

Politics essays - thatcher thatcherism government



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Thatcher Thatcherism Government

'Thatcherism' is a useful term' (Nigel Lawson), Discuss.

Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, the successor to James Callaghan. From 1979 - 1990, Thatcher, to many, ruled with an 'iron fist', winning three consecutive general elections despite her popularity immensely decreasing during her first term alone. It can be said that her style of rule was anything but euphonious, given the policies she put into place in these eleven years. It was these policies and indeed Mrs. Thatcher's way of rule that have since come to be characterized by the term 'Thatcherism'.

In this essay, the issue of using 'Thatcherism' as a term shall be discussed in relation to the events that occurred throughout Margaret Thatcher's Government, from 1979 - 1990. Examining what 'Thatcherism' is characterized by, the effect Thatcher's rule had on the UK, Nigel Lawson's relationship to Thatcher and his position in politics, and of course the origins of the term 'Thatcherism', I will attempt to discuss whether or not 'Thatcherism' is indeed a useful term.

Nigel Lawson, Mrs. Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1983-89, defined 'Thatcherism' as;

"'Thatcherism' is, I believe, a useful term ... No other modern Prime Minister has given his or her name to a particular constellation of policies and values. However it needs to be used with care. The wrong definition is 'whatever Margaret Thatcher herself at any time did or said'. The right definition

involves a mixture of free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, 'Victorian values' (of the Samuel Smiles self-help variety), privatization and a dash of populism"

Lawson states that ' no other modern Prime Minister has given his or her name to a particular constellation of policies and values', however one question to ask is whether it was actually Mrs. Thatcher who lent her name to these policies or someone else?

Historically, it was Stuart Hall who famously concocted the term ' Thatcherism'. He noted that the term was in respect of the political imagery that the Conservative leader coined, ' ideological representation', if you will.

On Stuart Hall, James Proctor writes of the reasoning behind the concoction of the term ' Thatcherism', stating;

"'Thatcherism' was a term Hall coined (a ' dubious distinction' he has wryly commented) in order to elaborate on the prevailing cultural and ideological forces associated with (but not necessarily confined to) the Thatcher governments"

It must be noted at this point that Stuart Hall was not a ' Thatcherite' (a supporter of Thatcher), in fact, Hall was one of Thatcher's critics. Being of the view that ' Thatcherism' had Britain in a state of false hopes and dreams. He writes that Britain had imagined a wonderful, economically blooming state. ' Thatcherism' addressed Britain's fears and anxieties and indeed using the political imagery mentioned above, she had conquered that idiom.

So how can a term coined by one of Thatcher's biggest critics be classed as a 'useful term' by one of Thatcher's former 'Thatcherites' and what motivates one to adopt the very phrase which aims to critique Britain's first female Prime Minister? To answer this question, we must look at the policies Mrs. Thatcher introduced during her rule, and indeed the relationship between Nigel Lawson and Mrs. Thatcher.

Before Mrs. Thatcher came to power, James Callaghan headed a Labour government which faced immense difficulties. From 1974, the 'Winter of Discontent' and subsequently the British power cuts, inflation rises, strikes had eventually forced Mr. Callaghan to call an early general election following a vote of 'no confidence' from Tory leader and opposition, Margaret Thatcher. Callaghan was subsequently defeated in 1979, and the Tories came to power under Britain's first female Prime Minister.

During her first term, Mrs. Thatcher and the Tory government were faced with an exceptionally high annual inflation rate of 20 per cent - the aftermath, if you will, from Callaghan's struggling Labour government. It was Thatcher's intentions to redistribute income in favour of the rich as noted in Geoffrey Howe's tax-cutting budget of 1979. Incidentally, Thatcher's monetarist action to control the supply of money, thus raising taxes during a recession, saw unemployment in Britain shoot up from just over one million in 1979 to over 3 million by 1983. Already in just her first term, the impact of Thatcher's reign reached epic proportions. This would see the beginning of 'Thatcherism'.

In her time as Prime Minister, Thatcher's government deployed the British Military to the Falklands with a view to repossess the Islands from Argentina. The expedition was a success and soon put Mrs. Thatcher ahead in the opinion polls after a slump largely due to her monetarist actions early into her first term. It was during her second and third term that Thatcher conquered the Unions which held Britain to ransom during the winter of discontent, by introducing eight acts, including the Trade Unions Act (1984) and the Employment Acts (1980, 1982, 1988, 1989 & 1990).

Nigel Lawson was Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1983 - 1989, during which he played a part in reducing national insurance contributions and the promoting of privatization of government owned public services. It was his resignation from Thatcher's office of Exchequer that shook the Tory government, leading Thatcher to reshuffle her cabinet amidst a media frenzy on the ongoing dispute between Lawson and Thatcher's personal advisor, Alan Walters, over the economy and indeed inflation rates.

In view of this information, it seems that 'Thatcherism' equals the impact Thatcher's government had on British Society. It is also clear that Lawson deems the term, originating from the of critic Stuart Hall, as 'useful' *because* it captures the extraordinary impact Mrs. Thatcher's government had on British society.

Although this is the first time in British history that an 'ism' has been associated with an individual of power, it isn't the first time such a noun has been used to describe the policies put in place by a states leader. 'Thatcherism' can be compared to 'Reaganomics' in this sense. '

Reaganomics' refers to the most serious attempt at altering the U. S economic policy in America. In 1981, President Reagan announced his ' Program for Economic Recovery' which had four main objectives - to reduce the growth of government spending, reduce regulation, reduce the marginal tax rates on income from both labour and capital and finally to reduce inflation by controlling the growth of the money supply.

In discussing Margaret Thatcher's government, her policies, the relationship with Nigel Lawson and indeed the criticisms of Stuart Hall, we now come to ask ourselves if ' Thatcherism' really is a useful term?

Thatcher's reign as Britain's leading lady saw her party isolate trade unions from their previous close links with the government, promote the privatization of government owned public services and industry and even challenge the ' welfare state' that Britain found itself in. The redistribution of income to benefit the wealthy, the recession and indeed the ever growing unemployment rate in Britain served to see Margaret Thatcher as the ' Iron Lady', impacting in such a manner on the British people that it was only inevitable that a single term would be used to characterize this period in British politics.

As Britons, we cannot forget the strength and tough nature of Britain's first female Prime Minister, and we accept she showed immense patriotism in her efforts to bring down the miners strikes and recapture the Falklands. '

Thatcherism', much like ' Reaganomics' to the US, is a system of political thought attributed to Margaret Thatcher's rule over Britain - a period of change and an impact that ultimately undermined a general consensus that

had existed in British politics for a very long time. It is therefore a conclusion that 'Thatcherism' is indeed a useful term, Thatcher's reign is a philosophy, and much like all philosophies before and after it, requires a word which conjures up the imagery associated with the period - 'Thatcherism'.