australia has long been regarded a part of this story.²⁰⁶ Indeed, Kinnock had encouraged Blair and Brown to visit Hawke and Keating in 1990, and on the long plane journey to Australia both sketched out a plan for some of the ideas that would inform New Labour. Having taken over as Prime Minister, Keating would also offer advice for Blair ahead of his 1995 meeting with Rupert Murdoch, too. But perhaps it is time to go beyond the machinations of leading figures. Hawke’s Labor Party provided a template (suitably modified) of sorts for the young modernisers, but he could not deliver a British electorate primed to accept it. Here is where popular culture came in. By the mid 1990s the dip in *Neighbours*’ viewership meant there would have been less value in Blair or Brown visiting Ramsay Street for a photo-op – and so better, by this time, to play head tennis with the football manager Kevin Keegan (thereby capitalising on the explosion of interest in Premiership football).²⁰⁷ But New Labour would benefit from a generation of British voters who had previously sat in front of a different type of world every day. This included many women voters who had been insufficiently persuaded to back Neil Kinnock. And, in particular, the 8 in 10 12-15 year olds who watched *Neighbours* in 1990 (about 2.2m people) would join the franchise for the first time at the 1997 General Election.²⁰⁸ These viewers – who watched the show with greater regularity than even their immediate 16-24 elders, thus rendering it a particularly formative influence – were bombarded with material some saw as tawdry, low rent, and destructive for the nation’s youth, but in reality the connection was deeper than such ‘culture wars’ fluff let on. There was no guarantee that such future voters would back the Blair project, and they still required the reassurance that a skilful political machine provided. Nonetheless, the huge boost Labour saw amongst younger cohorts on that famous occasion owed something to an electorate primed to vote for a less adversarial, and communal, type of country.

Given the fact that this article has been about two differing success stories in British society in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the question of correlation or causation naturally follows. As to the first, the correlation is fairly clear. Both *Neighbours* and New Labour were wildly popular within a few years of one another, and often with the same people. For Widdecombe, ‘*Neighbours* was good television...I was more emotionally involved in the storylines and felt a stronger affinity to the characters than with any other show I watched growing up.’²⁰⁹ Likewise, ‘Tony Blair felt like no political figure I had seen before...On that night in May 1997 it *did* feel that a new dawn had broken, had it not?’²¹⁰ Clearly a sense of newness marked both, but their appeal was not just frothy presentation. Both New Labour and *Neighbours* married a positive story rooted in community, which crossed or avoided old boundaries of class, and which was often relatively social conservative – certainly compared to the image of a ‘loony left’ the Conservative government had managed to pin on the party during the previous decade. While economists have therefore famously interpreted the period from the mid 1980s as a ‘great moderation’ – reduced macroeconomic volatility begetting less zigzags in either levels of inflation or output compared to the crisis ridden 1970s – some of this doubtless filtered through to culture, and then, to politics.²¹¹

It is here, then, that we can begin to bring in notions of causation. To be clear, Jason Donovan manifestly did not create Tony Blair. But just as Blair’s opponents misread him as a lightweight ‘bambi’ during his early tenure as Labour leader, so too was the serious nature of the *Neighbours* phenomenon underplayed – at the time, and in retrospect. Newspaper stories about Kylie Minogue’s successful music career, or the rather smaller scale nightclub or pantomime appearances of stars of the show across the UK, suggested a purely ephemeral quality to the programme.²¹² But the cultural and political legacy of *Neighbours* was not just an affinity for fly by night heartthrobs, but a marker of a more significant sort. Erinsborough was the type of setting Labour needed to win over, whose popularity was endorsed on a daily basis by millions of viewers. It mirrored Florence Sutcliffe-Braitwaite’s description of Middle England – ‘relatively prosperous, suburban...neither particularly politically reactionary nor wildly progressive’ – almost exactly.²¹³ Given this specific context, analysing reactions to such a sustained and popular culture act of national communion should inform our understanding of the 1980s and 1990s more than it has hitherto. If historians have been willing to universalise, as it were, sociological studies on voters in the 1980s Isle of Sheppey, or Milton Keynes’ position as an early post-1979 election recipient of policies which would soon sweep the nation, we should be prepared to make tentative connections from wider phenomenon.²¹⁴ Citizens across the country buying into, in some ways, a nationally available advert for a new society was a significant development.

Of course, Labour itself had to find its way there, and thus there is a time lag inherent in this article. *Neighbours* achieved its greatest success between 1988 and 1990 – some four years before the dawn of New Labour. But, Mannheimian generational theory aside, and the progression of younger viewers into the franchise – we should also note that such allowances are generally made for shifts in political ideologies. Bob Hawke has long been cited as an inspiration for Tony Blair despite the Australian leader leaving office in 1991. Closer to home, the idea of a long Thatcherism (or Thatcher era) has marked British politics for decades after her departure from Downing Street. In his *Thatcher and Sons*, Simon Jenkins wrote of her breeding ‘a generation of politicians all of whom took her as their reference point.’²¹⁵ The causation outlined here is less overt, certainly less documented, but no less important. *Neighbours* was a substantial phenomenon in late 1980s and early 1990s Britain, with nearly 4 in 10 people consuming it at its height. Further research may, indeed should, illuminate its reach into the dynamics of school and university life, Britain’s post-imperial role, and everyday lives. But party politics should be part of this conversation. Good *Neighbours*, to a meaningful degree, helped the British electorate and New Labour become good friends.

Declaration of Interests

Other than being a member of the Labour Party, the author has no direct or indirect interests here – and the work is not linked to any funding grant.

¹ Many thanks are due to the anonymous referees of this article, those interviewed by the author, and to Nick Garland, Rohan McWilliam, and Robert Saunders who read through and commented on an early draft.

² ‘Television ownership in private domestic households, 1956-2019,’ via <https://www.closer.ac.uk/data/television-ownership-in-domestic-households/>; by the Spring of 1990, there were around 750,000 Sky satellite dishes in Britain as per ‘British Sky Broadcasting Group plc – Company profile’ via <https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/41/British-Sky-Broadcasting-Group-plc.html#ixzz6tbPoBUCL>.

³ Broadcasters’ Audience Research Board (BARB), ‘TV since 1981’ via <https://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-facts/tv-since-1981/1990/top10/>.

⁴ Indeed, given that 16.7m watched the semi final on BBC 1, and 8.5m on ITV, *Neighbours* topped the BARB ratings for a single transmission that year. This is in turn complicated by the BARB figure for *Neighbours* aggregating lunchtime and teatime audiences (4-5% of viewers claimed to watch both editions) – but also *not* counting those aged under four years old in its figures. With 2-3m of this latter category in late 1980s Britain, and the demographics of general *Neighbours*’ audience – including a significant number of young parents with said children – the total ‘true’ audience is hard to ascertain.

⁵ See BARB, 'TV since 1981,' above.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Liverpool Echo*, 2 January 1988

⁸ *Liverpool Echo*, 27 October 1988

⁹ 'Reg Watson obituary,' *Guardian*, 13 October 2019 via <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/oct/13/reg-watson-obituary>

¹⁰ Stephen Crofts, 'Global Neighbours,' in Robert C. Allen (ed), *To be Continued...Soap Operas Around the World*, (London, 1995), 110.

¹¹ Sue Ward, Tom O'Regan, and Ben Goldsmith. "From Neighbours to Packed to the Rafters: Accounting for Longevity in the Evolution of Aussie Soaps." *Media International Australia* 136/1, (2010), 162–76, 167.

¹² Stuart Cunningham and Elizabeth Jacka, *Australian Television and International Mediascapes*. (Cambridge, 1996), 135-40.

¹³ *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1991

¹⁴ Marie Gillespie, 'TV Talk in a London Punjabi Peer Culture,' Brunel University PhD thesis (1992), 191

¹⁵ It is missing, for example, from Nick Dyrenfurth's *Mateship: A Very Australian History*, (Brunswick, 2015) and Karina J. Butera's 'Neo-mateship' in the 21st century: Changes in the performance of Australian masculinity,' *Journal of Sociology*, 44/3 (2008) 265-281.

¹⁶ Crofts, 107.

¹⁷ Ibid; 'Television Audience Reaction Report,' BARB week 3/1990, WAC/R9/1099/1, BBC Written Archives Centre, Reading, UK, placed its location as the least important selling point (42%) compared to it being good escapism (63%) and having the right balance of humour and drama (62%).

¹⁸ For an early highlighting of such issues, see Ross McKibbin, 'Why the Tories Lost,' *London Review of Books*, 19/13, 3 July 1997

¹⁹ Geoffrey Evans, John Curtice and Pippa Norris, 'New Labour, new tactical voting? The causes and consequences of tactical voting in the 1997 general election.' *British Elections & Parties Review*, 8/1 (1998), 65-79.

²⁰ See e.g. Alex Marland, 'The brand image of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in international context,' *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 24/2 (2018), 139-144, Richard Carr, *Charlie Chaplin: A Political Biography from Victorian Britain to Modern America*, (London, 2017), Bradley W. Hart, *Hitler's American Friends: The Third Reich's Supporters in the United States* (London, 2018), Steven J. Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics*, (London, 2011), ch.6, and John Street, 'Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation,' *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6/4 (2004), 435-452.

²¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, (London, 2001), 299

²² Ibid, 237

²³ 'Television Audience Reaction Report,' BARB week 3/1990, WAC/R91097/2

²⁴ See Henry R.L. John, 'UK Rave Culture and the Thatcherite Hegemony, 1988-94,' *Cultural History* 4/2 (2015), 162-186 and Gavin Schaffer, "Fighting Thatcher with comedy: What to do when there is no alternative." *Journal of British Studies* 55, no. 2 (2016), 374-397.

²⁵ Joe Moran, *Armchair Nation: An intimate history of Britain in front of the TV*, (London, 2013), 9 and 11.

²⁶ David Cowan, 'The Politics of the Past in Britain, 1939-1990,' University of Cambridge PhD Thesis (2019), 209

²⁷ 'TOP Summary Report,' WAC/R9/1938/1, Week 30/1996.

²⁸ See e.g. Josh Widdecombe's *Watching Neighbours Twice A Day...How '90s TV (Almost) Prepared Me for Life*, (London, 2021)

²⁹ Chris Moores "'Thatcher's troops? Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and the search for 'ordinary' Thatcherism in 1980s Britain,' *Contemporary British History*, 31/2 (2017), 230-255, 233.

³⁰ See, e.g. Nick Garland, 'Social democracy, the decline of community, and community politics in post-war Britain,' in Nathan Yeowell (ed), *Rethinking Labour's Past*, (London, 2022), ch.8, Daisy Payling, 'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire': Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield," *Twentieth Century British History* 25/4 (2014), 602-627, and

³¹ Richard Cockett, *Thinking the unthinkable : think-tanks and the economic counter-revolution 1931-1983*, (London, 1994), and, more recently, Ben Jackson, 'The think tank archipelago: Thatcherism and Neo-liberalism,' in Jackson and Robert Saunders (Eds), *Making Thatchers Britain*, (Cambridge, 2012), 43-61.

³² Richard Carr, *March of the Moderates: Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, and the Rebirth of Progressive Politics*, (London, 2019). See also Al From, *The New Democrats and the Return to Power*, (London, 2013), ch. 18.

³³ Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America*, (Princeton, 2020).

³⁴ Important to note here that given *Neighbours'* transmission time and family audience, there was certainly nothing to worry Labour's morally censorious elements (ably chronicled by Paul Bloomfield, 'Labour's liberalism: gay rights and video nasties,' in Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam (eds), *Labour and the left in the 1980s*, Manchester, 2017, 69-89), either.

³⁵ Rob Manwaring, *The Search for Democratic Renewal: The politics of consultation in Britain and Australia*, (Manchester, 2014), 5.

³⁶ Ross McKibbin, *Democracy and Political Culture: Studies in Modern British History*, (Oxford, 2019), 4 – though see the correctives in ch.7.

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- ³⁷ Glen O'Hara and John Stewart, "The land with the midas touch": British perceptions of New Zealand, 1935-1979,' *New Zealand Journal of History*, 52/2 (2018), 42-65.
- ³⁸ David O'Reilly, *The New Progressive Dilemma: Australia and Tony Blair's Legacy*, (London, 2007), 19
- ³⁹ Chris Pierson, 'The Labor Legacy: Looking Back With the Australian Labor Party,' *Government and Opposition*, 42/4, 564-592, 566
- ⁴⁰ For a discussion of this, see Jeppe Kristensen "In Essence still a British Country": Britain's withdrawal from East of Suez,' *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 51/1 (2005), 40-52.
- ⁴¹ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000*, (Oxford, 2018), 202
- ⁴² Deborah Mattinson, *Talking to a Brick Wall: How New Labour Stopped Listening to the Voter and Why We Need a New Politics*, (London, 2010), 41.
- ⁴³ Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me? The Search for Community in Post-war England. United Kingdom*, (Oxford, 2019), 6.
- ⁴⁴ 'Labour and Britain in the 1990s,' in Neil Kinnock Papers, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, KNNK/2/1/96
- ⁴⁵ BARB research for *Neighbours* drew on around 3,000 responses. Typical ICM polling, e.g. as in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 11 March 1992, was near to half this figure.
- ⁴⁶ Mattinson, 337.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, 93
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 49
- ⁴⁹ Rosalind Shorrocks, 'In what ways does gender matter for voting behaviour in GE2017?' (2017) via [In what ways does gender matter for voting behaviour in GE2017? | British Politics and Policy at LSE](#)
- ⁵⁰ Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood*, (London, 2020), 18, 52, 176.
- ⁵¹ Russell West, "This is a Man's Country": Masculinity and Australian National Identity in *Crocodile Dundee*, in Russell West and Frank Lay (eds), *Subverting Masculinity: Hegemonic and Alternative Visions of Masculinity in Contemporary Culture*, (Atlanta, 2000), 44-66.
- ⁵² Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, 'Introduction,' in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London, 1989), 16
- ⁵³ Mattinson, 53.
- ⁵⁴ Baroness Rebuck and Deborah Mattinson to the author, 22 and 25 June 2021. Correspondence with author reveals Charles Clarke (17 June 2021) and Neil Kinnock (15 June 2021) were also not viewers.
- ⁵⁵ Frank Mort, 'The Politics of Consumption,' in Hall and Jacques (eds), 165.
- ⁵⁶ Karl Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations,' in Paul Kecskemeti (ed), *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge: Collected Works, Volume 5* (New York, 2003edn), 276-322, 295, 300.
- ⁵⁷ They made three gains in the Senate to take them to 30 of 64 seats – broadly enough, given the Liberal-National coalition was reduced to 28, to pass legislation.
- ⁵⁸ Specifically Forest Hill, Nunawading, and Vermont South.
- ⁵⁹ *The Age*, 24 June 1987
- ⁶⁰ 'Bob Hawke's old seat shows why Labor is vulnerable in Victoria,' *Financial Review* (2016), via <https://www.afr.com/politics/bob-hawkes-old-seat-shows-why-labor-is-vulnerable-in-victoria-20160127-gmetbz>
- ⁶¹ This would prove difficult but not impossible. Both aforementioned Melbourne seats would flip back to the Liberals by 1987, though would prove winnable again in the 1990s and 2000s. They were now at least firmly in play.
- ⁶² O'Reilly, 23
- ⁶³ Pierson, 570
- ⁶⁴ In Pierson, 572
- ⁶⁵ Kinnock to author, 15 June 2021.
- ⁶⁶ Briefing note, 22 November [undated but presumably 1989], KNNK 19/2/87
- ⁶⁷ Pierson, 587
- ⁶⁸ Elizabeth Humphrys, *How Labour Built Neoliberalism: Australia's Accord, the Labour Movement and the Neoliberal Project*, (London, 2018), 3.
- ⁶⁹ Pierson, 568
- ⁷⁰ Pierson, 588
- ⁷¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4102.0 – Australian Social Trends (2001), via <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/3487ff0af8b51db7ca2570ec000c6b0c!OpenDocument>
- ⁷² Geoff Paine to the author, 20 June 2021
- ⁷³ 'Tony Blair's Tribute to Bob Hawke,' (2019) via <https://institute.global/tony-blair/tony-blairs-tribute-bob-hawke>
- ⁷⁴ Albeit, as Paul Kelly argues, *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics and Business in Australia*, (Crows Nest, 1992), 61, then leading to problems regarding productivity. Keating's doubts at 68.
- ⁷⁵ Pierson, 571
- ⁷⁶ Kelly, 62
- ⁷⁷ Ibid, 64
- ⁷⁸ Neil Kinnock to the author, 15 June 2021.
- ⁷⁹ Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech at State Government dinner in Melbourne,' 3 August 1988 via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107311>

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- ⁸⁰ Thatcher-O'Brien interview, 4 August 1988, via <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107081>
- ⁸¹ Bob Hawke, *The Hawke Memoirs*, (Port Melbourne, 1994), 320-322.
- ⁸² Kinnock to the author, 15 June 2021
- ⁸³ 'Looking Forward', 28 September 1989, within KNNK 10/1/43
- ⁸⁴ House of Commons Debates, 7 June 1989, vol 154, col 249.
- ⁸⁵ House of Commons Debates, 9 May 2019, vol 659, col 735.
- ⁸⁶ House of Commons Debates, 7 June 1989, vol 154, col 249
- ⁸⁷ For this incident in its wider context, see Ayesha Hazarika and Tom Hamilton, *Punch & Judy Politics: An Insiders' Guide to Prime Minister's Questions*, (London, 2019), ch. 6.
- ⁸⁸ Giles Radice, *Diaries 1980-2001: from political disaster to election triumph*. (London, 2004), 196.
- ⁸⁹ Kinnock to the author, 15 June 2021
- ⁹⁰ House of Commons Debates, 19 May 1989, vol 153, col 598.
- ⁹¹ House of Lords Debates, 25 January 1988, vol 492, col 485
- ⁹² House of Commons Debates, 3 February 1989, Vol 146, col 560.
- ⁹³ Moran, 360
- ⁹⁴ 'Note for meeting with Red Wedge,' 18 April [undated but 1987] KNNK/2/1/84; Murphy, 292
- ⁹⁵ Data via officialcharts.com
- ⁹⁶ Bigoted attitudes would sometimes be expressed, but relatively swiftly repudiated. For example, in episode 2175 (broadcast in Australia in June 1994) the blokeish Doug Willis is shown to be uncomfortable with the concept of a gay teacher nicknamed 'Macca' – 'why didn't he say something [about his sexuality] before?' With Doug listening on, his wife Pam then asks a neighbour Mark, 'does it worry you?' Mark replies: 'what, that he's gay? No, why should it? He's still the same bloke, isn't he?' Within the same episode Doug declares himself to have been a 'fool,' and he and Macca reconcile. See the episode descriptions at www.neighboursepisodes.com
- ⁹⁷ Even with nominal decriminalisation, through the 1980s gay men in Victoria continued to suffer harassment from police under a vaguely worded 'soliciting for immoral purposes' clause in state legislation.
- ⁹⁸ Colm Murphy, 'The 'Rainbow Alliance' or the Focus Group? Sexuality and Race in the Labour Party's Electoral Strategy, 1985–7,' *Twentieth Century British History* 31/3 (2020), 291-315, 314.
- ⁹⁹ Labour Party Youth Strategy – General Election 1987, 3 April 1987, KNNK/2/1/84
- ¹⁰⁰ Ibid
- ¹⁰¹ Chris Clarke, *The Dark Knight and the Puppet Master*, (London, 2020), 173.
- ¹⁰² As per IPSOS-Mori, 'How Britain Voted Since October 1974,' <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-october-1974>
- ¹⁰³ See 'Observing the 1980s: Mass Observation,' entry S496 (1989 Autumn TV) at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/home/mass-observation/>
- ¹⁰⁴ See entry C1191 (1989 Autumn TV) at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/home/mass-observation/>
- ¹⁰⁵ See entry B1989 (1989 Autumn TV) at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/home/mass-observation/>
- ¹⁰⁶ 'Television Audience Reaction Report,' BARB weeks 26-29/1991, WAC/R9/1100/5.
- ¹⁰⁷ See B1215 and S496 (both 1989 Autumn TV) at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/home/mass-observation/>
- ¹⁰⁸ Widdecombe, 77
- ¹⁰⁹ 'Television Audience Reaction Report,' BARB week 3/1990, WAC/R9/1099/1.
- ¹¹⁰ John Connolly "Generational Conflict and the Sociology of Generations: Mannheim and Elias Reconsidered." *Theory, Culture & Society* 36, no. 7–8 (December 2019): 153–72, 158
- ¹¹¹ Reginald Edwards, 'Margaret Thatcher, Thatcherism and Education,' *McGill Journal of Education*, 24/2 (1989), 203–214, 209, Martin Cooper, 'The youth unemployment "crisis" of the 1980s: How two comprehensive schools have responded,' *Evaluation and Research in Education* 3/2 (1989), 81-88; Dan Finn, *Training Without Jobs: New Deals and Broken Promises*, (London, 1987).
- ¹¹² Widdecombe, 78
- ¹¹³ See C1191 (1989 Autumn TV) at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/home/mass-observation/>
- ¹¹⁴ Widdecombe, 78
- ¹¹⁵ *Reading Evening Post*, 25 July 1990.
- ¹¹⁶ *Reading Evening Post*, 2 April 1990.
- ¹¹⁷ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 14 May 1991
- ¹¹⁸ *Birmingham Evening Mail*, 27 July 1991
- ¹¹⁹ See the data at WAC R9/1099/1 (1990) and WAC R9/1938/1 (1996).
- ¹²⁰ BARB week 3/1990, as above.
- ¹²¹ As per *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1991
- ¹²² Geoff Paine to the author, 20 June 2021.
- ¹²³ *The Stage*, 28 November 1985.
- ¹²⁴ All via WAC/R9/1099/1, as above.
- ¹²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 6 February 1988
- ¹²⁶ Andrew Mercado, *Super Aussie Soaps: Behind the Scenes of Australia's Best Loved TV Shows*, (Sydney, 2004), 210.

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- ¹²⁷ The show's geography was actually somewhat ambiguous until the early 1990s – though newspapers in Britain and Ireland described Melbourne as its setting much earlier (e.g. *Irish Independent*, 1 July 1987 and *Reading Evening Post*, 29 December 1987).
- ¹²⁸ Gavin W. Jones, "White Australia, national identity and population change," in Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker, and Jan Gothard, *Legacies of White Australia: Race, culture and nation*, (Perth, 2003) 110-128.
- ¹²⁹ Widdecombe, 103. Italics in original.
- ¹³⁰ *The Guardian*, 2 November 1993
- ¹³¹ 31 votes were cast for more sex.
- ¹³² Findings broadly replicated nationwide as per data on Australian serials, 1989, in WAC/R9/1098/3.
- ¹³³ Gillespie, appendix.
- ¹³⁴ Paine.
- ¹³⁵ 'Commuting trends in England, 1988-2015,' via publishing.service.gov.uk
- ¹³⁶ As below, in 1997 50% of C2s and 59% of DEs voted for Labour.
- ¹³⁷ Mattinson, 11
- ¹³⁸ Mattinson, 11, 10.
- ¹³⁹ Mattinson, 8.
- ¹⁴⁰ Giles Radice, *Southern Discomfort*, (London, 1992), 2. My emphasis.
- ¹⁴¹ Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How The Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, (London, 1998), 59
- ¹⁴² Radice, *Southern Discomfort*, 7
- ¹⁴³ Compiled from https://neighbours-soap-opera.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Original_characters.
- ¹⁴⁴ Radice, *Southern Discomfort*, 7.
- ¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 24.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 15.
- ¹⁴⁷ Mattinson, 33
- ¹⁴⁸ Bacchus to the author, 14 June 2021.
- ¹⁴⁹ All via WAC R9/1099/1, as above.
- ¹⁵⁰ David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty,' 'The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s.' *Twentieth Century British History* 5/2 (1994), 129-152, 144.
- ¹⁵¹ Harriet Harman and Deborah Mattinson, *Winning for Women*, (London, 2000), 5.
- ¹⁵² Gould, 50
- ¹⁵³ Gould, 52
- ¹⁵⁴ Gould, 16
- ¹⁵⁵ Gould, 3
- ¹⁵⁶ *Los Angeles Times*, 3 June 1991
- ¹⁵⁷ *Liverpool Echo*, 1 December 1988
- ¹⁵⁸ *The Age*, 23 March 1989
- ¹⁵⁹ Matthew Taylor, 'The birth and rebirth of the Liberal Democrats,' *The Political Quarterly* 78/1 (2007), 21-31, 26.
- ¹⁶⁰ See S496 (1987 election special) at <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/observingthe80s/home/mass-observation/>
- ¹⁶¹ Bacchus
- ¹⁶² Ibid
- ¹⁶³ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁴ The records of the Cambridge University Neighbours Appreciation Society are available at the Cambridge University Library, Special Collections, O.V. 128/454
- ¹⁶⁵ Bacchus
- ¹⁶⁶ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid
- ¹⁷¹ Ibid
- ¹⁷² Campbell, 'New Times Towns,' in Hall and Jacques (eds), 279
- ¹⁷³ Campbell, 294
- ¹⁷⁴ Campbell, 295
- ¹⁷⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 August 1982
- ¹⁷⁶ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 21 April 1988
- ¹⁷⁷ *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 23 November 1985
- ¹⁷⁸ House of Commons Debates, 8 February 1989, vol 146, col 1016.
- ¹⁷⁹ House of Commons Debates, 10 December 1987, vol 124, col 649; *Evening Herald* (Dublin), 5 April 1988.
- ¹⁸⁰ *Irish Independent*, 19 December 1987
- ¹⁸¹ See BARB's Weekly Audience Reports including regional datasets at the Sir Michael Cobham Library, University of Bournemouth.

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- ¹⁸² See BARB's Weekly Audience Reports, 8 May 1988 and 6 May 1990 data, Sir Michael Cobham Library, University of Bournemouth.
- ¹⁸³ Hewitt and Mattinson, 5.
- ¹⁸⁴ Joe Moran, 'The Strange Birth of Middle England,' *Political Quarterly*, 76/2 (2005), 232-240, 234
- ¹⁸⁵ Paine.
- ¹⁸⁶ Moran, 'Birth,' 234
- ¹⁸⁷ Radice, *Southern Discomfort*, 10.
- ¹⁸⁸ Major's 1993 Conservative Party conference speech via <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=139>
- ¹⁸⁹ Widdecombe, 224
- ¹⁹⁰ Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle, *The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?* (London, 1996), 32
- ¹⁹¹ Gould, 233; Sarah Hale, 'The communitarian 'philosophy of New Labour,' in Sarah Hale, Will Leggett and Luke Martell (eds), *The Third Way and Beyond: Criticisms, futures, alternatives*, (Manchester, 2018), 87-107.
- ¹⁹² Mandelson and Liddle, 33
- ¹⁹³ Blair foreword to Philip Cornford (ed), *The Personal World: John Macmurray on Self and Society*, (London, 1996), 9
- ¹⁹⁴ Gould, 233
- ¹⁹⁵ *The Age* (Melbourne), 28 July 1990.
- ¹⁹⁶ Carr, *March of the Moderates*,
- ¹⁹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 March 2020
- ¹⁹⁸ *The Times*, 25 October 1988.
- ¹⁹⁹ *Daily Star*, 13 December 1989.
- ²⁰⁰ Mattinson, 171.
- ²⁰¹ Gould, 279.
- ²⁰² Gould, 223.
- ²⁰³ Hewitt and Mattinson, 7.
- ²⁰⁴ E.g. over 'VAT on school fees, devolution and nuclear energy,' Gould, 225.
- ²⁰⁵ Tony Blair's Leader's Speech, 1995, via <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=201>
- ²⁰⁶ See also, Neville Kirk, *Labour and the Politics of Empire: Britain and Australia, 1900 to the Present*, (Manchester, 2011).
- ²⁰⁷ *Guardian*, 5 October 1995.
- ²⁰⁸ Calculated via the data generated in the ONS Freedom of Information Act request at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/populationbyagegenderandethnicity> [footnote 1]
- ²⁰⁹ Widdecombe, 81
- ²¹⁰ Ibid, 228, 230
- ²¹¹ E.g. Ben Bernacke, 'The great moderation,' in Evan Koenig, Robert Leeson, and George A. Kahn (eds), *The Taylor Rule and the Transformation of Monetary Policy*, (Stanford, 2004), 145-162
- ²¹² E.g. Stefan Dennis' trip to Inverness covered in *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 30 January 1989
- ²¹³ Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, '1983-1997,' 354
- ²¹⁴ Jon Lawrence, "Thatcherism, the SDP and Vernacular Politics on the Isle of Sheppey, c. 1978-83." In David Thackeray and Richard Toye (eds), *Electoral Pledges in Britain Since 1918*, (Basingstoke, 2020), 231-248; Guy Ortolano, *Thatcher's Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism Through an English New Town*, (Cambridge, 2019).
- ²¹⁵ Simon Jenkins, *Thatcher and Sons: A Revolution in Three Acts*, (London, 2006), 1.