



BRITISH POLITICS REVIEW

Journal of the British Politics Society, Norway

Volume 4, No. 1 Winter 2009



Thatcher unveiled

30 years since the start of a premiership

CONTRIBUTORS

Kristin Clemet • Ulf Andenæs • John Curtice
Richard Heffernan • Dag Einar Thorsen • Ragnhild Vestli
Atle L. Wold • Øivind Bratberg

British Politics Review is a quarterly newsletter issued by the British Politics Society, Norway. With contributions from academic and journalistic sources, the *British Politics Review* is aimed at everyone with a general interest in political developments in Britain.

British Politics Society, Norway is politically neutral and has no collective agenda apart from raising the interest and knowledge of British politics among the informed Norwegian public.

Editorial team

Øivind Bratberg [Editor]
Kristin M. Haugevik [Associate Editor]
Atle L. Wold [Scholarly Responsible]
John-Ivar S. Olsen [Secretary]

Postal address

P.O. Box 6 Blindern
N-0313 Oslo, Norway

Email

mail@britishpoliticsociety.no

Website

www.britishpoliticsociety.no

Print

Representralen, Oslo, Norway

Cover photo

Margaret Thatcher visiting President Ronald Reagan at the White House, 28 February 1981. White House photo, public domain.

Manuscripts

Within a relatively broad framework, *British Politics Review* welcomes articles on British politics and society, preferably related to the thematic area set for each issue (announced in the previous journal and on our website). Please contact the editors at mail@britishpoliticsociety.no

Subscriptions

100 NOK pr year

Please contact us at mail@britishpoliticsociety.no or visit our website.

Editorial

Reassessing the longest premiership of the twentieth century

Margaret Thatcher. There are few names in modern British political history which awaken similarly strong emotions. Active in British politics for more than fifty years, eleven of them as Prime Minister, Thatcher experienced most aspects of post-war political life in Britain. The memorable speeches and quotes made by her are countless, as are the jokes, nicknames and slogans invented by supporters and opponents to describe her personality, style and politics. "What more does she want, this housewife? My balls on a tray?" complained France's President François Mitterrand following particularly tough negotiations with Thatcher in Brussels. "She's the best man in England", was the unreserved compliment from US President Ronald Reagan. "For us she is not the iron lady. She is the kind, dear Mrs. Thatcher", explained Slovak politician Alexander Dubček.

When she first ran for a seat in the House of Commons, in Dartford in 1950, Margaret Thatcher was only 25 years old – the youngest female Conservative candidate to ever run for a position as MP. While unsuccessful in depriving Labour of its safe seat, the attempt gave Thatcher much attention both inside the Conservative party and in the media. Several disappointments later, she was finally elected MP for Finchley in the 1959 general elections. In the years that followed, her position within the party grew increasingly stronger. In 1975 she challenged Edward Heath the party leadership and won. Four years later, in the general election of 1979, she made it all the way to 10 Downing Street, effectively invalidating her own observation of some years earlier that there would not be a female prime minister in her lifetime.

As prime minister, Thatcher is undoubtedly best known for her (much contested) economic policies, emphasising free market economics and privatisation, combined with reform of the welfare state and of the trade unions. In addition to this clear-cut new political direction, which has become known for all time as *Thatcherism*, the Thatcher years were characterised by deep-seated Euro-scepticism and glory days for the special relationship between Britain and the United States. It was also marked by historic events such as the Falkland Wars and the end of the Cold War.

In this issue of *British Politics Review*, we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the start of Margaret Thatcher's premiership with a wide range of articles reassessing the Thatcher years in British politics. This time, our first-rate team of guest contributors includes Kristin Clemet, Ulf Andenæs, John Curtice, Richard Heffernan and Dag Einar Thorsen. Together with regular BPR-writers Øivind Bratberg, Atle L. Wold and Ragnhild Vestli, they present a many-sided portrait of Margaret Thatcher's intriguing political career.

Øivind Bratberg and Kristin M. Haugevik, Editors

Contents

Reform to preserve: conservative advances in Britain and Norway <i>Kristin Clemet</i>	p. 3	The continuing shadow of the Thatcher governments <i>Richard Heffernan</i>	pp. 8-9
A radical in a conservative nation? <i>Ulf Andenæs</i>	pp. 4-5	Thatcher's influence after her premiership <i>Ragnhild Vestli</i>	p. 10
The controversial politician Margaret Thatcher <i>Atle L. Wold</i>	p. 6	The territorial problems of the Conservative Party <i>Øivind Bratberg</i>	p. 11
Were British voters transformed by Thatcherism? <i>John Curtice</i>	p. 7	Cherish freedom! <i>Dag Einar Thorsen</i>	p. 12

Reform to preserve: conservative advances in Britain and Norway

By British Politics Review Guest Writer Kristin Clemet, leader of Civita

Kristin Clemet is a former secretary of state for education and research (2001-05) and member of parliament for Høyre, the Norwegian Conservative Party (1989-93). She has also held several minor governmental posts. A deputy director in the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise from 1998 to 2001, Clemet today heads the liberal think tank Civita.



The Conservative Willoch government in Norway (1981-86) and Margaret Thatcher's premiership in the UK (1979-1990), have both been seen within the context of the emerging New Right during the late 1970s and 1980s. There are obvious similarities between the two: both leaders gained power as a result of a failing social democracy, the radicalisation of the left and the considerable economic changes of the 1970s which brought a set of new ideas to the fore.

In both cases, the period of Conservative rule was necessary in order to get society back on its feet, but a closer examination of the two leaders and their periods in office also reveals marked difference. The transformation of British society during the Thatcher era was far more profound than anything carried through in Norway. There is a natural explanation for this: in Britain, the illness was worse and the medicine consequently had to be stronger.

One of the causes of "the English disease" which troubled the UK economy before Thatcher came to power, was the trade unions, in particular those representing the miners. The jobs of their members had become increasingly precarious in the preceding decades. In 1947, coal represented ninety percent of Britain's energy needs, while thirty years later, this proportion had sunk to a third. Moreover, the British mining industry was experiencing an increasing, though belated, mechanisation. That this caused concern amongst miners and their families is easy to understand. The National Union of Mineworkers, led by the Leninist Arthur Scargill, exploited this fear to command strikes of devastating effect. Scargill was a man of influence, and sufficiently so to make a socialist out of the Conservative prime minister Edward Heath in the early 1970s.

The British Labour Party represented different shades of socialism from 1945 all the way to 1994. The Conservatives were

less consistent, but sometimes matched Labour's leftist policies. Heath's infamous U-turn towards accommodating the trade unions reflects this point: nobody in Britain dared to challenge the post-war consensus and the vision of "building Jerusalem" in the UK. Marginal taxes had reached unsustainable levels of up to 100%; the expenses of the welfare state were rising continuously; and industry and housing remained in the public sector. In the 1970s, it was clear to Thatcher and many others that Britain neither had the money nor the competitive edge to pay for this.

The situation was not made any better by the international stagnation triggered by the oil crisis in 1973. Decades of strong and consistent growth in the economies of Western Europe were brought to a sudden halt after 73. Increasing oil prices led to inflation which was aggravated rather than cured by the Labour governments' Keynesian attempts to regulate the economy. Britain was forced to appeal to the International Monetary Fund for financial aid. For a long time, the size and significance of the public sector had been allowed to increase steadily without causing problems, mainly as a result of a growing (particularly female) workforce and increasing public revenue. Now, major reforms of this system seemed unavoidable, and Labour could not be trusted to make the hard decisions needed; indeed, as the problems mounted, Labour instead turned left towards increasingly radical policies. This was the context in which Margaret Thatcher became electable. A determined and stubborn leader was what was required to counter, in turn, trade unionists on strike, belligerent Argentines, and – for a period of time at least – a hesitant population.

In Norway, similar tendencies could be observed, but of a less dramatic nature. Here, even longer periods of Labour government had led to an over-expanding public sector, and reform was sorely needed. At the same time as problems mounted, however, oil was discovered in the North Sea. The oil crisis became a "blessing in disguise" in providing a fresh inlet of public funds. The Norwegian Conservative Party, consequently, could do what any conservative really prefers: reform in order to preserve. The Norwegian Conservatives were given an extra momentum by a Labour Party which had followed British Labour's lurch to the left. According to the historian Francis Sejersted, "the radicalisation of Labour was seen by the Conservative Party as a god-sent gift. The Conservatives could now present themselves as defenders of the established social democratic order against attempts at further radicalisation."

While Thatcher pulled the Tories to the right, Willoch in Norway was more moderate. We

did not experience the Thatcher hallmark of large-scale privatisation, nor did the Willoch government take on the trade unions directly to the same extent. What we did get, however, were a whole range of other reforms and liberalisations – of the credit market, the energy sector, housing as well as the media and public broadcast.

The claim has been made that both Thatcher and Willoch were guilty of demolishing the welfare state and of enforcing an attitude of every man for himself. I disagree completely and would rather contend that they *secured the basis* for our welfare. Even though the public sector was reduced as a proportion of GDP in Britain, this was mainly due to the sale of largely inefficient public industries while expenses for social security, health and education increased by 33, 34 and 9 percent respectively. Willoch, equally, shied away from any attack on the Norwegian welfare model. Reforms, in Britain as in Norway, were unavoidable at the time and essential for the sustained welfare in both nations thereafter. The British economy was transformed, resulting in reduced inflation and increased growth. The seemingly endless expansion of the public sector was halted, and the trade unions never regained their excessively powerful role.

Thatcher's success is highlighted by the succeeding policy shift in Labour. Her policies have not been reversed since 1997. Tony Blair – referred to by Thatcher as "her finest achievement" – instead pursued the principles of enterprise, competition and economic growth. This has largely been the case for the subsequent Labour governments in Norway as well. Thorbjørn Jagland, the former Labour prime minister and currently President of the Storting, has referred to the Willoch years as "a necessary overhaul of the social democratic order". Without liberalisation, the Norwegian model would not have been sustainable.

I cannot say I was a great supporter of Thatcher while she was in office, but she was no doubt important; domestically for crushing socialism and internationally for playing a major role in defeating communism as a global threat. Alongside Ronald Reagan, Thatcher contributed to a change in the political climate which would pave the way for the liberation of Eastern Europe from communist oppression. To me, that could well be the most important legacy of Thatcher's years in Downing Street.

And as for Kåre Willoch, Thatcher's Norwegian contemporary, I have always been a supporter of him!

A radical in a conservative nation?

By Ulf Andenæs

A correspondent's view of Thatcher. In Niall MacCormick's brilliant film made last year about Margaret Thatcher's way to power (*The Long Walk To Finchley*), the young Thatcher is fascinatingly portrayed by the rising star Andrea Riseborough, as a pioneering force of change and a feminist role model: the gifted girl from modest background fighting her way against the prejudiced male upper class Tory establishment, being rebuffed over and over again. Despite an amount of artistic licence, the portrayal is captivating and convincing.



Ulf Andenæs is a journalist and commentator in Aftenposten. Since 1977, he has covered politics, foreign affairs and culture; in addition, he has headed the politics section, edited comments and debate and had several spells abroad. A former student in modern history at Wadham College, Oxford, Andenæs was foreign correspondent in London for for Aftenposten in 1985-89.

good listener, at least not to people of differing views. She was always right. This was her strength in action, but it also in the end led to her fall. At those occasions when I had a chance to get her at close range, usually during election campaigns, party conferences or special events, one could not mistake those steely blue eyes.

During years of reporting in a country where she was the centre of attention virtually every day, what struck me as the most characteristic trait of Margaret Thatcher as a political figure, was that I never once heard her speak with any sign of a politician's usual ambiguity, tactical vagueness or verbiage. All other democratically elected politicians of position have at times resorted to evasive ambiguities, committee speech or jargon from their manifestos; never Thatcher. In my experience, she was physically and mentally unable to speak in vague language. In this sense, she is probably the most distinctive elected politician I have experienced in my lifetime.

She belonged to that exclusive set of individuals who have turned the course of a nation, in the real sense. When I took over the London office for my newspaper, I inherited a file cupboard with a thick file marked "Nationalisation", a government remedy which had been on the agenda

on and off since World War II, right up to Thatcher's access to power in June 1979. This file went instantly into disuse, being replaced by a new and soon bulging file marked "Privatisation". Thatcher was the prime mover in selling off not only nationalised industries but also what had been seen as public utilities. Gradually the whole world seemed to be following this model where she

started. In this and in related fields, it is only now, during the present crisis, that the renewed crusade for European capitalism, with thatcherism in the vanguard, has been halted. (She is one of the few with a political term named after her - thatcherism).

Thatcher was an obvious hate figure for the Left. For those

"[W]hat struck me as the most characteristic trait of Margaret Thatcher as a political figure, was that I never once heard her speak with any sign of a politician's usual ambiguity, tactical vagueness or verbiage."

of us who got to know the British in those days, it is tempting to say that they deserved to get such a tough ruler. Not all her former enemies like to be reminded to what extent the UK had been left behind compared to other major industrial powers of the day. The productivity in British industry, counted in production value per working hour, had sunk to less than half the average of advanced Western economies.

The vicious circle, called "The English disease", was marked by trade unions with dogmatic leaderships resisting modernisation, unsatisfactory quality control and working practices, ageing means of production, overstaffing, rigid entrenched relationships between workers and management, a baffling number of strikes and a steady loss of confidence in British products in overseas markets. With this came a reduced comparative wage earning ability, resulting in a development whereby the standard of living in the UK fell behind other Western countries of the time.

For me as a man of the press, meeting the British newspaper industry of the day was like entering a museum, witnessing horrific waste of resources. People from abroad with background from other industries had similar experiences, although the newspaper industry was probably the worst. In the course of a decade the previously huge market share of British cars in Norway had fallen to next to nothing.



Start of a journey. Margaret Thatcher in 1975, the year she ascended to the leadership of the Conservative Party. © wikipedia/public domain

When I reported on Thatcher in action during her heyday of the 1980s, elements from the days of the young Maggie were still there to be seen: The old patrician guard of the Tory party somehow kept their distance, reluctant towards her political style which they found lacking in subtlety, too divisive and strident, their attitude famously expressed in the speeches by the ageing Lord Stockton - Harold Macmillan - warning her about "selling the family silver". At the time, observers seldom tired of pointing out the difference between the patricians, who knew their positions had been enhanced by a privileged start in life and good networks, hence sometimes revealing a measure of political humility, and Thatcher, who had achieved everything through her own efforts, with no such need of humility.

Reporting from the United Kingdom during the Thatcher years had one main theme: All public life circled around the force and energy of one person, apparently indefatigable, imposing her power and impatience for change upon an obstinate nation. I never experienced that anyone was able to defeat her in a verbal exchange, be it at home or abroad. She was like a force of nature. What drove her were her totally unwavering convictions, leaving no room for doubt, and little room for carefully weighing up the pros and cons.

Another side of this state of mind was that she did not come over as a

A radical in a conservative nation? (cont.)

By Ulf Andenæs

Thatcher's cure for the British industry and economy was drastic. Monetary policies driving up the cost of money and the exchange rate of the pound, together with a refusal to bail out ailing companies or industries; trimming of welfare budgets, changing the UK from a high tax to a low tax economy, a wide range of encouragements to free enterprise, local wage agreements and, not least, a massive confrontation with the most change resistant parts of the trade union movements and their leaderships, in addition to the above mentioned privatisations.

The effects of these deep changes were in some cases not fully visible until long after her departure in 1990, and they were continued under her Conservative successor John Major and even during the Labour government from 1997. The long-term effect was restoring British economic resilience. Her cure had brutal effects during the transition period, with staggering unemployment rates in the old industrial areas. Some industries virtually disappeared for good. Britain's vulnerable working class youth got a rough deal, with a neglected apprentice and trade skills training system and shrunken council housing. Thatcher would perhaps not have been able to continue her drastic policies without her triumph in the 1982 Falkland war, which contributed greatly to her second election victory the year after.

Thatcher's foreign and defence policies had all the decisive marks of British - or English - right wing nationalism, including an ever stronger resistance to European integration, fully marked

in her 1988 Bruges speech on Europe of a British Gaullist colour. Her critical attitude to European integration grew ever stronger with time, even more so after she retired.

Thatcher had previously supported the introduction of the European Single Market - as an instrument for increased free trade - but had rejected most of the other steps of European integration, such as monetary and political union, a European Central bank, Schengen, social policies and foreign security. The core of her argument was that Europe is not a nation, and can never be one, because it lacks common culture, language and identity, which the United States had had right from its beginning. Therefore Europe does not have what it takes to make a future federal outfit meaningful. Repeatedly and forcefully, she maintained that the British Parliament should remain sovereign.

With increasing intensity, Thatcher took on a role as an ideological opponent of European integration. Her thoughts were received as the established view on the right wing of the Tory party, and for periods this seemed to become the mainstream way of thinking within the party, to the dismay of the ardent Europeans who were still vociferous among its leading ranks. This side of

"Her resolute rejection of representative organs for Scotland and Wales contributed to the dwindling of support for her Conservative party north of the border, to the effect that Scotland in the end was ruled like an unwilling dependency through her appointed Scottish ministers..."

thatcherism is a reminder of how the attitudes on Europe often differ notably between the British and the Norwegian Conservatives, whereas European feelings, or lack of such feelings, among the population on the whole reveal similarities between the British and the Norwegians compared to continental nations.

Faced with demands for constitutional reforms, she resisted change in this field, which put her at odds with public opinion in Scotland. Her resolute rejection of representative organs for Scotland and Wales contributed to the dwindling of support for her Conservative party north of the border, to the effect that Scotland in the end was ruled like an unwilling dependency through her appointed Scottish ministers who had little support in Scotland as a whole.

With the Conservative loss of power in 1997, Scotland was overruled for devolution, with Wales following. Another aspect of these policies was that Thatcher in some places reduced or dismantled local government in order to weaken political opponents regionally or locally. With her Iron Lady convictions, she would remove the forces which shadowed for the light of reason: reason as it was defined by her.

When Mrs Thatcher came to Norway

September 1986 was the occasion for Margaret Thatcher's first and only visit to Norway as prime minister. Her Norwegian counterpart, Gro Harlem Brundtland, had like Thatcher fought her way past male dominance. In political terms, however, there was little common ground between them. One of the things that surprised the British press was that Brundtland chose to emphasise precisely their political differences in her lunch speech on the opening day of the visit. Clear divergence was also expressed over the use of sanctions against South Africa (which Brundtland, in contrast with Thatcher, strongly supported) and she also raised the issue of Britain's responsibility for acid rain over southern Norway.

Much more dramatic than vocal disagreements, however, were the riots which erupted in the city centre of Oslo in relation to Thatcher's visit. A demonstration dominated by left-wing activists and anarchists escalated, with several hundred protesters breaking past the police barriers around Akershus Castle where a banquet dinner for Thatcher was to be held. In order to regain control over the situation, additional police was required and the dinner had to be delayed. The event led to big headlines in the British press, amazed by the seemingly unprepared police in Oslo.

However, the fact that a British leader could provoke such aggression in Norway was also a source of concern. Kåre Willoch, leader of the Norwegian Conservative Party, feared that Norway's favourable esteem in Britain might be injured. On the British side, however, Donald Anderson of Labour took the opposite perspective, seeing the events in Oslo as yet another sign of Thatcher's unpopularity: even Norwegians, Britain's closest and most loyal friends in Europe, now turned to passionate protest against her.



No regrets. Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland sees her British counterpart Margaret Thatcher off from Oslo on 12 September 1988. The headline in *Verdens Gang* chooses a conciliatory approach to what had been a tumultuous visit in Norway. © Verdens Gang/Retriever

The controversial politician Margaret Thatcher

By Atle L. Wold

Passions stirred. The name Margaret Thatcher still stirs up strong feelings among people in Great Britain, a good 18 years after she resigned as prime minister. Whenever the word "Thatcher" comes up, the British seem to head for the trenches, and attempting to remain neutral or indifferent is likely to leave you in an undesirable no-man's-land. And this is no less case among those who are either too young to have any recollection of her time in office, or who were not even born during her premiership, than amongst those who experienced life in Britain in the 1980s. Thatcher is loved or hated and little in between, or at least so it seems.

A main reason for this is of course the *policies* pursued by Thatcher's governments, but the picture is further complicated by that other main pillar of Thatcherism, the *style* of Mrs. Thatcher as PM. The disagreements work at different levels: as one might expect in a democracy, people have disagreed over her political views and principles, not the least, perhaps, because they were often so sharply worded. Her supporters could enjoy her unflinching conviction that she was right, while her opponents could find agreement in abhorring her supposed arrogance.

Even more so, however, there have been fundamental disagreements over the actual *consequences* of her policies. The opponents of Thatcher's economic policies, for example, have argued that Thatcher destroyed much of Britain's industrial base, thus effectively representing a government-administered *de-industrialisation* of the country, and that she sold off the "family silver" through the large-scale privatisation programme of the 1980s. And while the effect these policies had on Britain's economy was bad enough, the social consequences were even more dramatic. Whole communities in the industrial heartland of Britain, the English Midlands and North East, the Vales of Wales, and Clydeside in Scotland were effectively destroyed by the unemployment and depression which followed the collapse of these industries, they have argued.

The supporters of Thatcher's policies on the other hand have held that, while the immediate consequences may have



Atle L. Wold is a Senior Lecturer at the Dept. of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo and Scholarly Responsible of British Politics Society, Norway.

been negative, the long-term effect was to rescue Britain from the stagnation and crisis of the 1970s, and to create the basis for a healthy economy with lower unemployment rates than any of the major economies in Europe at present. Moreover, they argued, the consequences of Thatcher's policies were primarily dramatic because Thatcher had the guts to sort out long-standing structural problems which previous governments had shunned. One thing was the power of the trade unions, another, the lack of willingness to renew and modernise old industries which had long since lost their competitiveness. (In some cases, such as the mining industry in Wales, these were problems which arguably dated all the way back to before World War 1.) What Thatcher did was merely to remove the "artificial props" of government subsidies given to these industries, thereby removing "dead flesh" in the economy. And as for privatisation: well this turned many loss-making industries into well-run companies which now produced a nice flow of tax revenues for the Treasury coffers.

To latter point, however, the opponents could retort that while some public enterprises such as British Airways may well have been turned around by privatisation, others – most notably the railway-system – instead turned out an unmitigated disaster. The debate continues, and the disagreements persist.

Thatcher's style, however, has drawn a more ambivalent and unclear response. Many *supporters* of Thatcher disliked her high-handed style and "handbag-

bashing" techniques – as they were used against both political opponents and her own Cabinet members – while many *opponents* of Thatcher rather liked her adherence to principle.

During the BBC's television programme series "Greatest Britons" in 2001, for example, (a concept subsequently exported to much of Europe), one of the celebrities who was invited to comment on the candidacy of Thatcher was the perhaps unlikely choice of Johnny Lydon, alias Johnny Rotten of the 1970s Punk

"Thatcher is loved or hated and little in between, or at least so it seems. A main reason for this is of course the *policies* pursued by Thatcher's governments, but the picture is further complicated by [...] the *style* of Mrs. Thatcher as PM."

band "The Sex Pistols" (Thatcher made it to 16th place and hence not to the top ten who went on to the final round). Lydon's response was typical of the ambivalent views which often come to the surface when both the style and policies of Thatcher are considered.

While not producing the outright condemnation one might perhaps have

expected, Lydon stated that – however much he loathed the actual policies of Mrs Thatcher and her governments – he nonetheless respected the politician Thatcher. Her clarity and steadfastness with respect to political principles and views, as well as her readiness to stand by unpopular policies she believed in, could be nicely contrasted with the current Labour government Lydon thought (this, of course, being in the heyday of Alistair Campbell). In Lydon's view, there was something reassuring about a politician whom you knew were you had, whom you could trust to remain there, and whom you could therefore make up your mind about: either you agreed or you disagreed with Thatcher, full stop.

In terms of practical policies, Thatcher may well have been more pragmatic than her often sharply worded political utterances would suggest, but the perception of her as a firm and strong politician pursuing a coherent set of policies – as voiced by Lydon – seems to have given her some unlikely closet admirers, while at the same time producing a handful of enemies amongst those tried to work with her. Perhaps that is another reason why the British cannot ever seem to console themselves with Thatcher and her legacy.

And the final result of the Greatest Briton vote? Well, it was perhaps as boring as it was predictable: Winston Churchill.



Of days past. Margaret Thatcher attending Ronald Reagan's funeral in June 2004. © wikipedia/public domain

Were British voters transformed by Thatcherism?

By John Curtice

Attitudes and reform.

Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 determined to change Britain. It had become, she felt, an uncompetitive society in which the unions had too much power, people were too dependent on welfare benefits, and too few had a stake in capitalism. Thus she took on and eventually defeated the miners, tried to scale back welfare benefits, and sold both council houses and the nationalised industries to ordinary members of the public.



John Curtice is Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde and a Research Consultant to the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). He has published widely on electoral behaviour and political parties.

But she did not simply wish to change the structure of Britain's economy and its society. She also wanted to change the country's attitudes. Britain, she believed, needed an "entrepreneurial culture" that valued hard work, enterprise, low taxes and a small state. Not only would the creation of such a culture help make the country more competitive, it would also ensure that no subsequent government would seek to reverse her reforms for fear of an adverse public reaction. Her legacy would thus be entrenched.

Did she, however, succeed in fulfilling her ambition? Ever since 1983 NatCen's British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has examined the social and political attitudes of the British public in forensic detail on an annual basis, often asking the same questions every year. It thus enables us to chart systematically long-term trends in the climate of British public opinion.

One question BSA has asked every year focuses on one of Mrs Thatcher's key concerns, the balance of taxation and spending. It asks people whether, if the government had to choose it should reduce taxes and spend less on 'health, education and social benefits', keep both at the same level as now, or increase them. In 1983 there was already relatively little apparent appetite for higher taxes and spending. Although only 9% said that taxes and spending should be cut, equally only 32% said they should be increased. The most popular option by far, supported by 54%, was to keep things as they were.

It seemed that many already shared Mrs Thatcher's doubts about the merits of an apparently ever growing public sector.

But what progress did she make in instilling a preference for a low tax economy? The answer, it seems, is none at all. By 1990, the year she was deposed from office, just 3% wanted lower taxes and spending. More dramatically, by this stage only 37% were happy with the status quo, while no less than 54% wanted more spending, even at the expense of higher taxes.

Of course a single survey question can serve as an adequate test of Mrs Thatcher's success in creating an enterprise culture. However, other questions carried regularly by BSA tell much the same story. In 1983 46% agreed that "benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship", hardly an attitude we would expect to be endorsed by someone who believed people were too reliant on the welfare state. By 1990 support for that view had actually increased slightly, to 52%. In similar vein the proportion who believed the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes was too large increased from 72% in 1983 to 81% in 1990. In short, it seems that, if anything, public opinion had drifted away from the values Mrs. Thatcher had hoped to promote.

Yet if Mrs Thatcher apparently had little influence on public opinion, she did have an impact on the Labour Party. Beginning with its policy review under Neil Kinnock in the 1980s, and then more dramatically, with the rebranding of the party as "New Labour" following Tony Blair's election as leader in 1994, Labour moved towards what it regarded as a the "centre ground" of British politics. It accepted the importance of markets and private enterprise, the need to cut welfare benefits and the merits of keeping taxation down - much as Mrs Thatcher had done.

"[T]he proportion who believed the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes was too large increased from 72% in 1983 to 81% in 1990. In short, it seems that, if anything, public opinion had drifted away from the values Mrs. Thatcher had hoped to promote."

And by switching his party's positions Tony Blair seems to have had the impact on public attitudes that Mrs Thatcher had failed to achieve. Support for the view that unemployment benefits are too low reached its zenith in 1994, when 58% adopted that view. Thereafter it started to fall back. But it did so most dramatically, from 46% to 29%, during Labour's first year in office. In 2007 just 26% were in favour. Meanwhile, whereas in 1995 as many as 87% believed the gap between those with high incomes

and those with low incomes was too large; by 2007 it was back down to 26%.

Of one thing, however, Tony Blair did not persuade the public - that lower taxes were more important than better public services. For two years the New Labour government adhered to a manifesto promise to keep to the tight spending plans of the previous Conservative government. Yet in 1998 as many as 63% still felt that the government should increase taxes and spending. Eventually public dissatisfaction with public services hit home and the government embarked on a significant expansion of public spending, accompanied by occasional tax increases.



Moderniser. "[B]y switching his party's positions Tony Blair seems to have had the impact on public attitudes that Mrs Thatcher had failed to achieve." © wikipedia/public domain

However, by eventually meeting the demand for better services, the Labour government began to satisfy those that had wanted change. By 2003 some sections of the public had concluded that it had already done enough; support for more spending and higher taxes had fallen back to 51%. And by early 2008, just 34% were of that opinion - almost the same proportion as in Mrs Thatcher's heyday in 1983.

What lessons are there to be learnt from this experience? First, in some respects public opinion is cyclical, reacting against any shifts in the balance of policy implemented by the current government. To that extent all governments, including Mrs Thatcher's, are destined to fail to persuade the public of their point of view. But just occasionally a government can make a long-term difference. However, that happens *not* when a politician like Mrs Thatcher promotes policies that appear consistent with their party's past, but rather when a politician like Mr Blair comes along and contradicts people's expectations. If Britain does indeed now have an "enterprise culture" the credit belongs to Mr Blair, not Margaret Thatcher.

The continuing shadow of the Thatcher governments

By Richard Heffernan

Change-and continuity. Today, some thirty years after it was first elected, it is widely acknowledged that the Thatcher governments, re-elected in 1983 and 1987, have helped, alongside the successor government led by John Major, to bring about real and far reaching changes in public policy which substantially remade the British political agenda.



*Richard Heffernan is a Reader in Government at the Dept. of Politics and International Studies, Open University. Among a range of publications on British politics he is the author of *New Labour and Thatcherism: Political Change in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).*

In the 1980s the many and different policy reforms of the Thatcher government found themselves subsumed beneath the description of Thatcherism. Over time Thatcherism, a term initially coined by opponents of the Thatcher-led Conservative governments, has become something meaning many things to many people. It has variously been employed to denote a popular political movement, a policy style, a form of political leadership, or more usually, any number of notions relating to ideology, politics, economy and society.

The term problematically places too much emphasis on the former British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. While remarkable in many ways, Thatcher was only part of a team of ministers. Ministers, often described as "Thatcherites", such as Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson at the Treasury between 1979 and 1989, not to mention Keith Joseph in opposition before 1979, were, working with and through Thatcher, central to the work of the Thatcher governments. Nonetheless, Thatcherism is a term that has firmly entered the political lexicon. Thatcherism can, when deployed as an analytical prism to explore the meanings and impacts of the Thatcher governments, be seen to have both reflected and promoted a fundamental rightward shift in British politics.

Thatcherism, as it is uncovered in political developments and electoral cycles after 1975, was anti-corporatist, anti-(political) trade unionist, anti-public enterprise, anti-welfare (but it sponsored, for electoral reasons, no meaningful reform of welfare) and, in economic attitudes, very much anti-Keynesian. It strongly favoured the primacy of the market in the governance of the economy, the privatisation and commercialisation of the state sector, the deregulation of corporatist arrangements, the marketisation of much

of state-centred activity, the boosting of financial capital over manufacturing, the encouragement of a flexible labour market, and the assertion of legislative control over trade unions. Five elements of Thatcherism combined to drive it forward as a political project in office after 1979:

First, it was a response to economic and political difficulties; *second*, it was a reaction against the political status quo; *third*, it had a clear political objective (a strong state restoring the autonomy of the governing centre); *fourth*, this political objective was coterminous with electoral objectives (a strong state dominated by the Conservative Party); and *fifth*, as a programme to secure these objectives, Thatcherism was informed by a series of New Right ideological prescriptions, the success (in broad terms) of which benefited from the opportunities granted it by a discredited social democrat inspired status quo.

Despite their necessary pursuit of electoral statecraft, the Thatcher governments pursued an ideological-political-economic project with identifiable objectives. This project was, of course, part of a world wide movement across the developed world. Thatcher and her ministers may have often been both cautious and pragmatic, but the ideological frameworks suggested by the new right ideology provided Thatcherism with a set of policy tools, not necessarily a fully worked out blueprint. This meant that Thatcherism, even when narrowly defined as the policy record of the Thatcher

(and Major) governments, combined two aspects of new right thinking which had been emerging since the mid 1950s:

First, neo-liberalism in the form of individualism, freedom, choice, laissez-faire, minimal government and the market economy; and Second, neo-conservatism as expressed by strong government, hierarchy, discipline, law and order and the nation.

"Thatcherism, as it is uncovered in political developments and electoral cycles after 1975, was anti-corporatist, anti-(political) trade unionist, anti-public enterprise, anti-welfare and, in economic attitudes, very much anti-Keynesian."

Of these two sets of values, summed up in Andrew Gamble's telling reference to the "free economy and the strong state", the Thatcherites eagerly pursued the first; often, it must be said, at the expense of the second. In this regard,

over time, the reduction of direct taxes, the emasculation of the trade unions and the pursuit of privatisation, when coupled with deregulation and forms of re-regulation, proved the key policy instruments by which the British economy and the state were reworked.

For instance by 1995 privatisation meant that British households no longer had their telephone, gas, electricity, coal or water provided by the state, British citizens no longer travelled by state owned railways, airlines or ferries, and that, among other things, the state no longer owned and controlled the steel, shipbuilding, aviation and car making industries. By such means did Thatcherism seek to revive market liberalism as the dominant public philosophy by rolling back the state, whenever possible, while creating the conditions for a free economy by limiting the scope of the state while simultaneously restoring its authority to act.

Thatcherism, naturally, faced all sorts of constraints and Thatcher herself was a polarising figure, someone who was loved and loathed in almost equal measure. Among the constraints the government faced were the dictates of electoral politics; the internal politics of government and party; the public expectations and demands of electors and opinion formers; the administrative practicality- and achievability- of proposed reforms; and the public policy agendas inherited from previous administrations. Its strength, however, was that its ideologically based set of values could, when converted into policy prescriptions, enact successful, sustainable and popular policy change and change the ways in which the state regulates or manages the economy and society.



Shared values. Margaret Thatcher's ideological project shared a lot with Ronald Reagan's presidency on the other side of the Atlantic. © wikipedia/public domain

The continuing shadow of the Thatcher governments (cont.)

By Richard Heffernan

It had the unrivalled political opportunity offered by the crisis – and the electoral rejection- of the inherited status quo which provided ministers with the chance to pursue a reform agenda. As importantly, the Thatcher government possessed political leaders who were prepared- and were able- to pursue their policy objectives, could deal with political, electoral and economic circumstances, and had the electoral opportunity to pursue these policy objectives through the state by winning and (as importantly) retaining governmental office.

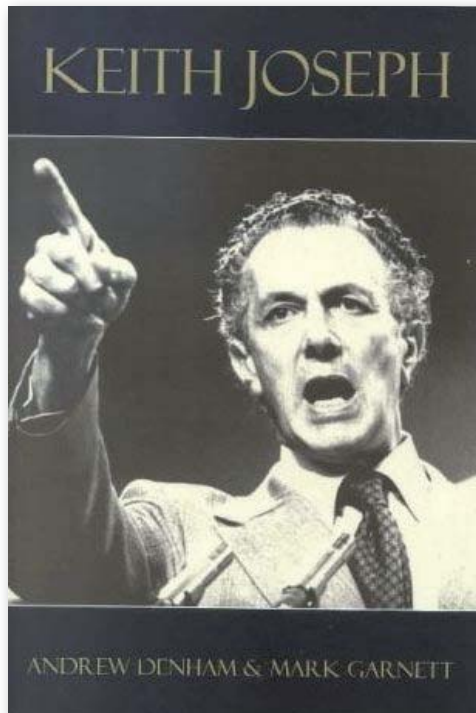
This is how the Thatcher governments made the political weather in the 1980s. Crucially, Thatcher's electoral fortune owed much to the fact that Labour had pitched violently to the left after 1979 and was saddled with its failures when in government in 1974-79. She may also have benefited from facing a divided opposition, but drew considerable electoral strength from the Conservatives' ability to appeal to the 44 percent of the voting public who were prepared, particularly after the recession of the 1980s had been faced down by 1982, to endorse her governing philosophy in 1983 and 1987.

Thatcherite ministers, despite successes, did not achieve everything they set out to do. They presided over policy failures as well as policy successes (the Poll Tax), lost the plot over Europe and, with catastrophic electoral consequences in 1997, 2001 and 2005, were ultimately to forfeit their reputation for economic competence and being able to effectively steward the public services. Today's Conservatives, faced with the realities of

Tony Blair's winning ways between 1997 and 2005, have had to move slowly and carefully, often painfully, beyond some aspects of old-style Thatcherism. While broadly endorsing the economic revolution ushered in after 1979, David Cameron and his team have aligned themselves with changing social notions of personal identity and preference and of the reality of some degree of collective interest.

Thatcher's much derided view "that there is no such thing as society" finds few supporters within today's Conservative Party. In particular the Conservatives have now to champion

"Thatcherite ministers [...] did not achieve everything they set out to do. They presided over policy failures as well as policy successes (the Poll Tax), lost the plot over Europe and, with catastrophic electoral consequences in 1997, 2001 and 2005, were ultimately to forfeit their reputation for economic competence..."



The ideologue. Sir Keith Joseph (1918-94), by many regarded as the intellectual father of Thatcherism, especially in his preference for monetarist economics and a competitive, entrepreneurial society. Here depicted on the book cover of Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett's *Keith Joseph* (Acumen, 2002).

public services, something which the Thatcher governments were often loathe to do, and accept Labour's post 1997 reworking of the Thatcherite agenda in the form of the minimum wage, increased child benefit, and the use of indirect (and direct, at least in the form of increased National Insurance contributions) tax revenues to redistribute resources to the working poor and the use of increased expenditure to best fund and perhaps better manage the public services that British citizens want and need.

Still, even some thirty years after the election of the first Thatcher government, the continuing impact of Thatcherism is that the majority of its economic policy prescriptions, most of them considered dangerous and radical at the time, now reflect a dominant set of ideas which (if reframed by Labour after 1997) still provide policy makers with a compass, not a road map, and help structure policy agendas in a variety of ways, most notably by diagnosing political and economic problems and prescribing policy solutions. In 1979 Keith Joseph, briefly Thatcher's intellectual mentor, identified "six economic

poisons" which the government had urgently to excise: These poisons, "high direct taxation, egalitarianism, excessive nationalization, a politicised trade union movement associated with Luddism, and an anti-enterprise culture", were all to be tackled by the Thatcher governments and most to be erased by the late 1980s.

A reformed Labour Party, which had fought the Thatcher government tooth and nail over almost every single reform throughout the 1980s, was, when eventually returning to power in 1997, to publicly associate itself with the removal of such poisons from the British body politic; Blair pledged that they would not return.

After 1983 "modernised" Labour, in order to win elections it has previously lost, and to do so by reconnecting with the electorate by becoming politically "relevant", slowly, methodically and deliberately accommodated itself to a Britain which had been fundamentally recast by eighteen years of radical Thatcherite Conservatism. In office Labour might have favoured policies which, say, seek to alleviate poverty, but it has done little to pursue broader social equality.

Thatcherism had so reworked the political terrain after 1979 that Labour, which had historically wanted to manage, restrict or constrict the market for a social purpose, sought now to empower, free and liberalise the market in an economic interest: Blair, when prime minister, stood in policy terms far, far closer to Thatcher than he did to Labour's Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson or Jim Callaghan. Labour's Gordon Brown, now grappling with the economic crisis of the present day global downturn, may find he has now to reach for policy solutions beyond the Thatcherite paradigm. It still remains to be seen, however, how much his government- or a future Conservative one led by David Cameron- can move beyond the broad parameters of the policy settlement initiated by Thatcherism.

With mainstream politics having moved decisively beyond the nostrums of the pre 1975 post-war social democratic era, any and all contemporary reform agendas are still presently pursued within the neo-liberal policy paradigm that has been bequeathed by the Thatcher governments and subsequently finetuned by the governments led by John Major and Tony Blair.

Thatcher's influence *after* her premiership

By Ragnhild Vestli

Reign but not rule? After Margaret Thatcher resigned as prime minister in 1990, she remained active in the political debate, and was able to have a considerable influence on politics in the UK through different roles and in different ways.



Ragnhild Vestli is an MA student at the Dept of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, University of Oslo. She is writing her thesis on Margaret Thatcher's impact on British politics since her resignation as prime minister.

Between 1990 and 1992, she worked and voted as a backbench MP in the House of Commons, and from 1992 onwards, she has sat as a member of the House of Lords. Outside of Parliament, she was able to keep a strong influence in the Conservative Party through her many supporters in top ranks of the party, and both within and outside of the party organisation, through various right-wing groups dedicated to Thatcherism, among which the most important were: Fresh Start, The Bruges Group (a think-tank), The Conservative Way Forward and The No Turning Back Group.

Thatcher's enormous reputation, however, meant that she was also much sought after as a lecturer, and from 1990s onwards, she travelled extensively speaking as a former influential prime minister and outspoken world leader. She attracted huge audiences to her well-paid lectures in the US, and as a rule, British journalists would trace her footsteps, reporting both official engagements and small comments made by Thatcher abroad. It is not unlikely that some journalists were delighted if they could report a vindictive



Le dauphin. John Major, initially Thatcher's favoured successor, was later subject to her disapproval over lack of leadership and a docile approach to Europe.

© wikipedia/public domain

statement that would make big headlines in the British tabloids, and in any case, it seems clear that Thatcher was in a perhaps unrivalled position when it came to ensuring that her opinions were heard. What actual

in 1990 has been on foreign policy. To begin with she focussed on the EC/EU, and was very articulate in the few debates that she participated in and egged on her supporters to be critical about Europe. She continued to oppose further integration, and the idea of a "United States of Europe". Moreover, she wanted a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, and when the proposition was turned down, Thatcher spoke condescendingly about Major's arrogance on television. She later spoke for a referendum to be held on the single currency, which in principle the New Labour government has endorsed. Overall, with respect to questions of the EU, Thatcher's ability to influence has been somewhat mixed. Other foreign policy issues she presented her views on were the war in the former Yugoslavia, the future of Hong Kong, the Chilean dictator Pinochet, and arms export to Iraq. Her sympathy and wholehearted support for the ageing Pinochet was seen as very controversial.

Another key theme for Thatcher after 1990 was her continued attacks on John Major. All her three books touched upon the state of affairs under Major and his supposed lack of leadership ability. Thatcher seemed determined to challenge John Major and his government, but whether she really wished to force him to stand down as leader of the Conservative Party remains unclear. Her autobiography *The Downing Street Years* was published just at the time of the Conservative Party conference in 1993. It was serialised in *The Sunday Times* and Thatcher was interviewed everywhere about the book. John Major was not very flatteringly described. In *The Path to Power* (1995) she criticised her successor indirectly, complaining about the government's policies regarding public spending, taxes, the lack of British troops in Bosnia, and the European Union.

Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World was published in 2002. Two chapters focused on Britain and the European Union and were serialised in *The Times*. Thatcher suggested that Britain should withdraw from the EU and join NAFTA instead. This point of view led to heated discussions. The party carried out a poll to examine whether Conservative constituency chairmen supported Thatcher or not. A clear majority did not support her, and many claimed that this time she had gone too far. Thus, while the continued attacks on John Major may have weakened his position as prime minister, Thatcher did not seem to win through on major issues.

Many newspapers were biased in favour of Thatcher's views, and increasingly critical against Major's leadership and views. This was especially true after "Black Wednesday"

in 1992, when Britain had to leave the ERM. Thatcher had maintained a good relationship with many newspaper proprietors and editors, and had easy access to prominent coverage as well as backing from right-wing editors. Tabloid newspapers like *The Sun* and *News of the World* were Thatcherite and shared her anti-European views. Coinciding with the Conservative Party conference in 1992, an article by Thatcher was published in *The European*. Thatcher's highly critical views on the Major government were given two pages' coverage and soon made the headlines of all the other media.

Thatcher stressed the need for the Conservative Party to "be united, not torn apart". This did not prevent her from further criticism in the media. In the *Newsweek* article "Don't Undo My Work", (1992), it seems that Thatcher attacked Major's personality and his desire for consensus in the parliamentary Conservative Party. Through her books and articles Thatcher contributed to the

"Public opinion was influenced by Euro-sceptical right-wing newspapers that also supported Thatcher's views. When push came to shove in 1995, however, Thatcher supported Major in his 'put up or shut up' campaign to remain leader of the party."

ongoing debates in Britain, and her criticism of Major probably encouraged other politicians to do the same, which made it increasingly difficult for Major and his government to govern.

Public opinion was influenced by Euro-sceptical right-wing newspapers that also supported Thatcher's views. When push came to shove in 1995, however, Thatcher supported Major in his "put up or shut up" campaign to remain leader of the party. Thatcher issued a brief statement in support of Major, who won the leadership contest with a solid majority. Exactly how important Thatcher's endorsement was may be difficult to ascertain, but it is interesting that when Michael Portillo campaigned to become the new Conservative leader after William Hague in 2001, he claimed the backing of Thatcher, which she then denied. Indirectly, and "in the shadows", she clearly remained a force to be reckoned within the Conservative Party.

Thatcher was determined to exercise her influence everywhere she could after 1990. It was quite remarkable that the new Labour prime minister, Tony Blair, invited Thatcher to Downing Street for consultations on issues like military involvement in former Yugoslavia and war in Iraq. Perhaps it was in this kind of consultancy position, and through the informal sway she held over many senior members of the Conservative Party, that her influence was greatest during the eventful decade following her resignation.

results emanated from this opportunity to influence?

Thatcher's primary focus since resigning

The territorial problems of the Conservative Party

By Øivind Bratberg

Dilemmas. Margaret Thatcher bequeathed a difficult legacy to her party - although, to be fair, that legacy has been made even more difficult by the confused efforts of her successors as party leader. Some of the most essential tensions in the Conservative Party after Thatcher concern territorial questions and the future of the British state. These issues remove the attention from the neoliberal agenda of Thatcherism, which despite its controversies at the time has been more or less accepted by all three parties in Britain.



Øivind Bratberg is a PhD fellow at the Dept. of Political Science, University of Oslo and President of British Politics Society, Norway.

Within the Conservative Party, devolution and European integration have clearly been more controversial than market liberalism. Territorial questions affect the core principles of the traditional Westminster model, such as parliamentary supremacy, strong executive government and united and hierarchical parties. When these principles are seen to be threatened today, the causes are found in the granting



Mutually incompatible? Union Jack and the EU flag flying together. © European Community, 2008

of autonomy to Scotland and Wales and the realisation of ever closer union in Europe.

Regionalisation and European integration are not exclusive to Britain, which with these reforms has followed where other countries have led. However, Britain has found territorial reform particularly

difficult, and the problem has been acute for the Conservatives. Historically, the party has been intimately connected to the institutions of the British state and to statecraft in the sense of responsive, responsible and unitary government. Matured in the nineteenth century, the Conservative Party embodied a legacy of imperial rule, both overseas and across the British Isles: two empires tied together by the political authority of London.

Following the dismantling of the British Empire, it was a Conservative government that took Britain into the European Community in 1973. However, there was tension between Edward Heath's vision for Britain and those in the party who promoted disentanglement from Europe and a more affirmative foreign policy. How to strike the balance between Europe, the Anglo-American partnership and the Commonwealth remained a question of concern on which, Heath, perhaps the most Europhile British prime minister since the War, was not able to convince his party.

In the latter half of the Thatcher era the tensions of being "in Europe, but not of it" (echoing Churchill) reached the surface with renewed vigour. Thatcher's desire for market liberalisation led her to endorse the Single European Act of 1986. However, where other member states saw the 1992 Maastricht Treaty as a natural next step, with its provision for a single currency, a common foreign and defence policy and closer cooperation on immigration and asylum, Thatcher saw a threat to national survival. Britain would support open markets but fight any yearning for a European federation. Maastricht, in Thatcher's words, was "a treaty too far".

By the time of the Maastricht Treaty's approval Thatcher was an ex-prime minister, her increasingly bitter Euroscepticism listed as one of the causes for the mutiny against her. It was for John Major to grapple with the growing tensions in the Conservative Party. The quarrels over the treaty, which was finally voted through Parliament in July 1993, reflects an essential Thatcherite dilemma: how to promote harmonisation conducive to free trade, yet block non-market integration and the "social Europe" for which some continental partners yearn. What has become clear over time is that integration *à la carte* has a limited applicability. Moreover, alternatives to continued membership are few and far between. The vision of Britain as a new Singapore, autonomous from Europe and drawing on its assets as a global centre of finance, is still a minority

view in the party.

The issue of devolution has been no easier to handle for the Conservatives. Accepting devolution seemed to remove the last barrier against the disintegration of a once powerful imperial state. Thatcher was determined to sustain the unity of Britain.



John Redwood, MP for Wokingham, ties together the sub-national and supra-national concerns of the Conservative Party. A controversial secretary of state for Wales prior to devolution (1993-95), he has also been one of the party's most profiled Eurosceptics. © the Conservative Party

In the end, however, Thatcherism had the opposite effect of alienating Scottish and Welsh voters through neoliberal policies and a profound centralisation in London. In 1997, not a single Conservative MP was returned from Scotland or Wales.

Governed increasingly against their will by a Conservative government, they now seemed more disposed to devolution than ever before, an aspiration that was met by the incoming Labour government.

With devolution now a decade old, the Conservative

Party has shown itself capable to adapt to institutions established against its will. However, the lion's share of the party's support is located in the home counties of southern England. Proposals on "English votes for English laws" reflect a deep-seated animosity against the way in which England is marginalised by the lack of a separate legislature. The argument is often raised by voices equally dissatisfied with the way in which the supra-national EU encroaches on Westminster: Conservative advocates of letting Scotland loose are thus typically the same who promote a more determined British position in the EU.

Could the Conservatives then be the party to federalise the UK and detach Britain from Europe? The party once ruling an Empire could end up governing England and Wales, a kingdom unified in purpose but reduced in territorial reach and isolated from the European continent. If this was to be the outcome of the party's territorial tensions, it would be one which Margaret Thatcher herself probably neither expected nor desired.

Cherish freedom!

By Dag Einar Thorsen

Determination and simple minds.

As far as reactionaries go, Margaret Thatcher is one of my all-time favourites. There is something strangely admirable about her forthright libertarianism. She did not try to cover up her frank struggle against the generosity of the welfare state and almost all efforts to create a more non-discriminatory and truly democratic society. The fuzzy One Nation puffs and fraudulent tree huggers which populate the leadership of the Tory Party today have in this much to learn from her.

Please don't get me wrong. My appreciation for Baroness Thatcher is entirely of the same kind which led the old republican Machiavelli to admire the ruthlessly autocratic Borgia family. Thatcher had clear goals and ambitions, and managed to fulfil many of them. Even people who find her exceedingly irritating have to admit that she accomplished much of what she set out to do. One might vehemently disagree with her basic assessments of which direction Britain ought to go in, but it is hardly possible to doubt that she changed Britain and put a lasting mark on British society.

There is however a particular time and place for all things. The perceived indecisiveness prevalent in the Labour governments of the 1970's made the ground fertile for the libertarian populism which throughout her career characterised her public oratory. Meanwhile, Thatcher made good use of the four years from 1975, when she took over as party leader and leader of the opposition.



Dag Einar Thorsen is a PhD fellow at the Dept. of Political Science, University of Oslo and a member of British Politics Society, Norway.

She managed in that time to transform the Conservative Party from a sleeping ogre to a party which was yet again ready to snatch the political initiative from the faltering Labour Party.

She swept into power in the spring of 1979, after a wave of uncontrollable strikes and a botched attempt at devolution had led to early elections and a predictable downfall of the minority Labour government. If the election had come just a few months earlier or later, she would probably not have won such a stunning victory, or not won at all. Her first election campaign was probably the only one in recent history in which large parts of the electorate was ready for a sharp turn to the right. She could win even if she was not willing to play a role that would probably suit her badly, namely that of a political moderate. There is no such thing as an unlucky political genius.

During her tenure as Prime Minister, she showed her political genius yet again. Her new government quickly set to work, and

sent Britain through a series of reforms which undid much of what had been done by her predecessors – and then some. But she did not do everything she had promised her party and her voters. She did not, for instance, manage to cut government spending as such, which increased during her years in office. But she did manage to sell off some of the previously nationalised industries. She also cut government spending on health care, but did not go as far as privatising it. Her ideological intransigence was always checked by a keen nose for what possible to achieve in the long run.

Her government also reduced direct taxes, but at the same time she increased indirect taxes, so that the result was not lowered taxes, but instead reduced progression in the overall system of taxation. She became a Robin Hood in reverse, who robbed the poor and powerless, and gave the proceeds away to the rich and powerful. In the end, it was the introduction of a new tax, a poll tax for the benefit of local authorities – the so-called community charge – which eventually led to her downfall in 1990.

As she sits there now in her corner of the world, sheltered by both her closest family and her illness, we must in her place reflect on the value of freedom, which was so central in her rhetoric. What is freedom? What does it take for a people to be free? As I write this, I still have Barack Obama's inauguration speech fresh in my mind. We should probably listen to his advice on how to cherish freedom best: *A nation cannot prosper long if it favours only the prosperous.* In the end, such policies will lead us on the road to deeper conflicts and to less freedom for most people. Freedom must mean freedom for all, and not just the fortunate and the ruthless. That is what Thatcher never understood.



Frozen in time: The coat of arms of The Baroness Thatcher, with the motto "Cherish Freedom". The admiral represents the Falklands War, the image of Sir Isaac Newton represents her background as a chemist and her (and Newton's) birth town Grantham.

© wikipedia/public domain

Membership

Would you like to become a member of the British Politics Society, Norway? Membership is open to everyone and includes

- Subscription to four editions of British Politics Review
- Access to any event organised by the society
- The right to vote at our annual general meetings

Your membership comes into force as soon as the membership fee, NKR 100,- for one year, has been registered at our account 6094.05.67788.

For more information see our website at www.britishpoliticssociety.no

Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review

Devolution in Britain marks its first decade this year: the first elections for the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales were held on 6 June 1999.

British Politics Review marks the anniversary with a special issue on devolution. What were the driving forces behind the granting of law-making powers to Scotland and Wales? How has devolution

unfolded in its first decade, and what future developments are we likely to expect?

In the words of Ron Davies, the then Secretary of State for Wales, devolution should be seen as "a process, not an event". Will the end point of that process be the dissolution of the United Kingdom, or rather its consolidation? And what are the odds that Scotland and Wales

will maintain distinctly different paths, with Scotland playing the upper hand in terms of powers devolved?

Articles from readers of *British Politics Review* are very welcome. Please get in touch with the editors at mail@britishpoliticssociety.no for further details.

The winter edition of *British Politics Review* is due to arrive in May 2009.