LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Socialist Challenge! A snapshot of leftist language and discourse in the UK, 1977-1983

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Abstract: This paper is based on close lexical and semantic analysis of a collection of newspaper texts stored in the Marxists’ Internet Archive which, in effect, constitute an opportunity sample of Leftist language. The texts run to approximately ten million words. The purpose of the paper is to identify key linguistic features that appear to be typical of Leftist discourse during the period (1977–1983) when the paper (Socialist Challenge) was sold on the streets of Britain. There is a particular focus on lexical choices made by the text producers, and it is argued that a significant number of these involve the selection of what might be termed inflammatory or provocative words and phrases over those of a similar meaning but more neutral connotations. The discourse that emerges from the analysis is shown to involve portraying society as divided into two distinct and irreconcilable groups (workers and capitalists), and it is demonstrated that the use of words in the semantic fields of “war”, “flighting” and “struggle” underpins and sustains this discourse. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the relationship between language, discourse and ideology, as well as with several suggestions for future research.

Subjects: British Politics; Rhetoric; Language & Linguistics

Keywords: text discourse ideology socialism lexis

1. Introduction

Socialist Challenge was a weekly newspaper run by the International Marxist Group during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it was sold by volunteers standing in the streets of Britain’s towns and cities. An exclamation mark after its name is added in the title here because sellers would shout it as they attempted to attract buyers. For example, (personal attestation), spectators encountered a Socialist Challenge seller when walking to football matches at the City Ground in Nottingham around that time. The manager of Nottingham Forest in those years was Brian Clough—a man who freely admitted to “believing in socialist principles” and who in the mid-1980s marched with striking coal miners and joined them on picket lines (Clough B with Sadler J, 1994: 130). Today, it is not possible to establish whether Clough’s professed socialism in any way influenced the selling of Socialist Challenge outside the City Ground. It is probable that the sellers simply saw the streams of football fans heading to the stadium as a possible source of readers, and that sellers were positioned outside other major football stadiums on match days. According to the website of the International Marxists’ Internet Archive (https://www.marxists.org/english.htm), Socialist Challenge
was replaced by Socialist Action in March 1983 after affiliation with the Labour Party. The same source states Socialist Action ceased publication “during the 1990s.”

This paper offers an analysis of the language of Socialist Challenge, and of the discourse that underlies it. It also includes a brief discussion of the vexed relationship between discourse and ideology. It draws on material contained within scans of 280 full editions of the newspaper that are stored in the Marxists’ Internet Archive. Since the texts of each newspaper edition are scanned, it is not possible to search for particular words or phrases, using the Ctrl + F command in Microsoft Word. Instead, the data and observations in the present paper are the result of reading and taking notes in the old-fashioned way.

The political views of the present writer are mildly left of centre. It is certainly no part of the purpose of this article to belittle, in any way, the views of writers in Socialist Challenge who believe or believed in the need for a more equitable society. Some of the names that appear in the texts will be familiar to those who were young adults forty years ago: Michael Foot, Tariq Ali (at one time the editor of Socialist Challenge), Denis Healey, Peter Tatchell, Eric Hobsbawm, Terry Eagleton. Others—union leaders at that time—have faded into obscurity and are unlikely to mean much to younger readers: Sid Weighell, Len Murray, Ray Buckton, Arthur Scargill. For the last four years or so of the paper’s existence, Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister. Coutts et al (1981: 81) summarised at the time what they saw as some of the deleterious and dangerous effects of the policies her government pursued:

It is difficult to overstate the gravity of what is now happening to the UK economy. Output is falling at an almost unprecedented rate. Unemployment is at a level not experienced since the inter-war depression and is rapidly increasing towards 3 million, or 13% of the labour force, which would mean rates of 20% and above in large areas of the country… The social and political consequences of this are hard to predict.

Given this analysis by four academic economists, it is scarcely surprising that Socialist Challenge, from its sharply different political standpoint, writes of Mrs Thatcher in an invariably hostile tone, and deals with other prominent Tories of that era, such as Geoffrey Howe, Keith Joseph and Norman Tebbit, in similar vein. Socialist Challenge argued on behalf of trade unions and their members at a time when unemployment rose, under both the Callaghan (1976–79) and first Thatcher (1979–83) governments, to levels that were substantially higher than those in, for example, the 1960s and early 1970s (Denman & McDonald, 1996). Socialist Challenge also took a position on matters such as nuclear disarmament and women’s rights that was at variance with that of the first Thatcher government. For example, the paper supported the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament’s stand against NATO deployment of Cruise Missiles in the UK (Strong, 1983).

2. Terms and concepts

Before proceeding to examine linguistic features of texts that appeared in Socialist Challenge, I must first comment briefly on some key terms and concepts. Firstly, as Wodak and Meyer (2009: 2) rightly suggest, “it is obvious that the notions of text and discourse have been subject to a hugely proliferating number of usages in the social sciences.” For example, academic authors use the term “discourse” in differing ways depending on whether they are drawing on the Foucauldian tradition or whether they are writing from the standpoint of “critical linguistics” or “critical discourse analysis.” O’Halloran (2003: 12) distinguishes between Discourse 1 and Discourse 2. The former, he says, relates to the coherent understanding the reader makes from a text, while the latter refers to the way in which knowledge is organised, talked about and acted upon in different institutions. In this paper, I shall be concerned primarily with Discourse 1 and I shall follow Koller (2012: 35) in arguing that a close focus on text and language is capable of showing how instances of discourse are produced, and perhaps of how they may be received and interpreted. Texts are the realisation of particular discourses so that, for example, a political speech or a newspaper article that is interpreted as extolling the virtues of the free market may
well be an example of neoliberal discourse. Given that the texts and extracts discussed here come from Socialist Challenge and this newspaper was the organ of the International Marxist Group, it seems uncontroversial to state that the discourse underlying these texts and extracts is likely to be Marxist or Marxian in nature.

To the extent that my approach to the Socialist Challenge texts owes something to the work of Fairclough, it might be seen as located within the Critical Discourse Analysis tradition. However, as noted immediately below, there is at least one notable disparity.

3. Methodological approach
The methods I shall use to describe the Socialist Challenge texts are not dissimilar to those employed by Fairclough (2003), among others. They involve close textual analysis and identification of persistent phrases or collocations. Strong attention is also paid to semantic nuances. Arguing that one’s opponent’s arguments are “flawed” might be seen, in some ways, as being similar to stating that they are “nonsensical”—but there is little doubt as to which of these formulations is stronger and might seem more offensive to the opponent. Hence, in this paper frequently-occurring lexical and semantic features of the newspaper texts are identified and discussed in a manner that is not dissimilar to that exemplified in, for instance, Fairclough (1992a: 208–209). However, one significant difference in the present paper is that in Fairclough’s work, the texts chosen are generally those written from a neoliberal perspective, whereas the ones discussed here spring from strong socialist convictions. For a deeper discussion of this issue, see, Poole (2010: 149–152).

It is difficult to establish to what extent my own political position might have affected analysis of the textual data here discussed. As Nagel (1986: 3–12) rightly observes, the ways in which the researcher’s subjectivity combines with a desire to observe and describe data “objectively” are both numerous and complex. Suffice it to say that through reading the texts I have particularly noticed certain lexical choices and semantic features that seem to be persistent. It is by no means certain that other researchers, reading the same texts, would fix on exactly the same textual aspects. Nevertheless, it might well be the case that such researchers would note at least some of the features I highlight here.

It will, I think, be evident from most of the textual extracts and examples provided throughout this paper, that Socialist Challenge put forward a strong form of socialist discourse which could probably be characterised as ideological in nature. Indeed, that is abundantly clear from the newspaper’s name. Further support for this idea arises if we examine a few headlines from the paper. Dates in brackets, here and elsewhere, are those of the relevant Socialist Challenge edition and are in the day, month, year format. Upper case is used here because that is how the headlines originally appeared.

SIX TORY POISONS (2.8.79)
TORY JOBS HOLOCAUST (26.6.80)
MINERS CAN DEFEAT THE TORIES (29.10.82)
JOIN THE FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM (7.1.83)

4. The language of Socialist Challenge
Careful reading of the approximately 280 weekly issues of Socialist Challenge reveal various striking aspects of language use. I shall deal with three of these under the following headings: socio-politics is war; the imperative mood; and inflammatory lexical choices. I have also used a fourth heading (miscellaneous features) under which I have gathered a few less pervasive, but seemingly still significant, aspects of the publication’s language use. However, before dealing with each of these headings, I would again like to turn briefly to the name of the publication: Socialist Challenge.
The English word “challenge” is polysemous; it has several distinct but related senses. It can also function as both a verb and a noun. However, what is more important in understanding the political stance of the newspaper is that it was not called something more neutral, like Socialist News or Socialist Bulletin. According to Merriam Webster dictionary (online), senses of the noun “challenge” can involve calling something into question, or inviting someone to take part in a duel, combat, or a sporting competition. The verb “challenge” is associated, says Merriam Webster, with confronting someone; disputing assumptions; or halting someone and asking for proof of identity. In calling the newspaper Socialist Challenge, its owners and its journalists signal that socialism is combative, that it confronts accepted orthodoxies, and perhaps also that putting forward socialist views may require a certain bravery on the part of the individual. The noun “challenge” is adversarial in nature. It stands in contrast to neutral words, such as “news” or “bulletin” or “weekly” that could have been chosen for the second word of the newspaper’s name.

5. Socio-politics is war

Perhaps the single most striking lexical feature of the Socialist Challenge texts is that the word (or lexeme) “fight” occurs so often. It is true, of course, that other semantically related words occur too. But “fight” is the word that the reader finds on almost every page—and this of course is related to the point just made about the noun “challenge” in the paper’s title. Both “challenge” and “fight” have a strong sense of pugnaciousness about them.

Since “fight” (as a verb and a noun, and in various word-forms) occurs so often in Socialist Challenge, it would be possible to list dozens or even hundreds of examples. Here are just a few, taken from across the chronological history of the paper:

The best way the TUC and Labour can win an election is to fight for the rights of their rank and file (7.9.78).

What the public sector conferences showed was that the fight to unite the labour movement in action against the Tories requires a political fight against the right wing (31.5.79).

We have to fight back (17.12.80).

The rail-workers are gearing up to fight for their jobs (13.8.81).

The fight for union rights and the fight for youth rights go hand in hand (1.4.82).

At a series of militant and enthusiastic rallies they have urged their members to fight for wages and jobs (29.10.82)

It is noticeable that at least one of the collocations here is unusual. There are no examples of the phrase “fight to unite” in the British National Corpus (Brigham Young University, online). Corpus data tends to suggest that more semantically neutral verbs (aim, attempt, fail) collocate with “to unite” in British English texts as a whole—and from a commonsense point of view, one might think that to achieve “unity” it might be more usual to “persuade” or “win trust” or “coax”, rather than to “fight”. But the tone of Socialist Challenge tends to be belligerent.

Words whose meanings are semantically related to “fight” also occur frequently in Socialist Challenge. A few examples are shown below:

First battle for equal pay won at Laird Portch (headline, 6.6.77)

Restaurant workers battle for unions (headline, 23.3.78)
Why schools are a class battleground (headline, 23.3.78)

The Tories’ attack is double-barrelled (31.5.79)

Since November the Tories have continued their vicious attacks on all aspects of the welfare state (22.1.81)

Another word that occurs with great frequency in Socialist Challenge is “struggle” which, like “fight” and “challenge”, occurs both as a verb and noun. The idea of “struggle” (class struggle) is, at least in English translation, a key notion in the work of Karl Marx (Katz, 1993: 364). Indeed, at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto, Marx states that “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles” (Marx & Engels, original, 1848). As Penvenne et al. (1985) points out “A luta continua” (the struggle continues) was the rallying cry of the socialist FRELIMO movement at the time of the war of independence in Mozambique. It may not be surprising therefore that a newspaper owned by the International Marxist Group should make use of the word “struggle” so frequently.

When a Labour government is in power all the political weaknesses of the labour movement come right out into the open and cripple the class struggle. (5.1.78)

With the advent of the Thatcher government, the working class has to rally its forces afresh to the struggle for socialism (2.8.79)

The Struggle for Workers’ Power (headline,1.2.79)

The Struggle for Workers’ Power in Poland (headline, 7.1.82)

Rank and file workers, in struggle after struggle, have shown their willingness to fight (1.4.82)

There is an enormous well of disgust and hatred for the Tories which Labour can tap – by siding with those in struggle with the Tories (4.3.83)

The frequent use of words like “fight”, “battle” and “struggle” (all as both verbs and nouns) almost always occurs in contexts where the writer (text producer) is referring to disagreement or friction between two sides: one seen as progressive (workers, unions, the labour movement) and the other seen as conservative or reactionary (employers, managers, the Tories, Labour politicians portrayed as Rightist, such as Denis Healey). The “fighting”, “battling” or “struggling” is not primarily intended to denote real fisticuffs, shooting or throwing of hand grenades—it is metaphorical. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously identified “argument is war” as being one of the metaphors embedded in much discourse in English, though Ritchie (2003) later suggested that argument is often seen and expressed as a game of strategy, like chess. In the Socialist Challenge data, it seems clear from analysis of lexical choices that the text producers conceive of, and portray, external socio-political “reality” as war. One is frequently reminded of Orwell's (1945) Animal Farm: “four legs good, two legs bad”. Socialist Challenge sees and describes society in terms of two groups with radically different interests and characteristics, and constantly emphasises that these groups cannot be reconciled.

6. Inflammatory lexical choices
The second lexical feature that I want to deal with is what I am calling inflammatory lexical choices. By this I mean the choice of a more dramatic, emotive and probably confrontational word rather than of a word more neutral and less threatening in nature. There is a little overlap here with the previous section, although the two phenomena also exhibit differences. The similarity lies in the fact that often when the word “fight” (or a semantically similar word) is chosen, a more neutral verb or noun could have been selected instead. For instance, it would have been perfectly
possible for the writer to have said “political opposition to the right wing” rather than “a political fight against the right wing” (31.5.79); or to have preferred “restaurant workers argue for unions” rather than “restaurant workers battle for unions” (23.3.78). However, in general Socialist Challenge texts tend to exhibit lexical choices redolent of aggression.

To illustrate what is meant here by inflammatory lexical choices, we can begin with part of an example already cited above: “There is an enormous well of disgust and hatred for the Tories which Labour can tap” (4.3.83). This could potentially have been expressed as, for example, “Labour can exploit the fact that many people dislike the Tories.” However, the reference to a “well of disgust and hatred” raises the temperature of the rhetoric very markedly. As with reliance on the “socio-political argument is war” trope, this feature of the language of Socialist Challenge is evidently intended to affect the reader emotionally. In other words, affective factors are at play, and not only cognitive ones. If one wanted to be derogatory, one could suggest that it is a form of demagoguery.

There are many more examples of inflammatory lexical choices in the data, involving other words and phrases.

Smash ASLEF! That’s the cry from the Tory wolves and their friends in British Rail who are baying for the blood of train drivers (11.2.82).

A less emotive paraphrase of these sentiments might read something like this: “The Conservative government and the management of British Rail oppose the train drivers and would be happy to see their union (ASLEF) disbanded.”

The water workers strike can give Margaret Thatcher the bloody nose she so thoroughly deserves (2.2.83)

Punching women in the face is not something that most people condone, even if deep disagreement is involved. We can contrast the above sentence with a possible alternative formulation, such as “Water workers have a chance to show Margaret Thatcher that her policies are unpopular and wrong-headed.” Referring to the possibility of giving the prime minister a bloody nose can be seen as somewhat inflammatory. Below is another similar example, from 29.10.82:

The Tory government (is) hellbent on breaking the backbone of the trade union movement.

A possible paraphrase that is more neutral in tone might be: “The Tory government is determined to suppress the trade union movement.” Both these metaphors (giving someone a bloody nose, and breaking a backbone) are grounded in the idea of physical violence.

These examples, and many others that involve words such as “vicious”, “bloodthirsty”, “mas- sacre” and “slaughter” indicate that the rhetoric of Socialist Challenge tends to be emotive and even inflammatory. Another aspect of this is that, just as many synonyms for “fight” can be found in the data, there are also many words of similar meaning that centre around destruction. Some examples are: smash, crush, slash, wreck, chop, and blitz.

The Tories have to be crushed in a pincer movement of mass campaigns (22.10.81).

Ever since the trade unions were formed in this country the ruling class have tried to smash them (29.11.79).

The Tories have slashed social spending (22.10.81).

… because of the image the media creates that he* is a wrecker (*Arthur Scargill) (2.7.81)
Now they’re chopping another thousand jobs (17.12.80).

Thatcher’s present blitz on the working class is politely termed ‘monetarism’ (7.8.80).

In all the above cases, the writer could have chosen a more neutral word. For example, “The Tories have reduced public spending”; “the ruling class have tried to disband them”; “The Tories have to be overcome”. The lexical choices in Socialist Challenge have a strong tendency to be fiery and provocative.

A similar example here is the widespread use of the word “massive”. This adjective is used as a pre-modifier before “fight”, “struggle” and “confrontation”, among other nouns.

(British Rail) was not prepared to face the massive confrontation that would have ensued if it had gone ahead with its threats to sack the train drivers or shut down the railways (16.7.82).

The government is preparing a massive campaign of abuse against the water workers (2.2.83).

Over the years, the satirical magazine Private Eye has occasionally featured a fictional militant socialist called Dave Sport. Dave Sport’s views (as written by Private Eye journalists) do to some extent capture the tendency of radical Leftist writers to choose pre-modifiers that might be seen as leading to exaggeration rather than to neutral reporting:

It is totally sickening the way the media, i.e. the capitalist press and the state-run puppet regime at the BBC, have shamelessly promulgated non-stop tributes to the arch-reactionary Edward Elgar … (source: boardgamegeek.com)

In Aristotelian terms (McCormack, 2014: 131), the rhetoric of Socialist Challenge relies to a large extent on pathos (appeal to the emotions), rather than ethos (perceptions of the writer’s standing and credibility), or logos (logical argumentation). As we have seen above, distinctions and confrontations are often magnified by the use of adjectives such as “massive” and by choosing provocative phrases such as “baying for blood” and words like “crush”, “smash” and “slash” despite the availability of near-synonyms more neutral in connotative meaning. Lexical selection involves the choice of one option and a rejection of known alternatives (Fowler et al., 1979: 155).

7. The imperative mood
The third aspect of the language use that I want to focus on is the use of the imperative mood in Socialist Challenge. A typical example is found in a headline from 22.6.77:

Fight Benyon on 25 June

In context, this headline is about the Conservative MP William Benyon (1930–2014) and his views on the subject of abortion, which Socialist Challenge disagrees with. An article below it, on the same page, has a headline “Speak Out” above an article by the Gay Pride Committee. In both cases, the imperative mood is used to give a command to readers. Other headlines could, of course, have been chosen. For example, the first one could have been “We Oppose Benyon’s Views”. However, as with its preference for inflammatory over more neutral lexical items, the paper often uses imperatives rather than declaratives.

Here are some further examples:

Build the Anti-Nazi League (headline, 4.5.78)

Rebuild Left (headline, 22.6.78)
Be there on 20 August. Assemble 8am. (17.8.78)

Don’t let him get away with it! (in an article headed ‘Callaghan Defies the Labour Movement’, 2.11.78)

“Kick Out the Tories” and “Support the Steel Strike” (separate headlines, 31.1.80)

Stop the Witch Hunt (headline, 10.12.80)

Join the Fight for Socialism (headline, 10.12.80)

Join us in campaigning to commit the Young Socialists against the war (28.5.82)

Many of these examples could have been couched as statements rather than orders—for example, “The witch hunt must be stopped” or “The Tories must be removed from power”—but Social Challenge often features imperatives, particularly in headlines.

8. Miscellaneous features

Other linguistic features of the Socialist Challenge texts are notable. Firstly, the paper has a tendency, when identifying groups of workers or other individuals that it feels have been mistreated or victimized, to use the name of a place and a cardinal number. Some examples are: the Pentonville Five (20.10.77); the Islington 18 and the Lewisham 24 (both 22.6.77); and the 10 Chartists (2.8.79). It is difficult to know what motivates this feature of the texts. Obviously, it is easier to use a group term, rather than to give the forenames and surnames of multiple people. Also, similar structures are encountered in other areas of life—the Jackson Five (pop music) or The Magnificent Seven (cinema). Perhaps also, there might be a tendency for a socialist writer to downplay the significance of particular individuals, but to stress the importance of a group. For example, Stjernø (2011: 159) points out that when the idea of working-class solidarity developed, at the time of the industrial revolution, “the individual was expected to subordinate himself to the collective and to realize his interests as a member of that collective.”

This focus on the collective is evident in the Socialist Challenge texts in various ways. For example, there is an emphasis on unity, solidarity and togetherness. A few examples are given below:

Solidarity Mounts for Gardner’s (headline, 23.10.1980)

The solidarity which ordinary trade unionists and unemployed workers show for us will be the single most important element in ensuring that the Gardner’s struggle is successful. (Text of the same article, 23.10.80. Gardner’s was/is an engineering plant.)

United in action we could get rid of Thatcher in three weeks. (9.7.81)

Vote Socialist Unity (26.4.79)

Let the biggest picket line this country has ever seen be organised to defeat the Tory proposals. And let it stand together, and proclaim together, ‘we shall not be moved.’ (12.7.79)

Lexical realisations of togetherness occur quite frequently in the Socialist Challenge texts. They call to mind a chant that is sometimes heard when employees band together to take action in opposition to their employers: “The workers, united, will never be defeated.” This chant may, in fact, ultimately derive from Chilean street demonstrations against Salvador Allende (Fairley, 2014). Certainly, the spirit of togetherness is one of the foundations of collective action by working
people. The fact that *Socialist Challenge* often lexicalises the concept of “togetherness” as “solidarity” is, I think, worthy of note. Although I am not able to demonstrate this with textual evidence, it may be the case that the political Left speaks of both “solidarity” and “unity”, whereas the political Right (for example, the Conservative and Unionist Party in the UK) tends not to use the former word. Certainly, as Stjernø (2011: 159) states, working class solidarity is prototypical solidarity and it first developed during and after the industrial revolution from about 1800 onward. The comparative use of “solidarity” and “unity” in political texts from the Right and the Left could be investigated using appropriate corpus evidence.

9. Longer extracts

It might be argued that, thus far, only individual words, phrases and sentences have been dealt with. I therefore now propose two slightly longer stretches of text, though I am conscious that it is I who have selected these, so that there is no certainty that they are representative of the perhaps ten million running words in the 280 editions of the newspaper.

The strength and determination of the train drivers has forced British Rail to back off. It was not prepared to face the massive confrontation that would have ensued if it had gone ahead with its threats to sack the train drivers or shut down the railways. Faced with the massive show of solidarity from ASLEF, BR and the Tories have their backs against the wall. Now the whole labour movement has to throw its full weight behind the train drivers and the health workers to give the final blow to Thatcher. (16.7.82)

Many features are evident in this short text that have been directly or indirectly referred to before. Firstly, note that the text paints a picture of two sides that are utterly opposed and cannot be reconciled. On one side stand the train drivers; on the other, British Rail and the Tories (the governing party at that time). The train drivers—as claimed by the text—have forced British Rail to “back off”, like any individual or army that finds itself outgunned or outnumbered by an opponent. As ever, the idea that socio-politics (in this case, industrial relations) is war underlies the text. A “confrontation” between two opposing sides has been avoided because British Rail has been “forced” to “back off”. Note that, as is often the case, the adjective “massive” is used (“massive confrontation”, “massive show of solidarity”) and that the text ends with a sentence suggesting that the labour movement as a whole has the chance deal Margaret Thatcher (the then prime minister) a “final blow” (a phrase which carries connotations of a knockout punch in a boxing match).

In this extract one finds many of the linguistic and discoursal features that are evident throughout the corpus of *Socialist Challenge* texts. A key foundation of the discourse is the portrayal of a chasm in society between the powerful, prosperous ruling class and the repressed, needy working class, with the latter having no choice but to “fight” for basic rights. The language of the text features words and phrases such as “strength”, “confrontation”, “threats”, “backs against the wall”, “full weight” and “final blow”, that carry connotations of violence or at least physical force.

MINERS CAN DEFEAT THE TORIES

If the miners vote ‘yes’ in the NUM ballot – result will not be known until after we go to press – the stage will be set for a mighty confrontation.

On one side will stand the Tory government, hellbent on breaking the backbone of the trade union movement and showing people that there is no way that they can be resisted. On the other side will be the most militant, and best organised section of the working class.

If the miners crack the pay offer put up by the NCB and force the Coal Board to retreat over pit closures they will encourage and inspire every other worker fighting for wages and jobs.

They will also give the rank and file a lesson in what leadership is about. The right wing leaders like Sirs, the departed and un lamented Weighell, Duffy, and of course Len Murray,
have shown time and time again that they have no stomach for a fight. As a result the Tories have treated them with contempt and simply walked all over them.

In contrast the NUM leadership, with Arthur Scargill to the fore, have shown what leadership is about. They have produced leaflets putting the case of the union executive. They have campaigned through the journals of the union. At a series of militant and enthusiastic rallies they have urged their members to fight for wages and jobs. (29.10.82)

In the second extract (above) the reader is again presented with a confrontation between two diametrically opposed sides. On one side, the Tory government; on the other, the working class (as represented by the National Union of Mineworkers). Although the language here is perhaps not quite as harsh and bellicose as in some Socialist Challenge texts, nevertheless, words and phrases such as “fight”, “fighting”, “crack”, “no stomach for a fight”, “hellbent on breaking the backbone of the trade union movement”, and “force the Coal Board to retreat”, all carry a sense of aggression or the use of force. The extract ends with what, in rhetorical terms, might be seen as a tricolon: a list of three actions taken by the NUM. One might see a certain degree of bathos however in at least the first of these listed items. The writer of the text wishes to contrast the “leadership” provided by the NUM and by Arthur Scargill with the implied inaction of other named union leaders. But what has the NUM done? “They have produced leaflets.” This is perhaps a rare case where the generally vigorous rhetoric of Socialist Challenge seems a little limp.

10. Discourse and ideology
As Määtä (2014: 63) puts it, “the uneasy relationship between the concepts of discourse and ideology puzzles most scholars in critical language studies at some point in their career.” However, if we accept that ideology can be seen as “denoting “the way in which ideas, expressed in language or some other medium, play a role in justifying, defending, disguising or concealing economic exploitation or political and social inequalities and oppression” (Jones, 2001: 227), then the discourse of Socialist Challenge is ideological in nature. While Hodge and Kress (1993: 6) argue that all language is ideological, I prefer Fairclough’s contention (Fairclough, 1992b: 91) that “discourses are not ideologically invested to the same degree.” For example, the written rules of a game (such as tennis) might be seen as part of sporting discourse, but as less ideologically invested than an article in Socialist Challenge urging support for striking workers.

As we have seen in the preceding discussion, the language of many texts in the Socialist Challenge collection paints a picture of workers fighting or struggling against intransient employers and a Tory government indifferent to the needs of the working class. There is a chasm. On one side, working people, and on the other, the capitalists. This, broadly speaking is the discourse that emerges from a reading of many texts in Socialist Challenge. Fairclough’s approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) sees a mutually constitutive relationship between discourses and the social contexts in which they operate (Howarth, 2000: 4). In other words, Leftist discourse around 1980, as realized through the linguistic features discussed in the present paper, influenced and was influenced by the socio-political environment existing at the time. Margaret Thatcher’s first government (1979–1983) concentrated, among other things, on cutting public spending and reducing the public sector borrowing requirement (Buijer et al., 1981). This inevitably resulted in the loss of public sector jobs, and disagreement between the government and the trade union movement.

The language of Socialist Challenge and the discourse which underlies it seeks, in its time, both to describe and to shape the political and economic landscape. It could be argued that it constitutes, in essence, political propaganda. As Van Dijk (2013) points out, one of the aims of political propaganda is to transmit an ideology to those who may not be familiar with it, and while the readership of Socialist Challenge might have consisted mainly of committed socialists, the publication would also have found its way into the hands of those (such as some of the football fans mentioned at the beginning of this paper) whose political views were relatively unformed or
malleable. The aim of Socialist Challenge might be seen therefore as purveying a discourse that could conceivably catalyze greater militancy and belligerence among those sympathizing with the plight of the working class.

11. Conclusions and implications
The present paper has various weaknesses. Firstly, because the store of issues of Socialist Challenge contains scanned issues, it has not been possible to carry out computer-based searches for key words and phrases. Instead, I have relied on handwritten notes, taken while looking at the source material onscreen. Secondly, and in a related point, the specific examples and textual interpretations offered here, all spring from a single reader—myself. For this reason, it is highly possible that both the examples and the interpretations are skewed in ways that reflect my own biography, interests and ways of thinking. Ultimately, this paper privileges my own exegetical approach, with all the bias and idiosyncrasy that implies.

Despite the flaws mentioned above, it might be argued that the lexical and semantic analysis here of the Socialist Challenge data provides a template that could be used in other contexts. For example, political rhetoric from many sources—whether emanating from Britain or elsewhere, whether contemporary or historical—could be analysed in similar ways. It is important to identify whether political speakers or writers choose words and phrases that are relatively neutral in meaning, or whether (as is often the case in the Socialist Challenge data) they have recourse to alternative words and phrases that have more emotional or aggressive connotations? Analysing texts in the way that is exemplified here can conceivably help to raise awareness among school or university students that political speakers and writers often seek to influence their audience or readership through pathos rather than logos. Thus, I hope the approach to texts demonstrated in the present paper may be of value in educational settings.

Turning to suggestions for further research, several avenues could usefully be pursued. This paper has shown that Leftist language of the late 1970s and early 1980s often exhibits a tendency to portray two groups (usually workers and capitalists) as being utterly divided and bereft of common ground. The language also makes prominent use of lexical choices that I have termed “inflammatory” (non-neutral, provocative) and seeks to impact readers directly through the use, particularly in headlines, of the imperative mood. Do Marxist/Leftist texts still exhibit these characteristics? And are these characteristics largely of texts written from a radical Left perspective or can they be found in those emanating from the radical Right? These questions could be investigated through systematic analysis of large corpora. An advantageous and perhaps parallel approach might involve asking readers of those texts— their true audience—about how they react to and interpret selected phrases or sentences in the texts. This approach would reduce the risks arising when a single researcher, who may not be a typical reader of the texts under investigation, relies purely on his/her own intuitions and interpretations. These are the kinds of risks that arise, it can be argued, when text-based research is carried out under the banner of Critical Discourse Analysis.

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