

# Thatchers conflict with the trade unions politics essay



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The conflict with the trade unions played a significant part in relation to Margaret Thatcher's resignation, in November 1990, however there are other reasons which led to her fall in November 1990. The main issues that occurred were that Mrs. Thatcher's hostility towards the European Union which caused division within the Conservative Party and a European diplomatic crisis and the introduction of poll tax.

Mrs. Thatcher was committed to reducing the trade unions power because she believed " their leadership was undermining parliamentary democracy and economic performance"[1]. A view also shared by Walsh-Atkins who stated that before Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister, the Trade Unions had " a high and possibly damaging influence on the economy."[2]Collins and Seldon state Thatcher " was determined to prove that it was she and not the NUM that ruled Britain"[3]. This shows the trade unions influence over how the country was run and Thatcher was determined to reduce the unions' power. The miners' strike in March 1984 was the climax of confrontation between the unions and Thatcher's government. The strike was ordered without a national ballot. However, Lynch states " Scargill's NUM never had any real hope of success"[4]as the strike was " weakened by breakaway miners who remained at work, and the refusal of key unions, such as power-station workers, to join the struggle."[5]Eventually, the miners lost the British public's support due to the violence and economic crisis the strikes caused. Thatcher states " The Battles at Orgreave had an enormous impact and did a great deal to turn public opinion against the miners"[6]. Also backed by Walsh-Atkins stating " polls had revealed the public to be strongly anti-Scargill"[7]a view also supported by Lynch stating " public opinion became

largely pro-government"[8]. Eventually the National Union of Miners conceded defeat and mines closed. This strike boosted public opinion for Thatcher's government and improved relationships with the TUC. The Sunday Times states " The memory was still fresh of Mrs Thatcher's commitment to defeat with the enemy within"[9]and that " The polls showed throughout that most people rejected Scargill's interpretation of what was at stake"[10]and shows this was not the main reason for Mrs Thatcher's downfall in 1990.

Running Word Count: 560Mrs Thatcher had a very hostile approach to the EU, her views and entire debate on the EU was to arouse " huge controversy"[11]during her premiership, her views subsequently began to question her leadership, playing a key part in her fall in 1990. In 1986, when the Single European Act was signed, against Mrs. Thatcher's policies of trying to denominated the " neoliberal revolution"[12]. Throughout her premiership, she was strongly against European integration and was determined " to reduce the British contribution to the ECC budget"[13]. In 1987 " she had agreed to something that went against what she hoped for the UK"[14]and Walsh-Watkins states " other key figures in the party.... were obviously moving in a different direction."[15]The Single European Act was to divide the Conservative Party and the country even more. Mrs. Thatcher had an " out-and-out policy against advancements in European integration"[16]; however Walsh-Watkins states that " what she argued for was a 'willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign nations'"[17]. In October 1990, Thatcher was persuaded to join the Exchange Rate Mechanism by Lawson, Lowes and Major. It led to 'Black Wednesday' and economic disaster

on 16th September 1992 leading to Britain humiliatingly withdrawing from the Exchange Rate Mechanism in late 1992. As a result of her European policies, in 1990, " her cabinet was divided over the issues including the European Community"[18]. The relationship between the party and PM was edgy as most Conservatives didn't support Mrs. Thatcher's ideas or views, commonly referred to as Thatcherism. This view is shared by Vinen who states " European policy distance her from the two men who had been most influential in her governments during the 1980's - Howe and Lowes."[19]Howe later resigned from office after Mrs. Thatcher refused to join the Euro, and Thatcher lost support as Howe was a key political figure in the Conservative party. Howe's resignation is seen " as the key catalyst for the leadership challenge of Michael Heseltine .... as well as Thatcher's subsequent resignation."[20]This view is also shared by Seldon and Collings who state " Howe's departure made even loyal Tory MPs feel that perhaps she had to go now.[21]Howe's resignation speech is " seen as an invitation for others to come forward and challenge her"[22]This speech was seen by many Conservative MPs as having " witnessed the undoing of the Prime Minister."[23]Therefore, the issues regarding Europe are seen as the main reason for Thatcher's fall.

Running Word Count: 1, 213The introduction of the poll tax, or community charge, in 1990 created civil unrest in Britain. Mass riots occurred in Central London on 31st March 1990 and support for the government dropped significantly " when opinion polls were showing 2% support"[24]Conservative MP's joined the demonstrations against setting poll tax limits and against poll tax generally. As demonstrations unfolded, " speculation developed for the

first time about Thatcher's position as leader"[25]. This view is also shared by Charmley stating the poll tax riots " had echoes of the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, which threatened to dethrone the Monarch; there were echoes of that in a contemporary situation, too, with Mrs Thatcher now cast in the role of Richard II"[26]. One of the PM's closest advisors, Nigel Lawson, hated the idea of poll tax because he believed it put people " into the tax system"[27]rather than taking people out and Michael Heseltine " walked out of the cabinet on another issues minutes before it was due to endorse the poll tax"[28]. Heseltine later voted against the implementation of poll tax in England. After the implementation of poll tax, Vinen states " Sir Anthony Meyer announced that he would challenge"[29]Thatcher's position as Prime Minister. He became anti-Thatcher due to Mrs. Thatcher's anti-Europe views. Michael Heseltine also launched a leadership challenge against Mrs. Thatcher but lost by 52 votes (204-152) but Gibson states " in the actual election contest Europe became relegated to a minor role and domestic issues, especially the poll tax, emerged as much more important"[30]and thus the leadership challenge led to Mrs. Thatcher's resignation and therefore shows that poll tax was the main reason for Mrs. Thatcher's resignation in 1990. This view is reinforced by Lynch who states this " created fury in the country at large, provided a cause around her opponents rallied and alienated some of the Conservative Party's staunchest supporters"[31]this is evident as Gibson states in the parliamentary by-elections in Eastbourne, where the Conservatives had " a majority of 16, 923 in 1987"[32], the Conservatives lost the by-election to the " Liberal Democrats on a 20% swing"[33]. Lynch further states that the poll tax was " to destroy her position"[34]as PM, along with Britain's relationship with Europe, Gibson also states that " could the <https://assignbuster.com/thatchers-conflict-with-the-trade-unions-politics-essay/>

government, in this case, simply made a mistake?"[35]thus showing that questions about Thatcher's leadership was under question therefore, shows that poll tax played a big part in Mrs. Thatcher's resignation later on in November 1990.

The Falklands War was a pivotal moment in Thatcher's premiership, putting Britain's foreign relations to the test and Vinen states that " Sir Henry Leach"[36]the most senior Royal Navy officer said that if Britain didn't re-capture the Falklands, Britain would " be living in a very different country whose word means nothing"[37]which implies that Foreign relations would become complex. When Britain declared war with Argentina it caused a diplomatic crisis, with the EEC and United Nations giving its support to Britain, announcing " economic sanctions against Argentina"[38], straining Britain's foreign affairs. However, when Britain reclaimed the Falklands Mrs. Thatcher's support was at its highest and Baker states " by transforming the spirit of the nation the Falklands war also transformed the spirit and fortunes of the Government"[39]therefore, the outcome of the war helped Mrs. Thatcher to win the 1983 elections. This view is supported by Sergeant who states " the success of the Falklands War helped produce a landslide for Mrs Thatcher in 1983."[40]Lynch agrees stating " The reward for her leadership during the Falklands crisis came in the 1983 election"[41]therefore, clearly showing that the Falklands War was not behind Mrs Thatcher's downfall in 1990.

Running Word Count: 1, 909To conclude based on the evidence, I think that the conflict with the trade unions was not the main reason for Margaret

Thatcher's fall and that the introduction of the poll tax, in 1990, was the cause of her fall.