

# Margaret Thatcher: The Iron Lady [B2]

È stata la prima donna a ricoprire la carica di Primo Ministro del Regno Unito. La Lady di ferro ha rivoluzionato le sorti del Paese in ambito economico, sociale e politico.

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Margaret Thatcher (born in 1925 and who died in 2013) was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990. The first woman to **hold the office**, her **tenure** was marked by radical economic and social reforms, a strong foreign policy and highly-conservative principles. Thatcher's promotion of free markets, privatisation and deregulation, an ideology known as neoliberalism, left an indelible **imprint** on Britain and the world.

## CONSENSUS POLITICS

From 1945 to the late 1970s, Britain had an economic order and social model called the 'post-war consensus'. Parties **agreed** on **policies** such as full employment, heavy government regulation, high taxes, a **welfare state**, nationalisation and strong **trade unions**. Thatcher led the Conservative Party to a decisive electoral victory in May 1979 following the Winter of Discontent, five months of **devastating** widespread **strikes** by unions under the Labour government.

In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man; if you want anything done, ask a woman

## MAJOR SHIFT

Thatcher's first **term** as Prime Minister **shook** the country. She introduced strict controls on the **trade unions**, cut the top rate of **income tax** from 83 per cent to 60 per cent, introduced monetarism, made huge cuts to government spending, and dramatically reduced subsidies to manufacturers. Unemployment doubled to 2.6 million, while inflation doubled to 20 per cent. Thatcher was expected to lose the election of 1983. But in 1982,

Argentina invaded the British **Falkland Islands**, an archipelago and disputed territory in the South Atlantic Ocean. Thatcher sent an **armada** that easily defeated the **ill-prepared** Argentinian army, many of whom were as young as eighteen and **conscripted** by the military dictatorship. The British victory was widely celebrated in the UK popular press. Then, for their election campaign, Labour published a radically socialist manifesto, described by one of the party's own members as "the longest suicide note in history." It secured Thatcher a huge win, with a parliamentary majority of 144 seats. This prepared the ground for the Thatcher Revolution or Thatcherism.

## MARKET RULES

Influenced by a political approach known as neoliberalism, Thatcher **rolled back** the public sphere. She privatised state-owned industries and public services such as gas, water and electricity, offering **shares** to the public in her new "capital-owning democracy." Her Right-to-Buy **scheme** allowed **tenants** of **council properties** to buy their homes to give people more of a **stake** in society. Around 1.5 million homes were sold. Some experts **blame** Britain's current chronic housing **shortage** on Thatcher's idea. Thatcher also seriously **weakened** the unions, **curbing** their **power** and influence over government **once and for all**. Her opportunity came when the all-**powerful** National Union of Mineworkers went on strike after Thatcher announced the closure of twenty mines that she claimed were **unprofitable**. After a **bitter**, often violent, year-long dispute, the government won; **however**, many mining communities suffered badly, economically and socially.

## A GLOBAL ROLE

Thatcher played an important role on the world stage. She had a close relationship with US President Ronald Reagan. Their anti-communist **stance** put severe economic pressure on the Soviet Union, contributing to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Soviet press called Thatcher the Iron Lady. With the economy now strong, inflation low and unemployment falling, Thatcher won a historic third **term** in 1987. But trouble was **looming**. Thatcher had

spent years attacking the European Community. European plans for greater integration now infuriated her, and her anger divided her traditionally pro-European party. At the same time, she introduced a very unpopular change to local taxation, with a **poll tax** that would be the same for both rich and poor. As public protests turned violent, Conservative **MPs** moved to depose her. Thatcher **resigned** in tears on 22 November 1990. It was the end of an era.

## A LASTING LEGACY

Margaret Thatcher **recast** attitudes towards the state and the market, radically reducing the role of government and promoting individualism, entrepreneurship and wealth generation. She changed British politics forever, and her economic agenda was copied in many countries. Time magazine named her one of the 100 most important people of the 20th century. She died on 8 April 2013 and received a ceremonial funeral, including full military honours, with a church service at St. Paul's Cathedral. As a reflection of her **divisiveness**, there were parties in some cities to celebrate her death.

## THATCHERISM

Margaret Thatcher's **groundbreaking** views on economics, politics and society was quickly called Thatcherism. Very few politicians have a philosophy named after them. Thatcher inspired both love and **loathing**. To some, the Prime Minister was the saviour of her country who created a vigorous enterprise economy which **outperformed** the more regulated economies of Europe. To others, she was a **narrow** ideologue whose **harsh policies** legitimised **greed** and intentionally increased inequality, while destroying the country's sense of solidarity and civic pride.

## THE EYES OF CALIGULA, THE MOUTH OF MARILYN MONROE

British politics had always been dominated by men. The first woman was only elected to Parliament in 1918, and another eleven years passed before a

woman reached the Cabinet. Men had traditionally considered that women were unfit for politics, and often had no idea how to engage with women as equals. Winston Churchill found “a woman’s intrusion into the House of Commons as embarrassing as if she burst into my bathroom when I had nothing with which to defend myself, not even a sponge”. Thatcher was the daughter of a grocery store owner who had left school at just thirteen. She studied Chemistry at Oxford before becoming a barrister. Yet she claimed to owe almost everything to her father, who she said taught her the importance of integrity, hard work (it’s said she slept just four hours a night), self-reliance, thrift, duty and not compromising “on things that matter.” As a politician, she was tough, tougher than the men: consensus and solidarity were not priorities. She once famously said: “Who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families.” Thatcher was only the fifth woman to sit in Cabinet, yet as Prime Minister only ever appointed one woman to her own. Some commentators and politicians said this was intentional and that she was adept at exploiting her position as the solitary woman at the top. Despite her seeking advice to deepen her voice to sound more commanding, the press talked of her regularly “hand-bagging” foreign leaders, and she was often accused of megaphone or “foghorn diplomacy”. Cabinet colleagues were also chauvinistic: Jim Prior described her technique as, “A few tears occasionally, the odd tantrum, then a bit of coquetry were all permissible.” French President François Mitterrand famously claimed that, “She had the eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe”. As for the Iron Lady herself, she was “not for turning”, as she famously remarked, further stating, “I don’t mind how much my ministers talk, as long as they do what I say.”

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# Glossary

- **unfit** = inadatte
- **not for turning** = non era disposta a cambiare idea
- **term** = mandato, legislatura
- **council properties** = case popolari
- **bitter** = accanita, amara
- **odd** = occasionale
- **weakened** = indebolire
- **looming** = incombere
- **compromising** = cedere, scendere a compromessi
- **tenure** = mandato
- **blame** = incolpare
- **adept** = abile
- **divisiveness** = polarizzazione, disaccordo
- **greed** = avidità
- **conscripted** = arruolare, chiamare alle armi
- **grocery store** = negozio di alimentari
- **hand-bagging** = attaccare verbalmente
- **policies** = politiche
- **self-reliance** = autosufficienza
- **exploiting** = sfruttare
- **stake** = partecipazione
- **curbing** = limitare
- **unprofitable** = non redditizie
- **poll tax** = tassa pro capite
- **narrow** = rigida, intollerante
- **trade unions** = sindacati
- **strikes** = scioperi
- **Falkland Islands** = Isole Falkland
- **foghorn diplomacy** = diplomazia aggressiva
- **barrister** = avvocato
- **thrift** = frugalità
- **welfare state** = stato sociale
- **recast** = ridefinire

- **duty** = dovere
- **shook** = scuotere
- **ill-prepared** = impreparato
- **shares** = azioni
- **deepen** = rendere più grave
- **commanding** = autorevole
- **armada** = flotta
- **shortage** = scarsità, carenza
- **groundbreaking** = rivoluzionarie
- **appointed** = nominare
- **imprint** = segno, impronta
- **engage** = trattare, relazionarsi
- **owe** = dovere
- **rolled back** = ridurre, tagliare
- **tenants** = inquilini, affittuari
- **resigned** = dimettersi
- **stance** = posizione
- **burst into** = irrompere
- **income tax** = imposta sul reddito
- **once and for all** = una volta per tutte
- **all-powerful** = onnipotente
- **stating** = dichiarare
- **hold the office** = ricoprire la carica
- **loathing** = detestare
- **harsh** = dure, severe
- **tantrum** = capriccio
- **scheme** = programma
- **MPs** = deputati (acronimo di Member of Parliament)
- **outperformed** = superare