

# MARGARET THATCHER.

A TRIBUTE TO BRITAIN'S GREAT LEADER.

**1925 - 2013**



## Richard Allsop on how Margaret Thatcher changed Britain—and the world.

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Only twice in my years as a Liberal Student at Melbourne University was I physically attacked.

It says something about the Left's visceral and irrational hatred of Margaret Thatcher that one of these assaults was prompted by my celebrating Thatcher's victory in the 1983 UK election. Given the reaction of much of the Left to her passing earlier this year, it seems that they are still maintaining their rage. But what a hypocritical rage it is!

After all, many of the same people who sent the Wizard of Oz song 'Ding Dong the Witch Is Dead' to number one in the British charts are the same types who po-facedly lecture the rest of us for showing any sort of pleasure when the likes of Osama bin Laden meet their demise. When pressed to explain why they still hate Thatcher so much, the lefties wheeled out the same old clichéd rap sheet.

Exhibit number one of Thatcher's critics still appears to be the coal miners' strike of 1984. There was a strong element of hypocrisy about this criticism at the time as previous British Labour governments had closed more pits than she was attempting to shut, but it is

even more bizarre now. Isn't one of the Left's own great causes now to shut down coal mines to address



■ Margaret Thatcher with fellow freedom fighter, US President Ronald Reagan

global warming? They should be applauding her foresight.

Exhibit number two is still apparently the Falklands War, which once again seems most odd. Not only did the Argentinians launch a unilateral invasion, but almost to a person Falkland Islanders wanted

people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours.' These are hardly the words of a heartless individualist.

And, of course, the Left still wrap it all up in the expression 'Thatcher's Britain,' which somehow

➤ **ISN'T ONE OF THE LEFT'S OWN GREAT CAUSES NOW TO SHUT DOWN COAL MINES TO ADDRESS GLOBAL WARMING? THEY SHOULD BE APPLAUDING HER FORESIGHT**

to remain British. Given that leftists normally tend to argue in favour of self-determination, one might have thought they would have been enthusiastic supporters of Thatcher's response, especially as at the time Argentina was run by a right-wing military junta. It seems pretty clear what side a leftie should be on, if not blinded by anti-Thatcher prejudice.

Exhibit number three still appears to be quoting out of context her line about there is no such thing as society when what she was actually saying was that people should not blame 'society' for things as a cop-out. For as she continued: 'There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and

leaves out of the narrative the fact that in 1979 she inherited a deeply divided and dysfunctional country which, in the previous decade, had endured rampant inflation, rising unemployment, industry failure, increasing crime, the spread of the Troubles in Northern Ireland to the mainland, football hooliganism and, most of all, outrageous displays of union muscle resulting in the three day week in 1973-74 and the Winter of Discontent in 1978-79. Thatcher did not solve all of these problems, but she certainly made progress on several of them, particularly in reducing union militancy. The number of days lost annually to strikes fell from 29 million to two million in her decade in power.

Thatcher's achievement in



## Through the years Margaret Thatcher

### 1958

Elected Member for Finchley in the UK parliament.

### 1970-1974

Served as Secretary of State for Education and Science.

### 1975

Is elected leader of the Conservative Party.

### 1987

The Conservative Party wins an historic third term in office.

### 1989

Thatcher introduces the poll tax, a charge levied on community residents rather than property.

### 1990

Is forced to resign as prime minister after a leadership struggle within her own party.

### 1991 & 1992

Receives the US Medal of Freedom from President George Bush and is named a life peer on the Queen's honour list.

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becoming prime minister was extraordinary. Not only does she remain the only female leader of any major British political party, the fact she had a modest upbringing as a grocer's daughter from Grantham only adds to the unlikeliness of her rise. However, she accumulated experiences that mattered. In the late 1930s her family housed an Austrian Jewish girl called Edith, who had fled Nazism, planting in Thatcher a lifelong revulsion of anti-Semitism and fascism. She also brought to political leadership the unusual background as a research scientist and work experience at firms such as BX Plastics outside Colchester and J Lyons in Hammersmith.

After a couple of unsuccessful attempts to enter Parliament, she became the MP for Finchley in 1959 and had an unusual, but not exceptional, career as a female politician up to and including her four years as Education secretary in Ted Heath's government from 1970 to 1974. There is no evidence that in those years she objected as the government delivered its big-spending budgets and industry subsidies and failed to control the unions.

Thatcher became exceptional in 1975. She stood for the

Conservative Party leadership against Heath in early 1975, when several of her more timid colleagues thought they might wait until the second round of balloting. She beat Heath in the first ballot and the timid colleagues in the second. Her political courage seemed to inspire her policy courage. Her close friend Keith Joseph had spent lots of time listening to Friedrich Hayek and the Institute of Economic Affairs and had come to share their conclusion that the Keynesian post-war consensus no longer had the answers to the problems which Britain faced.

The case that major reform was required was reinforced by the Winter of Discontent. With hospitals not functioning and rubbish piling up in the streets, it was clear that something had to change, but the question was whether the public was ready for radical reform.

After her May 1979 election win, Thatcher initiated a number of free-market reforms, including the abandonment of price and foreign exchange controls. However, the key period in Thatcher's prime ministership was 1981. Worldwide recession meant that Britain's unemployment rate was approaching three million, there were riots in several British cities, her opinion poll ratings had plummeted and 364 economists wrote an open letter to

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*The Times* arguing that her policies would never work. Most politicians would have decided that the path to political survival lay through compromise, but not Thatcher. As she told the Tory conference in 1981 'U-turn if you want to, the lady's not for turning', words which every contemporary politician should recite when handed the latest focus group results.

She was proven right when, by the time she went back to the polls in June 1983, the economy was showing signs of improvement and her stature had been enhanced by her resolute response in the Falklands. She won the 1983 election with a majority of 144 seats, the biggest majority since 1945, and was returned again with a handsome majority of 102 in 1987.

By 1988, she had reduced the top marginal tax rate, which was 83 per cent (with a 15 per cent surcharge bringing it to 98 per cent on 'unearned' income) when she came to power, to 40 per cent (with no surcharge) and also cut the basic rate from 33 per cent to 25 per cent. She had embarked on a series of privatisations, first of state-owned businesses (including British Telecom, British Airways, British Leyland, Rolls-Royce and parts of British Steel) and then of public utilities. The resulting wider share ownership complemented the mass sale of council houses and went some way towards breaking down the rigid British class distinction between capitalists and workers. This was deep reform attempting to change British culture, which had been moving on an anti-capitalist trajectory for many decades.

Thatcher's impact was not

confined to Britain. She was one of the big three, along with US president Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II, who confidently asserted the moral superiority of the West in the Cold War. As early as 1976, the Soviets dubbed her the 'Iron Lady'—it was a badge she wore with pride. She was also the first to realise that in Mikhail Gorbachev the Soviets had a leader with whom the West could 'do business', and Reagan was prepared to take her word for it. By the end of her time in power the Berlin Wall had fallen, although it should be noted that she opposed German reunification, one of a number of quixotic judgments which clouded her third term.

However, nothing became her as much as her final day in the Commons as prime minister in November 1990, after she had accepted that she would not fight on against her party room challengers. If ever there was a political performance combining grace, style and substance it was this one. Without any of the self-pity other recent leaders have shown in such situations, she was able to speak with pride about what she had achieved and deal light-heartedly, but decisively, with interjections from the Labour side, prompting her at one point to comment that 'I'm enjoying this.' Her opponents may not have shared her enjoyment, but helping to liberate the peoples of Eastern Europe from communist oppression and wresting control of the British economy from the trade union movement were, without doubt, profoundly beneficial to millions of people. **R**

