Thatcherism *Today*

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EDITORIAL

There is Still No Alternative

by Dr Tim Aker



Shortly before the 1979 election the outgoing ambassador to France, Sir Nicholas Henderson, outlined what was wrong with Britain. The UK had poor productivity, its economy was falling behind other leading economies, and even its aesthetics were synonymous with the dire circumstances: Britain's towns, hospitals and amenities represented national decline. The confidential cable was leaked to the *Economist* and made sensational headlines. So, what relevance does this have to our first edition and launch of *Thatcherism Today*?

Pick up a paper or turn on the news and you will see: everything. Britain today has echoes of Britain in the 1970s. The 2025 Budget was compared to Denis Healey's in 1975. Whilst Chancellor Reeves did not put up income taxes, the government's raid on the wealthy has led to another feature of the period: the brain drain. Those with wealth and talent are heading for the Middle East, just as those in the 1970s headed for the USA and Europe. Whilst our current tax rates are nowhere near the highs of the Callaghan period, the effects of years of consensus policies have added up to penalise wealth creation.

Growth is non-existent, and productivity is negligible. Unemployment is creeping up. The feeling of national malaise is noticeable. The parallels are there.

And yet, by November 1990 Britain was no longer held back by its own mediocrity. The demons that had caused her stagnation in the late 1970s had all been slayed. The thought that the leadership of an individual, in this case Margaret Thatcher, could turn around the British economy and ease the trade unions' grip on politics and society – and do them both at the same time – and that a

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woman would do it, was for the birds. The rest, as we say, is history.

Thatcherism Today, however, is not a political polemic. It is fitting that our very first article is from Prof. Martin Jacques, the former editor of *Marxism Today* from 1977-91. Anyone unfamiliar with *Marxism Today* may be surprised at this. However, it was in that very journal that Thatcherism was first used in a paper by the late Stuart Hall entitled 'The Great Moving Right Show' in January 1979. It can be found online in the *Marxism Today* archive.

From then on *Marxism Today* was as important in our understanding of Thatcherism as the pages of conservative journals like the *Salisbury Review* and *Crossbow*. It analysed Thatcherism as a coherent political project, and one to be taken seriously – far more seriously than the Tory 'wets' ever did.

Thatcherism, however, is not just about Mrs Thatcher, or her period in office. Thatcherism was the creation of those around her, from politicians, journalists and academics. The contributions in this edition examine these influences. We have brought together academics, those who were there in the room in the 1980s, and those with significant experience of politics and the political process, to give a wraparound analysis of Thatcher and Thatcherism.

Former special adviser James Price writes of 'Stepping Stones', and the value it had in framing the first Thatcher term. Prof. Anthony Teasdale, former special adviser to Sir Geoffrey Howe, writes of the Thatcher government's special advisers and their relationship with the Prime Minister. Douglas McWilliams argues that the public kept voting for 'unpopular' Thatcherite policies – and could still do so today. Anthony Boutall writes that Thatcherite monetarism was a clean break from the consensus and not a continuation of Callaghan's policies. Dr Daniel Pitt examines the intellectual and literary influences on Mrs Thatcher. And, finally, Peter Just examines Mrs Thatcher's life after Downing Street and his new book is reviewed by Simon Richards.

It is a whirlwind tour through the Thatcher years, before, during and after office – and with plenty to inspire debate and discussion. And it is just the start. We welcome submissions and debate so please do contact me to discuss your paper at tim.aker@thatchercentre.com. And, finally, enjoy this first edition as we revisit the long 1980s, the ideas of freedom and the rule of law, and that, to quote arguably the godfather of Thatcherism, 'whatever the true interests of our country calls for is always possible'.

Dr Tim Aker is the Academic Director of the Margaret Thatcher Centre and visiting lecturer at the University of Buckingham. He is the editor of 'The First Brexiteer: The Diaries of Sir Neil Marten, 1970-79' *and author of* 'Popular Individualism: An Introduction to the No Turning Back Group, 1985-90', *both published by the Bruges Group.*



Simon Richards
23 June 1958 -
21 February 2026

The Margaret Thatcher Centre is deeply saddened by the passing of our friend, Simon Richards. A tireless champion of freedom and a committed Thatcherite, Simon mentored many across the conservative movement with endless kindness and principled guidance.

Joining The Freedom Association in 1976, he rose to become its Chief Executive and played a significant role in the campaign for Brexit. This issue is dedicated to Simon and his unwavering devotion to the causes of freedom and independence. We shall all miss you greatly and remember you always. Thank you for all you did for the cause and the memories we will cherish. Rest in peace.



Is Thatcherism Still Relevant?

by Prof. Martin Jacques

What has Thatcherism got to offer the UK, or indeed the world, in 2026, more than 35 years after Margaret Thatcher left office and nearly half a century since she was in full political bloom? The times are certainly very different: the two-party system, which reigned supreme throughout the twentieth century and well into this, is now fighting for survival, while the Conservative Party is struggling to survive as a major political force. Even more consequentially, the US has turned rogue and is in the process of ditching the post-1945 global order, which was largely its creation, abandoning the Atlantic Alliance, and turning its back on NATO. Meanwhile, China has, for over a decade, been the largest economy in the world as measured by GDP according to primary purchasing power and is fast emerging as the global leader. It is China's rise which has destabilised America, leading to the phenomenon of Donald Trump, an American president who is likely to be of far greater historical consequence than Ronald Reagan, Thatcher's soulmate, and who is presiding over the biggest shift in US politics since Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Not only has the world changed profoundly since the Thatcherite era, but the global changes we are now witnessing are of far greater consequence than those of the Thatcherite revolution. This is not to belittle the latter but to recognise that the present changes are global in scale and implication in a way that the Thatcherite revolution was not. The old order is dying, and the nature and terms of the new order are the subject of a huge global contest between China and the United States. This is why we live at a time of such acute global instability and unpredictability. In one way or another, the whole world is affected by and engulfed in this process, no nation can stand aside, be it concerning the future of NATO, Trump's Western hemispheric expansionism, US tariffs, or China's Belt and Road Initiative.

In retrospect, the global crisis started with the 2008 financial crisis, which emanated from the US, and is likely to last at least two more decades. For historical context, the last such struggle over the nature of the global order began in 1931 when the UK, the established global hegemon at the time, was forced to quit the gold standard and only reached a conclusion in 1945 when the US emerged as the new global hegemon, with the usurped UK now its very junior partner. The current dethroning of America is well underway but it still has a long way to go. Such shifts in the tectonic plates are prolonged, volatile, and turbulent processes, comprising many different phases and forms. The sheer radicalism of Trump's project is a measure of the depth of America's crisis as global hegemon.

Living in 2026, it is important to recognise the difference between the global existential crisis that we are now engulfed in and a domestic political project which succeeded in transforming British politics in the last quarter of the twentieth century and beyond.

The novelty of Thatcherism, when it burst on the domestic political scene from the mid-70s, should not be underestimated. Prior to that, the two major parties, Conservative and Labour, shared a great deal in terms of policy and attitude. Consensus politics aptly described the political scene between the end of the war and the mid-seventies. On becoming Conservative leader in 1975, Thatcher challenged that consensus, which had been the overarching post-1945 political response to the Second World War. She took issue with the welfare state, attacked the unions, praised the market and called for a reduction in the role and size of the state. We are now so familiar with these arguments that it is easy to forget just how radical they were in the seventies and eighties. In challenging the postwar consensus, she took on not just the Labour Party but the broad swathe of opinion in the Conservative Party that was committed to postwar social-democratic and

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liberal thinking, namely the so-called 'wets'. Even more challengingly, these ideas informed much of British society.

In the 1979 election campaign, Thatcher fought a very different kind of election campaign to previous ones in the post-1945 period, the exception being the 1945 election, which was dominated by a huge groundswell of popular opinion demanding a very different Britain from that of the interwar period. Otherwise, elections had typically been fought with great caution, with campaigns largely targeted at a relatively small band of floating voters somewhere in the middle. Campaigns were short-term, narrowly conceived, and devoid of any big ideas. Thatcher's campaign in 1979 was completely different; it was fought around big themes and big ideas. It was not just about winning the election but creating a different popular climate that would provide a fertile environment for a new kind of programme. Its aim was no less than a paradigm shift in the country.

No other modern British political leader has sought to shift the terms of political debate and policy in the way that Thatcher succeeded in doing. In 1945 the Second World War rather than Clement Atlee was the key factor in creating the new postwar desire for radical change. To this day, no other postwar British leader has come to assume hegemonic leadership over politics, society, and culture in the manner of Thatcher. Blair, in this context, cannot compare with Thatcher. He was derivative of Thatcher, a child of Thatcherism; he operated within, and was a disciple of, the same Thatcherite paradigm. New Labour was a Labour version of Thatcherism. Such hegemonic leadership requires a different kind of intellectual and philosophical vision, a capacity for strategic thinking, great courage, a very strong leader, and finely developed political skills, all of which Thatcher possessed in abundance.

The legacy of the Thatcherite revolution is still with us. It changed Britain profoundly, notably in the rise of a more individualistic mentality, the marketisation of society, the valorisation of money, the privatisation of the economy, and the retreat of nationalisation. In important respects it made the economy more efficient, more open to new sectors, and more responsive to the era of post-Fordism. But it also led to new dilemmas; the privatised public utilities created more problems than they solved, as exemplified by British Gas, the private rail companies, and most scandalously of all, the privatised water companies. The sale of council houses without a complementary programme of social housing has led to a grave crisis of affordable housing. While the failure to intervene in the areas most damaged by deindustrialisation has left them permanently maimed and their populations undermined.

To what extent is Thatcherism still able to offer a net positive with regard to Britain's future or is its potential now largely exhausted. I would argue the latter. We live in very different times requiring very different responses and very different priorities and choices. Take the question of the state. The rise of China is intimately bound up with the success of the Chinese state. In stark contrast, Thatcher was confronted with the failure of the Soviet Union and the abject failure of the Soviet state. Or take America. The state is central to the Trump project, most obviously in its retreat from free trade and the imposition of the US's highest tariffs for over a century. Tariffs represent a retreat not just from the idea of a domestic free market, but from a commitment to a global free market. Globalisation was at the very heart of the Reagan-Thatcher neo-liberal project of the 1980s but the US is now in headlong retreat from such ideas.

Does this mean that Thatcherism now has little or nothing to offer? I think not. Take myself as an example; or *Marxism Today*, the magazine I edited between 1977 and 1991. It was the first to use the term Thatcherism in a famous article by Stuart Hall entitled 'The Great Moving Right Show' which was published in January 1979 and in which he began to elaborate the concept of Thatcherism. *Marxism Today*, which was heavily influenced by the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, for over a decade sought to understand

the nature of Thatcherism, the most important political project of the time in the UK and more widely in the West.

We did not subscribe to it, we were not Thatcherites, but we respected Thatcherism as the most creative and most important political project of the time, and Margaret Thatcher as its leader. We learnt a huge amount from it. For me, seeking to understand Thatcherism was a great education – about politics, about leadership, about how society might be changed. In this sense, Thatcherism remains hugely relevant, whatever the era, whatever the nature of the times. The same goes for all great political projects, whether of the right or the left: they are rich in lessons for the times in which we live, even if those times are very different.

Martin Jacques was the editor of Marxism Today *between 1977 and 1991, the most influential political magazine of the 1980s. He was a major architect of its work on Thatcherism. Since the late 90s he has been working on China and East Asia. He is the author of the global best-seller* 'When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order'. *His new book on China will be published next year.*

Just In Time, Or Still Too Late?

by James Price MA MSc FRSA



'It has been a damned nice thing - the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life.'

- The Duke of Wellington, after the Battle of Waterloo, 1815

'It is part of the business of the artist and the philosopher to light the politician's path.'

- Margaret Thatcher, quoting Alexander Solzhenitsyn in a speech to the Bow Group, 16 March 1976[1]

The myth of the Thatcher Opposition years is of a plucky group of free market radicals plotting out the Revolution that was to come. Romantic as this sounds, the truth is that any policy and structural planning for the Conservatives' return to office was much more disorganised and half-baked than the Prime Minister, or many of her key lieutenants, wanted to acknowledge after the fact.

In some ways it makes it even more impressive that such success was achieved at all. But key advisers have lamented how much more might have been achieved had things been better prepared. Thatcher herself admitted, 'I came into 10 Downing Street with an overall conception of how to put Britain's economy right, rather than a detailed plan: progress in different areas would depend on circumstances.'[2] As it was, electoral division on the left, and the Falklands War undoubtedly did more to give the Revolution the chance to unfurl than it would have ever had otherwise.

Party planners and policy makers should learn the lessons of this time period if they are interested in how better to structure their own preparations for Government.

1 Margaret Thatcher, Speech to the Bow Group, London, 16 March 1976, accessed at https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102984.

2 Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 569

Just In Time, Or Still Too Late? *Cont.*

Keith Joseph's Conversion

Whilst some of the progenitor organisations to the Thatcher Revolution had been founded previously, including the Mont Pelerin Society and the Institute for Economic Affairs[3], efforts to really coalesce a set of people and ideas into something resembling a coherent plan began in 1974 when Keith Joseph was permitted to start a new think tank[4].

Even the direction of the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) was, arguably, down to serendipity. After leaving Heath with permission for the new venture, he went home, rather than to his business or parliament. As such, soon-to-be CPS Director Alfred Sherman says he 'only had [my phone number] to hand. The same afternoon he telephoned to invite me over, and the die was cast.'[5] It is possible that a more orthodox thinker could have taken the project on a more dirigiste path even then. Sherman remarked on Joseph's lack of original intent, that he 'never planned his excursions in advance. Even while they were under way, he was largely unaware of their significance and likely outcome.'[6]

Just look at Joseph's previous Government job. Made Health Secretary, he 'promptly returned to the bosom of party orthodoxy. Like many Conservative ministers, he was saddled and bridled by his civil servants'[7] persuading him 'to create a whole new tier of NHS management, creating new jobs for bureaucrats at the expense of healthcare.'[8] Joseph himself admits: 'It was only in April 1974 that I was converted to conservatism. (I had thought that I was a Conservative but now I see that I was not really one at all)'.[9]

Now, though, Joseph's task was to ensure the CPS 'could take over where the IEA left off [because] the IEA was concerned with the 'what' that had gone wrong and the 'why' it had to be changed, but not with the legislative 'how'.'[10]

This gave Margaret Thatcher an entry point into the beliefs she felt in her heart, but had as yet been less able to express in words. Charles Moore is bracingly honest on her apparent unsuitability for this task: 'Mrs Thatcher was ill-equipped for intellectual battle. She did not have an intellectually orderly mind.'[11] Alfred Sherman described Thatcher as saying: 'She wasn't a woman of ideas, she was a woman of beliefs, and beliefs are better than ideas.' But he also admitted that 'she lacked coherence.'[12] Nevertheless, Thatcher threw herself into the CPS to the point that one person even remembered her wiring up the electric plugs.[13]

Entropic Old Guard

Overwhelmed by the political need to keep the Tory Party together, efforts to do the deep thinking required to diagnose the underlying ailments of the country, and provide adequate remedies, were far from forthcoming inside the Party apparatus. For example, *The Right Approach* was a fudge, 'compromise reduced [the stance on incomes policy] almost to nonsense[14]'.

Helpfully, her opponents were weak on the key policy of economics. 'Didn't Keynes settle all this forever?' thought William Waldegrave at one point.[15] Better yet, most of her economic advisers did not need to defend

3 After she became Prime Minister, Thatcher wrote to the IEA to thank them for their efforts: 'It was primarily your foundation work which enabled us to rebuild the philosophy upon which our party succeeded in the past', Thatcher Archive, THCR 2/4/1/8, Margaret Thatcher to Ralph Harris, Anthony Seldon, and Brian Wood, 18 May 1979.

4 '[Keith] Joseph could approach Conservative donors to set up his own think tank...This was fatal [to Ted Heath]' Charles Moore, *Margaret Thatcher, The Authorized Biography, Volume One: Not For Turning* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), p. 253.

5 Alfred Sherman, *Paradoxes of Power: Reflections on the Thatcher Interlude* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), p. 49.

6 Ibid p. 43.

7 Ibid p. 46.

8 Ibid.

9 Keith Joseph, *Reversing the Trend* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1975), p. 4.

10 Arthur Seldon, *The Collected Works of Arthur Seldon, Volume 7: The IEA, the LSE, and the Influence of Ideas* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), pp. 56-57. See also 'The long-range artillery of the IEA had been reinforced by the David Hume Institute and complemented by the short-range infantry of the CPS and ASI'

11 Moore p. 302

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid p. 255

14 Ibid p. 340

15 Moore p. 340

Heath in any way: 'They were raring for change, and through CPS and IEA introduced her to Hayek and Friedman'.[16] Chris Patten, admitted: 'I happen to think she was right. But I remember the first time she said to me 'we have to win the battle of ideas in British politics,' I thought 'this is a bit rum'.[17]

But Charles Moore accurately describes Patten's 'alternative', in '*Further Thoughts On Strategy*' – of talking about tax, law and order, housing, education etc' as not a strategic approach at all, but a tactical one.[18] Even these tactics were better produced by the outsiders: The Adam Smith Institute joined forces with the CPS to organise policy conferences where, for example, Joseph first introduced the idea of enterprise zones.[19]

Nevertheless, the project desperately needed coherence.

Stepping Stones

This is exactly what a few outsiders, John Hoskyns and Norman Strauss, aimed to provide. Thatcher described it: 'The two of them argue that we could never succeed unless we fitted all our policies into a single strategy in which we worked out in advance the order in which actions had to be taken – hence the title.'

Thatcher, having been shown Hoskyns' wiring diagram of the nation's interconnected problems, admitted: 'The first time I heard all this, I was not very impressed. They had eaten a whole joint of roast beef, and I wasn't sure what I had gained from it. But, when long-term thinking was concerned, I came to appreciate the depth and quality of Hoskyns's analysis. The paper, Stepping Stones, was about persuasion as much as about policy. Winning the next election, even by a large majority, would not be enough if the only basis for it was dissatisfaction with Labour's performance in office since 1974.'[20]

In Hoskyns' own words, the project had three parts:

1. 'Produce a communications programme that would begin the long process of convincing the public that radical change would have to come, that it would be pretty uncomfortable, and that the alternative would be something worse.
2. 'Bring together in a coherent way all the key policy measures in preparation, and perhaps some new ones, so that even though the Conservatives would have to be cautious about how much they said in public, they would at last have a clear internal view of the kind of mandate they were seeking.
3. Ensure that the shadow cabinet members really understood the colossal scale of the task confronting them and the high probability that they would fail in office unless they were determined, politically imaginative and strategically competent.'[21]

It was only the Winter of Discontent that proved the thesis inarguable. Thatcher spent her last Christmas before the 1979 election reading a textbook on industrial relations law, then 'determined on one thing: the time had come to toughen our policy on union reform',[22] and had come to realise that Stepping Stones gave her 'a clear, practical, and intellectual path which she didn't have before'.[23]

Still, the time wasted on seeking consensus destroyed the chance for clear thinking, and 'ate up years of the early Thatcher leadership which could have been better spent'.[24]

Hoskyns tried, and failed, to explain to those politicians with less military or business experience than he: 'The truth is that there is never a convenient time for strategic thinking, in politics, business, or anywhere else. It always seems an academic exercise, a speculative distraction, to be put off whenever possible 'until there is more time'. Strategy can be defined, for practical

16 Ibid p. 342
17 Interview by Chris Patten, from *The Downing Street Years*, BBC1 (1993)
18 Moore p. 362
19 Madsen Pirie, *Think Tank: The Story of the Adam Smith Institute* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2012) p. 17.
20 Thatcher p. 420.
21 John Hoskyns, *Just In Time* (London: Aurum Press, 2000), pp. 40-41.
22 Thatcher p. 423.
23 Moore p. 363.
24 Sherman p. 89.

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purposes, as 'the careful thinking we wish we had done two years ago, but don't have time to do today'.[25]

It is a testament to Thatcher's resolve that only once did this behaviour from her own party get the better of Thatcher's temper, when Ted Heath particularly annoyed her, and she shouted: 'The bastard, The bastard, The bastard!'.[26]

A paper at the time by Hoskyns, called *Effectiveness in Government*, set it out starkly: 'Refraining from doing silly things would not be enough to arrest the decline; that would require the complete and innovative reversal of past policies, a task which was probably beyond the capacities of the Whitehall-Westminster system.'[27] Norman Strauss was even more blunt: 'A country's history is not changed by politicians who are unable to get control of their own diaries'.[28]

Conclusion

Mrs Thatcher, writing years after the end of her premiership, said of this time in opposition: 'On the higher plane of belief, conviction and philosophy we were extremely effective. We were winning the battle of ideas which was the necessary preliminary not just to winning the election but to winning enduring popular support for the change of direction we wanted to make.'[29]

Others have been less varnished. Sherman is the most damning, lamenting that: 'The real battle has been lost before it began. The rethink of politics, economics, religion, national identity, immigration and the changing face of British society which we had advocated at the CPS was postponed *sine die*...This meant that many reforms took longer and happened later than they needed to have done, or were not tackled in time.'[30] He concludes: 'these failures can be attributed to the unsatisfactory record of the Conservatives in opposition.'

In this short article, I hoped to outline that some efforts were made to prepare Thatcher and her team for the task ahead, how nearly they failed to even start, and argue that it should have been done better. With the Right reorganising under another Labour government bereft of big ideas, I hope that it might inspire those involved in preparations to ponder on the proper way to structure another revolution.

James Price is a former Government Special Adviser, serving in the Treasury, Cabinet Office, Department for Education, House of Lords and Conservative Campaign Headquarters. He is a board member of the Conservative Philosophy Group and a Senior Fellow at the Adam Smith Institute. James holds degrees from the University of Oxford, where he was President of the Oxford Union, and University College London.

25 Hoskyns p. 46.
26 Ibid.
27 Hoskyns p. 89.
28 Ibid p. 41
29 Thatcher p. 317.
30 Sherman pp. 93-94.

Riding the Wave or Making the Weather?



by Anthony Boutall

'There are times... when there is a sea-change in politics. It then does not matter what you say or what you do. There is a shift in what the public wants and what it approves of. I suspect there is now such a sea-change and it is for Mrs. Thatcher."[1]

In 1979, even the outgoing Prime Minister, James Callaghan, recognised that Thatcher's election victory represented a decisive break with the past rather than simply an evolution of policies already set in motion. Prior to May 1979, Britain had faced 25% inflation, the Labour Government had gone cap-in-hand to the IMF for a bailout, and the winter of discontent meant rubbish piling up in the streets and the dead going unburied. Less than three and a half decades after winning the Second World War alongside other Allied nations, Britain's political consensus was crumbling under economic stagflation. Some Continuity thinkers such as Rose and Riddell have suggested that the changes brought about by Thatcher's Government were inevitable or limited, and that she simply 'rode a global wave of anti-collectivism'[2] for political advantage. These thinkers contend that her governments were shaped by tectonic plates outside their agency and that, 'if there has been a Thatcher experiment, it was launched by Denis Healey'[3] and therefore the preceding Labour Government. This, however, is wholly erroneous. What made Thatcher's leadership so distinctive was her resolute and intentional commitment to certain core political principles and a central intellectual approach; broadly defined as monetarism in the field of economics. She and her governments were not ideological in the straitjacketed sense of rationalists under the spell of Plato; they were, however, imbued with core insights and principles that awarded them immense resilience via consistency of approach, signifying a meaningful change from that which had come before.

To understand the arguments of Rose, Riddell and others who adopt the Continuity view of Thatcher's governments – that they were simply an evolution of policies from the previous Government – it is worth noting the genuine efforts by Labour's leadership to move on from the post-war consensus prior to Thatcher's election victory. The 1976 IMF bailout was accompanied by expectations of fiscal and monetary policies that broke significantly from the consensus and began to emulate what might be described as monetarism. Labour had already committed to a monetary policy target for the first time at the beginning of 1976, prior to formal IMF involvement. Additionally, Callaghan was clear with his party's supporters that the option of spending their way out of a recession 'no longer exists, and in so far as it ever did exist, it only worked on each occasion since the war by injecting a bigger dose of inflation into the economy'.[4] After three decades of Keynesian consensus, it is possible that its central tenets were already under sufficient pressure and that Thatcher's Government simply entered office to continue with Healey and Callaghan's trajectory, as stipulated by the IMF.

However, this analysis fails to recognise the comparatively radical shifts introduced immediately in 1979, which signalled much more meaningful change than those promoted by Callaghan and Healey, whilst also overestimating Labour's capacity and willingness to deliver the necessary changes to

1 Callaghan quoted in Kenneth Morgan, *Callaghan: A Life* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 697.

2 John Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher, Vol. 2: The Iron Lady* (London, Jonathan Cape, 2003), p. 800

3 Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Government* (Oxford, Martin Robertson, 1983), p. 59

4 Labour Party Annual Conference Report 1976, p.188

Riding the Wave or Making the Weather? *Cont.*

Britain's economic settlement. As well as abolishing exchange and dividend controls, Howe's June budget brought about a significant switch in taxes, increasing VAT while significantly decreasing income tax, from 33% to 30% at the basic rate and 83% to 60% at the top rate. While some of Labour's leadership had seemingly recognised they could not tax their way to prosperity, Healey's 1974 budget had actually made the opposite switch, from taxation on spending to taxation on earnings. Even if Labour could recite the correct lines, they did not grasp the supply-side impact of their policies, perhaps since – unlike Thatcher, Howe, Joseph, and Lawson et al – they were not acting consistent to a central intellectual approach. Even if Labour's inhabitants of Downing Street prior to Thatcher's election victory appeared committed to monetarist reforms in rhetoric, the reality is that they exhibited the opposite instincts in key structural areas, whereas the Conservative reforms after May 1979 were genuinely transformative and coherent.

Furthermore, even if Callaghan and Healey sought to transition from the post-war consensus, their party was deeply divided, with many yearning to move in the opposite direction. Jenkins called for stricter control of prices and imports. Benn and Crosland publicly opposed Labour's spending cuts. Foot articulated views on unemployment and inflation which flatly contradicted party policy. As such, even if Callaghan and Healey sincerely desired to reorder the post-war settlement, internal pressure pushed them off task and forced them to accept £billions of extra spending commitments – similarly to Starmer's Labour Government being pushed off task from welfare reform – demonstrating palpable disunity. The idea that Thatcher inherited a functioning monetarist programme is therefore untenable.

While Labour's record undermines the idea that Thatcher's Government was simply riding a wave, her own administration's distraction from monetarist principles does potentially weaken the case that hers was a government with a remarkably consistent, coherent approach. The inclusion of so-called 'wets' such as Gilmour, Walker, Pym and Carlisle in Thatcher's first cabinet demonstrated potential weakening of attachment to monetarism. Inclusion of Jim Prior as Secretary of State for Employment presented a particularly major obstacle, and in such a pivotal area. In certain policy areas, early commitment to monetarism was weaker too, as is highlighted by thinkers such as Mullard, Thompson, and Tomlinson. For instance, in opposition, the Conservatives had committed themselves to the excessively costly Clegg Report on public sector pay, undermining fiscal integrity. Thatcher's Government also famously backed down to threats of strikes in the coal industry in 1981. Despite heightened public rhetoric which committed Thatcher's Government to following the stream towards 'the warm and bright sea of the Open Society' rather than the one to 'the dark cold sea of further collectivism',[5] perhaps the party was less crusade-like in practice and in government. The idea of a consistent, coherent Thatcherite approach might therefore seem less convincing.

This thinking somewhat underestimates the pressure under which democratic British governments operate, though, and is ungenerous in the demands it establishes upon coherency. Outside the realm of pure theory, political parties are necessarily coalitions of interests and ideas. For Thatcher to have succeeded, some practical consideration of this reality was necessary. Furthermore, in the long run, those practical constraints were generally overcome or seen as tactical losses for strategic victories. For instance, after initial placation, Prior was moved to Northern Ireland in 1981, and Gilmour, Soames, St John-Stevas, and Carlisle were removed from the cabinet altogether. As early as 1979, the Treasury team and key monetarist allies owned key economic policies such as the budget via the steering committee, designed to circumnavigate wets in the cabinet. Even in policy areas such as backing down to threats of strikes in 1981, once Thatcher's Government had adequately prepared via stockpiling of coal and police training,

5 Margaret Thatcher, *Speech to the Bow Group*, 6/5/1978 [Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR]

it showed extraordinary political resilience in facing down sustained national striking led by Arthur Scargill in 1984 and 1985. Rather than demonstrating weakness of commitment to Thatcher's central approach for government, it is possible that aforementioned limitations of application at the outset exhibit long-term thinking and the humble realisation that her Government could not run before it walked without risking falling over.

This commitment to long-term thinking is echoed in Ronnie Millar's congratulations letter to Thatcher after the 1979 general election, in which he wrote: 'There is work to do. At least three Parliaments' worth, I think, don't you?'[6] The humility to know to walk before running is also expressed in Thatcher's post-premiership admission that 'if we had signalled the wholesale reform of the unions over and against their opposition at the outset, it would have undermined confidence in the Government and perhaps even provoke a challenge we were not yet ready to face.'[7] Indeed, rather than demonstrating limitedness in commitment to her Government's central approach, many of these earlier indentations to monetarist perfectionism show an executive and Prime Minister with sufficient shrewdness to understand the political limitations that are consistent to any government, as well as those that were unique to the one elected in 1979. Gamble noted the 1979 administration definitely possessed 'long-term objectives', matched with a 'pragmatism concerning the means to achieve them'.[8] Indeed, for all the nostalgic celebration of Thatcher as a transformative, radical pioneer, it is important not to adopt the revisionist posture in which her political astuteness and that of those around her is not counted as pivotal to eventual success.

Having noted the political astuteness of Thatcher and her allies, though, it is also important not to disregard the profundity of change that did occur very early on. Much of it was genuinely radical in a structural sense, demonstrating urgent desire to bring about change with a great sense of intellectual clarity, introducing what Marxist critics referred to as a 'new public philosophy'.[9] Aforementioned tax changes were sweeping, underpinning a wider supply-side revolution. Control of the money supply was tightened, tackling inflation head-on. The Employment Act 1980 restricted picketing and required secret ballots. The Employment Act 1982 made unions liable for unlawful strikes and restricted closed shops. The Right to Buy Scheme from 1980 transformed home ownership in Britain, giving working class people the opportunity to own a stake in society. Even if Thatcher and those around her were wise enough to recognise that the UK would not become a haven of Thatcherism overnight – or after one term, for that matter – and that the programme of change required some caution in delivery, there is still ample evidence of urgency of purpose, further cementing the idea that Thatcher's governments were committed to a central, coherent programme of significant transformation.

Margaret Thatcher left Downing Street to the backdrop of a wholly distinct country in 1990 compared with that in 1979, following a genuine 'sea change' in British politics. For some, of course, that country was worse than the one she inherited. For many, it was a country imbued with greater self-confidence, a greater sense of individual responsibility, and with wider enfranchisement in the economic life of the nation, embodied by wider property and share ownership and entrepreneurial energy unleashed. Having inherited an economy dubbed the Sick Man of Europe in the 1970s, in the decade that followed the Thatcher governments' programme of change, inflation remained low, industrial strife was relatively absent, international investment was high, and Britain was home to one of the most dynamic market economies in Europe. The idea that Thatcher's Government was simply a continuation of that which had gone before

6 Ronnie Millar letter to MT: congratulations 10/5/1979 [Thatcher MSS (Churchill Archive Centre): THCR1/3/3]

7 Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (UK, HarperCollins, 1993) p. 28

8 Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: Second Edition* (Hampshire, The Macmillan Press, 1994) p. 6

9 Hall and Jacques, *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1983) p. 11

Riding the Wave or Making the Weather? *Cont.*

– riding on a global wave and predominantly subject to external forces – is mistaken. Margaret Thatcher's premiership was distinct from those that came before and those that came after – partly because it possessed a coherent intellectual framework and a consistent approach; albeit one that was sufficiently flexible to be applied in reality rather than just in theory. Thatcher's governments were neither passive inheritors of change nor rigid ideologues. They were architects of a new political settlement that would define a renewed Britain.

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Scenes from the Thatcher Revolution: The Special Advisers meet Maggie



by Anthony Teasdale

Nigel Lawson once said that dealing with Margaret Thatcher as a minister was rather like standing in front of a lighthouse, whose intense but distant beam would come round periodically and starkly reveal everything that was happening in your policy area, before it suddenly moved on, highlighting something else. On the afternoon of Monday 3rd October 1988, the twenty special advisers working as political aides to Cabinet ministers across Whitehall, including myself, were about to experience the intense glare of Mrs Thatcher's lighthouse beam.

Arriving at Number Ten, for only the second such meeting of her premiership, there was a keen sense of anticipation - a mixture of excitement and apprehension - among the special advisers as we sat down around the Cabinet table. It was the first time that many of us had ever been in that hallowed room, at the very epicentre of British politics. For some, the meeting marked a kind of coming of age, of which we could feel proud. But there was also a measure of foreboding hanging over the event.

The rumour was that the Prime Minister had convened the meeting to fire a warning shot across our bows. She knew that we would be working in the next few days on our ministers' party conference speeches, to be delivered in Brighton the following week. In a calculated show of authority, she apparently wanted to discourage us from writing anything that might suggest division within the government, or highlight competing personal or policy agendas, or (still less) intimate that there might be political life beyond the incumbent leader.

Mrs Thatcher had a choice about how to handle the meeting. She could 'hug us close', by telling the special advisers how much she valued our work as part of her wider team. She could back that up by offering insights into her government's priorities and sharing key messages that our ministers should communicate

at the party conference. Instead, skipping the pep talk, she asked each of us in turn, in a completely no-nonsense way, to report on the challenges being faced - and by implication, what was going wrong - in the government departments around Whitehall. With the advisers unsighted on what some thought might be a trick question - or where the wrong answer could implicate or annoy their own ministers - the exchanges that followed were often guarded and tense, with her questioning leaving many advisers discomforted by the experience.

The meeting got off to a shaky start. Peter Cropper - the respected and reassuring doyen of the advisers, on his second tour of duty at the Treasury - somehow failed to put the Prime Minister at ease with his opening remarks. She dispensed with any pleasantries and, looking around the room, let slip a wounding, if apparently spontaneous, remark: 'Gosh, there are an awful lot of you, aren't there? I thought we had junior ministers to do all that'. Her comment was uttered, as Andrew Tyrie, then one of Cropper's colleagues at the Treasury, recalls, 'in an aggressive way' that put everyone on edge.

Although Cropper said nothing in reply, Tyrie did intervene, teasingly: 'Well, you do have about half a dozen advisers of your own, Prime Minister'. He quickly realised that he had made a mistake. 'I got a very glassy stare. There was no humour in her reaction at all'. This skirmish set the pattern for what was to follow. As Warwick Lightfoot, then special adviser to Norman Fowler at Employment, recalls, 'it was the first in a series of awkward exchanges, marked by a strange willingness on the part of some of my colleagues to josh with the Prime Minister'.

As the *tour de table* proper got under way, Cropper quickly found himself enmeshed in a dispute about the origins of rising inflation, on which Mrs Thatcher pointedly asked his opinion. When he gave an orthodox Treasury explanation, citing a prominent City analyst, Roger Nightingale, she replied that surely monetary conditions had been too loose for too long, citing other economists who shared her view. Cropper quickly tried to close the exchange down, fearful that it was unhelpfully exposing tensions between Numbers Ten and Eleven.

Inviting Tony Kerpel, special adviser to Kenneth Baker at Education, to say what he thought should be done in the department that she had once headed, Mrs Thatcher proffered the pre-emptive view that 'one thing we certainly need to do is produce fewer sociologists'. Kerpel, older than most of the other advisers (at 43), with the confidence of having been a student leader in 1968 and then a local councillor, shot back jokingly: 'Well, speaking as a sociology graduate myself, Prime Minister...'. Everyone in the room burst out laughing, except Mrs Thatcher, leading to an awkward silence.

Turning to Graeme Carter, special adviser to Malcolm Rifkind at the Scottish Office and (at 23) the youngest person around the table, the Prime Minister simply uttered the word 'Scotland', with 'a beguiling smile, mixed with menace', as Carter recalls. When he highlighted some initiatives that Rifkind was taking to put the Conservatives on the front foot north of the Border - after losing half their seats there in 1987 - she replied: 'I think the only way we will see a Conservative comeback in Scotland is if we have another period of Socialism there'. That message seemed rather to jar with the purpose of the meeting.

When her turn came, Elizabeth Buchanan, special adviser to Cecil Parkinson at Transport, noted that major improvements in transport infrastructure were being completely absorbed as soon as they came on stream. She cited the example of the new M25 orbital motorway around London, which had quickly become saturated. 'We are getting all these complaints about the M25 being gridlocked', Buchanan said. Mrs Thatcher replied: 'I have to say that whenever I use the M25, the traffic seems to flow perfectly smoothly'. The advisers wondered if her perception might be affected by having a police escort to ease her passage. 'But I suppose I do often use it at about two o'clock in the morning'.

The sharpest exchange came when the Prime Minister asked Keith Simpson, special adviser to George Younger, about the situation at the Ministry of Defence.

Scenes from the Thatcher Revolution: The Special Advisers meet Maggie *Cont.*

Simpson had taken the precaution of talking to Archie Hamilton, Mrs Thatcher's former parliamentary private secretary (PPS) who was now minister of state at Defence, beforehand. 'Don't sit there passively. She can't stand that', was Hamilton's advice. 'Get on the front foot and make your point clearly. You may feel as though a tank has rolled over you, but she will think about what you've said'.

Putting this approach into practice, Simpson replied to the Prime Minister's question: 'I think the biggest problem we have over at MOD is money, Prime Minister, or lack of it. We just don't have enough money to do everything we need to do'. Mrs Thatcher was incredulous: 'Money, Keith, money! You really think that we are not spending enough on defence?' Mrs Thatcher proceeded to list the cost overruns of a series of recent major defence procurement projects. 'Chieftain: that was X billion over budget; Nimrod, Y billion; Tornado, Z billion', and so on. She had all the numbers stored in her head. 'You wouldn't need any more money, Keith, if you spent what you already have rather better. That's the real problem'.

Instead of taking this reply on the chin and pulling in behind her argument, Simpson went on the offensive. 'It is very easy to make cheap debating points, Prime Minister, but there is a real issue here'. She shot back: 'Cheap debating points? These are not debating points, but the lessons of hard experience with managing taxpayers' money'. After a further round, she said sternly: 'Rather than take up time now, perhaps we can discuss this privately at the end'. Simpson turned to me - I was then special adviser at the Foreign Office and sitting next to him - and said: 'She's going to sack me'.

A few minutes before going over to the meeting at Number Ten, I had asked my own boss, Geoffrey Howe, how best to handle the Prime Minister. His reply: 'Look her straight in the eye and try not to lose that eye contact whilst you are speaking'. This was an unexpected answer, given how enigmatic Howe's own relations with Mrs Thatcher seemed to be. I decided that when her lighthouse beam alighted on me, I would take no risks, highlighting something on which she could not disagree. I would avoid anything to do with the European Community - the meeting was being held only two weeks after her landmark Bruges speech - because if we skidded off into a discussion of Jacques Delors' integrationist agenda in Europe, things could blow up badly and lead anywhere.

When my moment came, I declared that one of the biggest challenges facing British foreign policy was how to get our European partners in NATO to step up and spend more on defence, in the face of the continued Soviet threat. Rather than endorse this heartily, she replied: 'Do you not think I make that very point at every single meeting I go to with the other leaders? I make it to them all the time. How do you think we could get the message across better?' I mumbled a few banalities and, clearly bored by what she was hearing, she moved on.

Some of the advisers found the tension in the room too much to bear. When Warwick Lightfoot spoke about incentives to work in the welfare system, Melinda Libby, special adviser to John Moore at Social Security, interjected to complain that this was a matter for her department, not for Employment, and that 'Warwick has just made the points that I was going to make'. Mrs Thatcher replied tartly that the government was one entity, not a series of separate fiefdoms - 'the day that one department says that's their policy will be the day the government falls apart' - and invited Libby to 'make some other points' instead.

Overall, Mrs Thatcher's encounter with the special advisers was a missed opportunity, for both sides. There was no preparation, no agenda and no actionable outcome. It was assumed that a positive dynamic would emerge of its own accord. Instead, the conversation failed to ignite and even backfired. The Prime Minister could easily have had the advisers eating out of her hand, but instead, as Andrew Tyrie recalls, the encounter was 'unstructured and ill-thought out', with an 'unconstructive' feel from the start. It was 'at best a

waste of time and at worst something that would bring tension between her and her Cabinet'.

As the special advisers spilled out into Downing Street, the illusions of many about their leader had been dented, with the government system ironically less confident or joined up than it was before. The meeting had indeed marked a coming of age for many of them, but not in the way they expected. They had gained a powerful insight into some of the pressures at the very top of government. David Lidington, then special adviser to Douglas Hurd at the Home Office, says they saw an 'increasingly detached' Prime Minister who was beginning to 'show the strain, isolation and arrogance that comes of being head of government for a very long time'. Conversely, the special advisers were not without arrogance themselves: our strange combination of confidence, nervousness, knowledge and inexperience did not always show us in our best light.

As Keith Simpson left the Cabinet Room, Mrs Thatcher did say something to him. Rather than continue the argument or admonish him for answering back, she said: 'We disagree, but you stood your ground'. In a way, Simpson seemed to have earned her respect. He walked back to the MOD somewhat dazed by the whole experience. Soon after he reached his office, one of the private secretaries to George Younger said: 'We understand that you have just had a row with the Prime Minister'. Interesting news travels fast in Whitehall.

Anthony Teasdale was Special Adviser to Sir Geoffrey Howe during the least three years of Margaret Thatcher's government. He is now a Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics and Columbia University. The article draws on his own recollections of the meeting, as well as those of the following advisers with whom he has spoken about the event: Graeme Carter, David Lidington, Warwick Lightfoot, Keith Simpson and Andrew Tyrie.

'Mrs Thatcher kept doing unpopular things but the electorate kept voting for her'



by Douglas McWilliams

In the summer of 1980, I had an agreeable trip to the US paid for by Ronald Reagan supporters who had organised a conference at Georgetown University in Washington DC.

They wanted to see what they could learn from the early experience of the UK under Mrs Thatcher.

My take then was that she was doing the right thing but it wasn't clear whether the voters would thank her – the economic benefits would only start to come with a delay and meanwhile the electorate would have to suffer the withdrawal symptoms of a nation that had become addicted to soft options for many years.

Fortunately, General Galtieri and a stunning performance by the UK armed forces in the Falklands War (combined with some luck – for example an opposition split between Labour and the SDP) took care of that problem. Mrs Thatcher won the 1983

'Mrs Thatcher kept doing unpopular things but the electorate kept voting for her' *Cont.*

election and thus emboldened started to push her policies through. She fought the miners' strike after carefully ensuring she had sufficient coal stocks; reformed trade union legislation; calmed inflation, reduced taxes and eventually revitalised the economy.

The process had difficulties and didn't always work as intended. Her biggest economic mistake was failing to foresee that as overseas investors began to understand how she was transforming the economy, inflows of capital would start to pile up and the economy begin to overheat. In retrospect the correct policy was obvious – let the pound rise until the inflows had been choked off – but she was out of sync with her Chancellor at the time and their compromise led to an absence of monetary control which permitted inflation to get out of hand. Indirectly, the spat with Nigel Lawson and the rise in inflation led to her demise as Prime Minister, although the Conservative Party struggled on in government for another 7 years.

Mrs Thatcher wasn't an ideologist and so I doubt if she would ever have thought of herself as a Thatcherite, let alone have described herself as such. But Thatcherism did exist: a belief in self-reliance, combined with a smaller state and lower taxes. Externally it meant a refusal to be bullied by other countries and international organisations.

Yet her policies eventually led to three specific changes that ultimately undermined not only her but also some of her policies.

First, her success in confronting the Soviet Union (and in talking to Gorbachev) led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and German unification. Instead of embracing this – after all it was a direct consequence of her policies – she stood out against it and gradually burnt her bridges with other European countries.

It is quite likely that given the desire in Europe to smother a united Germany in an enhanced EU, there was no sensible European policy for the UK that would ultimately have worked except withdrawal from the EU which is eventually what transpired after the 2016 referendum. But at the time of unification Mrs Thatcher gave the impression that she was caught on the hop and, even though her views ultimately proved visionary, at the time she looked less than sure footed.

Second, the revolution in technology and communications that was booted forward by the privatisation of British Telecom and the liberation of the economy from its pre-Thatcherite state led to the emergence of a new professional class of brain worker that eventually became the backbone of London's flat white economy. Clever but not wise, this class of people relates better to screens than to people. As a result, often lacking in self-awareness, the sort of people who retain studenty views even when beyond studenty age, these people became the bedrock of Sadiq Khan's vote in London and the Labour vote elsewhere.

Meanwhile the Labour party transformed itself into something electable. And had Gordon Brown not undermined the Blair premiership, the party could have stayed in power well beyond even the 13 years it remained in power. By combining Blair's determination to keep taxes low, preserving Mrs Thatcher's trade union reforms and Brown's determination to stay out of the Euro with an appeal to a more woke electorate, Labour could have stayed in power for a very long time. But the personal rivalry between Blair and Brown broke the Labour party's hold on power.

By the end of the period of Labour rule, many of the institutions of power, from the broadcast media to the civil service and the legal system had been Blairised and their traditional independence undermined, even if they didn't realise it.

Bringing the Thatcher insight up to date means coping with passes already sold and dealing with the changed world since her time.

The two biggest changes since her time are the rise of the emerging economies, especially China, and the rise of tech.

Politically China means a second superpower, rather more serious because it combines an economic challenge with a political challenge. Because China is a serious economic player, it can't be isolated in the same way as we could isolate the Soviets who we treated as a purely miliary threat. Eventually China's declining population will undermine it, but the challenge for the rest of the world is to keep the country from taking too much advantage of its quarter century while it remains either the world's largest economy or its second largest. Meanwhile India will eventually become, driven initially by mass of population as China still is, a third superpower.

Economically the rise of tech and globalisation massively increase the importance of incentives. The Laffer curve has shifted towards the origin – governments that impose high taxes lose much more than they did even in Mrs Thatcher's time.

My new book, *Prosperity Through Growth*, which I have co-authored with Art Laffer, Lord Matthew Elliott and Michael Hintze updates Mrs Thatcher's policies for a modern world of globalisation and AI. It takes account of the fact that tech has shifted the Laffer curve. It focusses on regulations that have become outmoded.

The book points out that we should start from first principles. In a signed introduction, co-author Art Laffer shows that to create the right climate it is necessary to follow a 'North Star' of low tax, low regulation, affordable government expenditure, sound money and free trade.

As Art Laffer puts it in the book *'Economics is about incentives and how people respond to incentives. People like doing things they find attractive and avoid things they find off-putting. Government actions affect both the attractiveness and repulsiveness of activities. And, as such, the messages sent by government to people and markets make activities more or less attractive. Just how government interacts with the world at large determines economic destiny.*

'By way of example, if you feed a dog, you know where the dog will be at feeding time. However, if you beat a dog, you know where the dog won't be (anywhere near you), but you'll have no idea where the dog will be. Positive incentives tell people what they should do while negative incentives tell people what not to do. The conceptual difference between the two incentives is of the essence, and the behavioural consequences are significant'.

We propose what we call a 24/7 growth plan which consists of 24 measures that we estimate could boost GDP growth by 7% within 5 years and by 29% after 20 years. The plan looks radical but actually our calculations on fairly cautious assumptions show that it can be combined with reducing the budget deficit and debt in cash terms (even more so as a share of GDP).

The centre piece of the 24/7 growth plan is a flat tax, initially 30% but falling to 20%.

In the book we recommend that this should be combined with gradual abolition of national insurance contributions for both employees and employers, returning non-dom taxation to its pre 2024 position, abolition of stamp duties and inheritance tax, abolition of corporation tax on retained earnings and of capital gains tax on assets held more than 5 years.

These tax cuts do not quite pay for themselves on their own even in the longer term, so they have to be phased in, combined with some savings in public spending – through gradually raising public sector productivity, freezing welfare in real terms and raising the pension age and abolishing the triple lock.

In addition, other regulatory changes besides lower taxes that will also boost the economy need to be introduced. Over time as money becomes available when the economy grows, spending on infrastructure, especially roads, and on defence should rise.

We plan to achieve sound money by changing the composition of the Monetary Policy Committee to ensure that major strains of economic thought are

'Mrs Thatcher kept doing unpopular things but the electorate kept voting for her' *Cont.*

incorporated. None of the co-authors would describe themselves as monetarist but we think it is scandalous that no monetarist has ever been appointed to the MPC. We also propose changing its remit to targeting nominal GDP and taking account of the money supply and the exchange rate. While borrowing and debt ratios have to be reduced faster.

We go into some detail on regulations, particularly planning and energy. But also it is critical that the consequences of all new regulations are fully cost justified in advance of implementation, and sunset clauses are important to remove redundant regulations. We need to stop imposing laws and regulations on people when neither they nor the government have any idea how they could actually be implemented.

To improve the supply of rental housing in the UK and offset the damaging impact of recent legislation, the government should restore the tax and legislative position for private landlords to that that existed pre-2015.

We recommend 'smart net zero' to achieve environmental objectives at minimal economic cost and only when cost-justified. This should radically reduce energy prices.

The labour market needs to be liberalised to make it easier for employers to hire and dismiss employees. The Employment Rights Bill, if it becomes law, should be scrapped while the minimum wage should be frozen until it falls to 61% of the median wage.

We propose road pricing to replace all other motoring taxation, supervised by road users, not civil servants who would be subject to the temptation to steal the revenues for other purposes as has too often happened in the past. This should pay for better and new roads.

We have three proposals on trade – to extend and improve recent deals with the US and India, to exclude the UK from the European Carbon tax network and to focus trade deals on services which now account for just under 70% of the UK's net exports – most UK trade policy focusses on the 30% of our exports which are goods.

Will all this work? History says it will. Our book is full of examples of the actual real-world evidence of the impact of tax changes not only in the UK but also in other countries. Some of the most telling evidence comes from the post-communist transition states – growth in the high tax states was 3%, in the medium tax states 4%, and in the low tax states 6%. The US also provides plenty of examples because of the different local tax systems in different states. Those states with low local taxes such as Florida, Tennessee and Texas have massively outperformed those with high taxes. Meanwhile high tax Michigan's share of US GDP halved from 5% of US GDP in 1960 to below 2.5% in 2024.

As we move into an age dominated by AI in the West and by autocracy in many other economies, we need to build flexibility into our economy to enable the seismic shifts of the coming years to be adopted in the UK successfully.

AI will certainly mean that many jobs disappear; but this should be more than offset by the new jobs created if we get our policies right to allow them to be created. This means lower taxes and fewer employment barriers. It also means skills training and adequate cheap energy supplies for the big data that underpins an AI economy. It means new power stations, better communications and new roads.

For the book we interviewed some fascinating people – 5 out of the 8 living former prime ministers; 9 out of the 11 living former chancellors, leading former civil servants and top businessmen. The businessmen were clear that the UK could return to being an economic success relatively easily if the right choices were made. The politicians said much the same.

In the interviews quoted in the book, Sir Tony Blair pointed out that Mrs Thatcher kept doing unpopular things and the electorate kept voting for her. He

explained this by suggesting that the public would vote for someone who they thought knew what they were doing even if they were unhappy with individual measures.

Covered rather more lightly in the book but also part of a modern update of Thatcherism is the need to revive the UK's legal system and its civil service and make them independent again. There are no perfect answers but reforming human rights legislation, a new civil service code and a form of diversity training that trains civil servants and possibly the BBC how not to be woke may be part of the package.

The UK has a real choice now between relative economic decline if we carry on doing the same thing, or the chance of an economic revival driven by our 24/7 plan and new technologies. The government needs to make the right choice. If it doesn't, the electorate will make the choice for it.

Douglas McWilliams sold Cebr, the UK economics consultancy which he founded in 1993, to a management buyout in October 2024. His co-authored book with economics guru Art Laffer 'Prosperity through Growth: raising living standards in a world of autocracy and AI' *was published in the UK by Biteback in 2025. Other books published in the past decade include* The Flat White Economy; The Inequality Paradox and Driving the Silk Road. *He was the Gresham Professor of Commerce in 2013/14. Before founding Cebr he was the Chief Economic Adviser at the CBI, the UK's industrial federation. He has also been the Chief Economist of IBM UK and the chairman of the Economics Committee of UNICE (now Business Europe).*

Have handbag, will travel: Margaret Thatcher's post-prime ministerial travels



by Peter Just

After her resignation as prime minister on 28 November 1990, Margaret Thatcher continued to play a leading role in British politics, perhaps most famously, if not infamously, on what became the European Union. Perhaps less understood and less appreciated at the time in the United Kingdom (UK) was the global role she continued to play. From the start of 1991 through to the early 2000s, she travelled all over the world, delivering lectures, meeting political and business figures, and promoting Britain's commercial and political interests.

Using material released by The National Archives since Lady Thatcher's death and the testimony provided by Sir Julian Seymour, her executor and the director of her office, just before his death in March 2025, this article sheds new light on her post-prime ministerial travels. In doing so, it uncovers an under-researched area of her life and provides a corrective to the largely negative way in which, to date, Margaret Thatcher's life after Downing Street has been viewed.

At the outset, it is important to note the purpose of Lady Thatcher's trips abroad as a former prime

Have handbag, will travel: Margaret Thatcher's post-prime ministerial travels *Cont.*

minister. Sir Julian Seymour highlighted how her lecture tours were not part of a 'grand farewell tour' or undertaken for 'altruistic reasons'. They were a means of earning money. He estimated that 90% of her engagements outside the United States of America (USA) were for personal gain and in the USA 70% with the remaining 30% designed to raise money for the Margaret Thatcher Foundation.[1]

Personal earnings aside, Lady Thatcher also used her visits abroad to promote Britain's commercial and political interests. Sir Julian Seymour revealed that outside of the USA, one third of the time Lady Thatcher spent in each place was devoted to British interest engagements.[2] We shall largely focus on this aspect of her travels, as a way of analysing what difference, if any, she was able to make internationally as a former prime minister on economic and political matters, and how her visits impacted on her reputation and demonstrated her continuing global influence.

Ahead of her visits, Lady Thatcher often sought advice from the Foreign Office (FCO) and the British ambassadors and high commissioners of the places she was visiting on what would be useful for her to raise. Her ongoing ability successfully to promote Britain's interests was widely recognised by ministers and officials. On the commercial front, before she visited the Gulf in November 1991, Tim Sainsbury, then a trade minister, wrote to her saying, 'Your visit offers an unparalleled opportunity to provide support and encouragement to British exports to Kuwait.'[3] FCO files also reveal that following Lady Thatcher's use of Jaguars during a trip to Taiwan in 1992, there was a consequent dramatic rise in sales.[4] While visiting Malaysia in 1993, she highlighted how high taxation on alcohol was affecting a British company's sales of beer and stout. In a subsequent telegram to the FCO, the British High Commissioner reported that the Malaysian finance minister, 'hinted that he would not raise the tax again in his next budget.'[5]

Lady Thatcher's promotion of Britain's political interests was probably best seen in her work on Hong Kong and China where she continued to have dealings with the Chinese and robustly supported Chris Patten when, as Hong Kong governor, he introduced controversial reforms. Patten later commented that, 'when I needed her help in Hong Kong she gave it unstintingly [...] She was a better and stouter friend to me than she will ever know.'[6]

In addition to generating income for herself and her Foundation, and the satisfaction of 'batting for Britain', Lady Thatcher's post-prime ministerial travels also gave her something else. Sir Julian Seymour spoke of the pleasure she drew from her travels to the USA and Asia. He noted particularly how she enjoyed meeting businesspeople on the ground on the tours sponsored by Citibank because 'they told her straight what was going on.' Seymour reflected on how Lady Thatcher both 'loved the applause' and was 'fascinated' by the places she visited and the people she met. As for those Lady Thatcher met, Seymour reflected 'curiosity and respect' got some of them to the events and meeting her gave them both 'prestige' and 'huge face'. [7]

Seymour also noted something else: Lady Thatcher's continuing ability to command meetings with significant figures, both political and economic. He recalled Sir Leonard Appleyard, the British Ambassador to China, commenting that only American Presidents could see three members of the Politburo Standing Committee on the same day. On one of her post-prime ministerial visits to China, Lady Thatcher did the same thing. Of one engagement on her 1994 trip to Brazil, Seymour recalled a business figure commenting, '60% of Brazil's GDP is in this room.'[8] In 1992, the British Ambassador to South Korea reported that a dinner in her honour was described by those present as 'an unprecedented event'. The attendees included all three presidential candidates, the then prime minister,

1 Interview, Sir Julian Seymour, London, 13 March 2025.
2 Ibid.
3 The National Archives, FCO 8/8261, Visit by Margaret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to the Gulf states, November 1991, 1January 1991-31 December 1991, f9.
4 The National Archives, FCO 15/6843, Visit by Margaret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, August-September 1993, 1 January 1993-31 December 1993, f3a.
5 Ibid, f14.
6 Chris Patten, *East and West*, (London: Pan Books, 1999), p.62.
7 Interview, Sir Julian Seymour, London, 13 March 2025.
8 Ibid.

five former prime ministers, the chairman of two of Korea's leading conglomerates, and 'a clutch of other political, economic and social luminaries.' The Ambassador said it was 'an astonishing tribute to Lady Thatcher's reputation, her drawing power and the wish for Koreans to be seen in her company.' Of the visit overall, the Ambassador reported that many Koreans, including the Foreign Minister, had told him that it had been 'a triumph'.[9]

Political figures across the globe often seemed to want some of Lady Thatcher's triumph to brush off on them. In November 1993, the British Consul General in São Paulo sent a letter to the British Embassy in Brasilia about Lady Thatcher's March 1994 visit. Its subject line was 'Proposed visit by Lady Thatcher: Paulo Maluf's Secret Weapon'. The Consul General wrote that if Maluf, then the Mayor of São Paulo, were to declare a presidential candidacy in 1994, 'he may well have calculated that it will do him no harm whatever to be seen to be playing host to Lady Thatcher at around the same time.'[10] Of her 1991 visit to Japan, the British Ambassador commented that the Japanese prime minister, 'clearly wanted to make an event of the meeting'. 'A huge crowd of reporters was on hand to record the initial moments of their meeting.'[11] In 1993, the British Ambassador to Poland commented that Lady Thatcher's public endorsement of the prime minister, Hanna Suchocka, 'will have been helpful' to her.[12] The desire for Lady Thatcher's public endorsement was also seen in the USA where successive candidates for the Republican presidential nomination effectively sought her benediction.[13]

As with politicians in the UK, this could backfire, however, with political figures in other countries being unfavourably measured against Lady Thatcher. In 1991, an official in the British Embassy in Japan, wrote that Lady Thatcher's 'strong leadership' resulted in 'comparisons which are most unflattering to Kaifu [the then Prime Minister] and other Japanese politicians'.[14] One newspaper presented Lady Thatcher's meeting with Kaifu as 'Mrs Thatcher lecturing the prime minister.'[15] In 1992, Lady Thatcher's 'grasp and understanding of world events' and 'her ability to go into considerable detail' resulted in 'unflattering comparisons with Japanese prime ministers.'[16] The Ambassador spoke of 'a good cartoon' appearing in one newspaper which featured Lady Thatcher 'giving frank advice' to the prime minister, Kiichi Miyazawa.[17]

If Lady Thatcher had triumph amongst political and economic figures, she also had it amongst members of the public. On an engagement during a 1991 visit to Brunei she was 'virtually mobbed'.[18] The same year, the British Embassy in Japan wrote of Lady Thatcher having 'almost pop star status' with Japanese women;[19] in 1992 the British Ambassador declared 'the Japanese love Lady Thatcher'.[20] Reporting on her 1993 visit to Singapore, the High Commission commented, 'She made quite an impact. She still has quite a reputation in this part of the world as an iron lady and her style goes down well'.[21]

Lady Thatcher's triumph was recognised by UK ministers. Following her trips to Taiwan and South Korea in 1992, the then Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, wanted to write to Lady Thatcher to congratulate her on 'the outstanding success' of her visits. He believed they will have done 'a power of good.'[22] Her ability to deliver 'a power of good' had been acknowledged almost from the start of her post-

9 The National Archives, FCO 21/5270, Visit by Margaret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to South Korea, September 1992, 1 January 1992-31 December 1992, f53.
10 The National Archives, FCO 7/10050, Proposed visit by Lady Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to Brazil, Chile and Mexico in March 1994, 1 January 1993-31 December 1993, f4.
11 The National Archives, FCO 21/4916, Visit by Margaret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to Japan, September 1991, 1 January 1991-31 December 1991, f23.
12 The National Archives' Website: Discovery: PREM 19/4408, FORMER PRIME MINISTERS. Lady Thatcher: part 1, 9 April 1991-20 April 1993, available at: https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16854623.
13 Peter Just, *Margaret Thatcher: Life After Downing Street*, (London, Biteback Publishing, 2025), pp.63-64.
14 TNA, FCO 21/4916, op. cit., f24.
15 Ibid, f23.
16 The National Archives, FCO 21/5196, Visit by Margaret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to Japan, October 1992, 1 January 1992-31 December 1992, f10.
17 Ibid, f11.
18 The National Archives, FCO 21/4831, Visit by Margaret Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to China, September 1991, 1 January 1991-31 December 1991, f23
19 TNA, FCO 21/4916, op. cit., f24.
20 TNA, FCO 21/5196, op. cit., f11
21 TNA, FCO 15/6843, op. cit., f16.
22 TNA, FCO 21/5270, op. cit., f55.

Have handbag, will travel: Margaret Thatcher's post-prime ministerial travels *Cont.*

premiership. Early in 1991, an official in the British Embassy in Washington commented, 'Although she is no longer a member of the government, Mrs Thatcher is clearly a major asset to Britain'.[23] As late as 1994, even while she continued to cause the Major Government difficulties domestically, including on the European Union and Bosnia, this was still recognised. A FCO memo - 'Lady Thatcher's international activities' - dated 5 May 1994 noted, 'There is wide acceptance here in the Office of the value to Britain's foreign policy of those visits which Lady Thatcher makes.'[24]

In 2000, a member of Lady Thatcher's Government commented, 'She never really lost her status as a world power, did she?'[25] As this brief sketch of her post-prime ministerial travels has shown, she did indeed retain her status as a world power, at least up to 1994, the latest date to which FCO files have been released by The National Archives. So, this article provides just an interim assessment, one worthy of being revisited in the future when both Lady Thatcher's post-prime ministerial papers at the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge are available to researchers and more files opened by The National Archives. It will be fascinating, for example, to see what, if any, difference the change of Foreign Secretary from Douglas Hurd to Malcolm Rifkind in 1995 made and if the change from a Conservative to a Labour Government in 1997 had any effect. What the currently available evidence suggests is that for all the turbulence Lady Thatcher generated at home between 1990 and 1994, abroad she almost always had triumph, often to the benefit of Britain. Beyond that, her post-prime ministerial travels also arguably provide a model of how, when out of office, a former prime minister can go on serving their country with both dignity and efficiency.

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23 TNA, FCO 21/4916, op. cit., f7

24 The National Archives, FCO 37/6754, Visit by Lady Thatcher, former UK Prime Minister, to India, September 1994, 1 January 1994-31 December 1994, f5.

25 Interview, member of Lady Thatcher's Government, London, 2000.

Thatcher, Poets, Statesmen and Conservative Thinkers: In the Age of Blair's Constitutional Revolution



by Dr Daniel Pitt

Lady Thatcher, in her post-premiership years,[1] took a keen political interest in the British constitution. She argued during her emeritus years that the British constitution was 'rooted in history and enshrined by practice.'[2] Moreover, she stated that she believed that a

1 For the most thorough discussion of Thatcher's post-premiership years, see Just, Peter, *Margaret Thatcher: Life After Downing Street* (London, Biteback, 2025).

2 The primary research for this paper was conducted during a research stay at the Churchill Archives Centre.

'constitution is not something you change on a whim.' To further make this point and to contrast the British constitution with the French one, she referred to *Punch* magazine's cartoon, which portrayed an Englishman entering a library and asking the librarian for a copy of the French Constitution. The librarian replies: Sorry, sir. We don't stock periodicals.

In this article, I argue that Lady Thatcher demonstrated a particular understanding of the British constitution, as well as the American Constitution, in her post-premiership years. It was a rather romantic Whig understanding with elements of Toryism as well. She drew on constitutional thinkers from both the liberal and conservative traditions to defend the British and American Constitutions. Encompassing thinkers, Thatcher also utilised poets and statesmen to defend the British constitution in the age of Tony Blair's constitutional revolution.

Thatcher's Constitutional Concern

On the 28th of September 1997, in a speech to the *First International Conservative Congress*, she remarked that Conservatives have been able to 'convert our opponents to quite a large extent as regards economics', but they have not been able to accomplish this feat on other political matters. For instance, one foundational issue that Lady Thatcher had not been able to convert her political opponents on was the constitution. Indeed, the Labour Party under the leadership of John Smith and then Tony Blair was committed to fundamental constitutional reform or in their opponents' eyes, vandalism. Indeed, Thatcher, during her speech, argued that the greatest threat posed by the New Labour administration was to the British constitution and 'to our traditional institutions of government'. A few months earlier in the year, Thatcher wrote, for the *Daily Telegraph*, with the title *The boneless wonder of New Labour*, in which she acknowledged that she had been criticised for openly welcoming Blair's changes to Labour's economic policies. Nevertheless, Thatcher was clear that she did not welcome Blair's constitutional policies or proposals, because they were a 'new and sinister threat', and that they were 'radically subversive'.

Just under five years earlier, on October 8, 1992, Thatcher wrote for *The European*, citing her favourite quotation from the former Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli that 'the programme of the Conservative Party is to maintain the Constitution of the country'. Additionally, Thatcher wrote that Conservative governments 'should have as its main priority the maintenance of our constitutional freedoms, our democratic institutions, and the accountability of Parliament to the people'. Thatcher, from 1992 to 2002, had grave concern for the British constitution and argued for its merits.

Arguing for Conservative Constitutionalism

Other than Disraeli, during her emeritus years, whom did Thatcher consult for intellectual inspiration? A former adviser to Thatcher said to the author that they used to joke that 'she has been at Dicey again' when she would debate constitutional issues. A. V. Dicey was a constitutional scholar and member of the Liberal Unionist Party. His most famous work is his book *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*. Thatcher also drew inspiration from both liberal and conservative thinkers, both British and American statesmen and two great poets. It is fascinating that a former British Prime Minister was utilising these people in and of themselves, but how did she use them? She used them to communicate ideas, to create stories and narratives and to provide political juxtapositions.

The constitutional topics that Thacher covered during this time were multifaceted and intersecting. She covered ideas such as sovereignty, accountability, consent, democracy and representative government, legitimate authority, and respect for the rule of law. Additionally, she expressed her views that parliamentarians should be the guardians of parliamentary institutions and of the British constitution as a whole and that parliamentarians should not tinker with what works within our constitution. She utilised thinkers, statesmen and

Thatcher, Poets, Statesmen and Conservative Thinkers: In the Age of... *Cont.*

poets to weave together a narrative about our laws being 'rooted in, and springing from, the deepest values of the Judeo-Christian tradition', the importance of ancient constitutional traditions, the similarities of the American Constitution to the British one, and the danger of Labour governments to our constitutional heritage. She also formulated political juxtapositions, such as liberty vs oppression; that is, liberty in the English-speaking world vs oppression in the Soviet Union. Now, let us turn to a few specific examples.

British and American Statesmen

To build her arguments to defend Britain's constitution, Lady Thatcher quoted both Britons and Americans. As we have just seen, she cited Disraeli, another Victorian titan, Lord Salisbury, as well as the Anglo-Irish Whig Edmund Burke and 'the Great Commoner' and former Prime Minister (1766 – 1768), William Pitt the Elder. Thatcher also cited Americans such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

Lady Thatcher's favourite statesman to draw from during this period was the great wartime leader Sir Winston Churchill. She would cite, on more than one occasion, his book series *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* to highlight the status of England's body of legal principles and institutions. These institutions include 'parliament, trial by jury, local government by local citizens' and the free press. Thatcher expressed the deep roots they had in England and claimed that the binding agent of all these things was the rule of law. Thatcher also employed Churchill to argue that these principles and institutions were shared across the English-speaking peoples.

Thatcher would also cite Churchill's Fulton, Missouri speech. She said that 'democracy' and 'liberty' are 'not just a cry', they are fundamental. Thatcher would argue that 'our form of government is not just a miscellaneous collection of policies: it is founded on fundamental principles.' She then cited Churchill verbatim, stating that Churchill called these principles 'the title deeds of freedom.' Lady Thatcher would then reiterate these principles by referring to Churchill's words again:

The people of any country have the right and should have the power by constitutional action, by free, unfettered elections, with a secret ballot, to choose or change the character of the form of government under which they dwell.

Thatcher then continued to use Churchill as her inspiration by quoting him, saying:

Freedom of speech and of thought and of religion should, of course, prevail. Courts of justice, independent of the executive, unbiased by any party, should administer laws which have received the broad assent of large majorities or are consecrated by time or custom.

To make the case for liberty and consent within the Anglo-American constitutional tradition, Thatcher utilised Jefferson and Madison and their 'generation of American founders' as she expressed it. These remarks were made to an American audience, and she suggested that these statesmen understood that 'true liberty was only possible through a well-constructed constitutional government resting upon the consent of the governed'. Consent was essential, yet Thatcher argued that above all else, our moral commitment has made us, in the English-speaking world, 'distinctive' and this was what shaped our constitutional government. She referred to Jefferson and cited the Preamble of the United States Declaration of Independence:

...that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness, and that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

She also believed that religious belief was fundamental for 'true democratic government', like those in the United States and the United Kingdom. Thatcher

turned to the authors of *The Federalist Papers* as a collective for support and argued that the form of constitutional government 'can only work with a nation founded on religious belief and moral values'.

Thatcher utilised Burke on several occasions; she would cite Burke topics such as law, 'little platoons', patriotism and religion. For example, she uses this passage from Burke: 'There is but one law for all, namely, that law which governs all law - the law of our Creator, the law of humanity, justice, equity, the law of nature and of nations.' She would also cite Burke's more famous passages, which she thought was 'more often quoted than understood'. That is:

To be attached to the sub-division, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ, as it were) of public affection. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love for our country and to mankind.

Thatcher drew on Burke to argue for the aforementioned in the Anglo-American constitutional tradition and to demonstrate that conservatives, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, are 'unashamedly patriots' and that Britain has 'served as a beacon to the world, lighting the way through the darkest days of this century.'

Thatcher's Thinkers

Lady Thatcher utilised thinkers to argue for the soundness of the British constitution during the age of Blair's constitutional revolution. Such drew upon the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, G. K. Chesterton, and the Frenchmen, Alexis de Tocqueville and Montesquieu.

To express her views on law and freedom, Thatcher would cite Locke, saying 'where there is no law, there is no freedom' and another favourite was 'where law ends, tyranny begins' as well as the Lockean maxim that 'no government allows absolute liberty.' Additionally, Aristotle's insight on law, justice and human nature would be deployed by quoting "man is the best of animals when perfected, so he is the worst when separated from law and justice." Thatcher also cited Hobbes to express her views on the role of law. She said, citing Hobbes:

The use of laws [...] is not to bind people from all voluntary actions; but to direct and keep them in such a motion, as not to hurt themselves by their own impetuous desires, rashness, or indiscretion; as hedges are set, not to stop travellers, but to keep them in the way.

To warn against new forms of despotism, she would employ Tocqueville and his warning about 'a new kind of despotism' in which the government could impose state control to achieve equality of outcome, which Lady Thatcher termed administrative despotism. She would also cite Tocqueville about 'petty complicated rules' and the impact that 'hinders, restrains, enervates, stifles and stultifies so much that in the end each nation is no more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd.' Tocqueville was deployed to argue for the importance of manners and morals for our form of constitutional government.

She did not always use thinkers positively. She also cited thinkers whom she thought were at the root of the West's troubles. For example, Thatcher cited Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Friedrich Nietzsche as the three intellectuals who were at the heart of 'the greatest tyrannies of our century'. Interestingly, this demonstrates Thatcher's views on the power of ideas and thinkers. Indeed, there is and has been an anti-intellectual strand within British conservatism.[3] Thatcher did display a touch of anti-intellectualism during the age of the Blair constitutional revolution. However, in one noteworthy case, she employed Hobbes to do so. She said that there is 'at least a grain of truth in Hobbes's indictment of the intellectuals of his day' that is 'the universities have been to this nation, as the wooden horse was to the Trojans.'

3 See Hörcher, Ferenc and Pitt, Daniel, *Intellectual Conservatism: From Burke to Scruton* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2025).

Thatcher, Poets, Statesmen and Conservative Thinkers: In the Age of... *Cont.*

Poets: Kipling and Eliot

During the years of the Blair constitutional revolution, Thatcher demonstrated her romantic and poetic side while arguing in favour of the British constitutional tradition and heritage. For example, she would draw on and quote T. S. Eliot and Rudyard Kipling. She would quote from Kipling's poem *The Heritage* to highlight concepts, such as sacrifice, continuity and passing on a tradition from generation to generation. For instance, she would cite: 'Dear-bought and clear, a thousand year, Our fathers' title runs. Make we likewise their sacrifice, Defrauding not our sons'. In her post-premiership years, Thatcher certainly did take a keen constitutional interest and deployed various and interconnecting constitutional concepts to defend the British constitution and drew on numerous people from Churchill to Burke to provide her arguments with authority, intellectual heft and romanticism.

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BOOK REVIEW

Margaret Thatcher: Life After Downing Street

by the late Simon Richards



My local bookshop has an entire section devoted to books about Sir Winston Churchill, including works on the great man's clothes, homes, holidays, cigars - indeed every aspect of his long and extraordinary life. As for the other great 20th Century British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher is not yet quite so well served, but it is still surprising that, until this study by Peter Just, nobody had yet examined the 22 years she spent after her departure from Downing Street, the manner of which continues to haunt the Conservative Party to this day.

The author learnt his trade under the tutelage of Lord Norton of Louth, so it is no surprise that he has produced a work of impeccable scholarship. It is also written with wit and an impish sense of humour. At the heart of the book is the acknowledgement that, for somebody with as powerful an image and reputation as Lady Thatcher, there was a need to live up to – and be true to – that reputation. As the author puts it, 'it is necessary always to distinguish between Margaret Thatcher the person and Margaret Thatcher the persona'. That she took care to live up to her persona was never better illustrated than in a memorable 1995 interview for Swedish TV when, asked by the interviewer, Stina Dabrowski, to perform a jump on camera, she refused, replying, bristling with indignation, 'I do not want to lose the respect of those whose respect I have kept for years'.

Looming in the background was always the spectre of her predecessor's unrelenting hostility to her. Edward Heath, a man who elevated rudeness to an art form, never let up in his criticism of every aspect of Lady Thatcher and the Government she led. There is no record of her having complained about it. How many

others would have taken thirty years of such hostility on the chin as she did? Certainly not her successor, the thin-skinned John Major.

The book examines the numerous complaints made by Europhiles in his cabinet that Lady Thatcher behaved outrageously in criticising his catastrophic adherence to the Exchange Rate Mechanism and Major's signing of the Maastricht Treaty. But suggestions that she was disloyal are wide of the mark. The author details how even her fiercest and most articulate critic, Lord Patten, acknowledged the extent to which she supported him in Hong Kong when he was under the greatest pressure.

Because of her worldwide fame and her electoral success, every utterance she made inevitably became a major news story. Naturally enough, commentators leapt on anything that could be interpreted as criticism of her successor, ignoring the far more numerous occasions when she was supportive of him. In contrast, Sir John Major was as unremittingly hostile to Boris Johnson as Heath had been of Thatcher. His criticisms rarely attracted a similar level of publicity simply because he was not as widely known or as electorally successful as her. The author rightly acknowledges the exceptional achievement of the late Sir Julian Seymour in arranging Lady Thatcher's finances and political legacy after she left office. Sir Mark Worthington's outstanding service is also acknowledged, though I should have liked to have read more of the extraordinary dedication he showed for over twenty years, serving Lady Thatcher with wit, wisdom and unmatched loyalty and discretion.

Peter Just has done a service to everybody interested in Margaret Thatcher and I commend this book, without reservation. Indeed, just as Michael Cockerell performed a great service to all students of political history with his incomparable series of politicians' recollections on screen, so, perhaps, this book might open the way to a series of studies of the lives and influence of Prime Ministers after leaving office. It is to be hoped that we shall not have to wait too long for the current occupant to be in that category. This is Peter Just's first book; I trust that it will not be his last. As for Margaret Thatcher's influence, as David Amess MP said in the House of Commons on 3rd September 2013, 'The memory of this remarkable lady will last for ever.'

'Margaret Thatcher: Life After Downing Street' by Peter Just was published by Biteback in 2025.

Simon Richards was Chief Executive of The Freedom Association until 2020, co-founding its Better Off Out campaign in 2006, to put the positive case for Brexit. As a kind and enthusiastic supporter of the Margaret Thatcher Centre from our beginning, and a member of the Thatcher Centre executive committee, his death is a great loss to us all. We are honoured to share this last commentary from our dear friend.

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