

***** Problématique**

Thatcher tries to vindicate the policies of her government by defending the necessity of reducing state intervention as the only way to build a new Britain where the individual would come first.

***** Part 1**

defending the main achievement of her government: economic recovery

economic and social policies are intertwined: to defend the latter, Thatcher insists on how her economic reforms have brought a “surge of prosperity”

1.1. MT attacks the previous governments (Labour and Conservative) which failed to address the economic crisis

- “If socialism had produced economic success” (1.9)
- “Some Conservatives were always tempted to appease the Left’s social arguments” (1.16)
- MT attacks the Keynesian model and the post-war consensus (cf. CM the results of the consensus according to Thatcher)

1.2. MT’s alternative economic model

- “free enterprise capitalism” (1.4) > deregulation and privatization (cf. CM)
- results: “creat[ing] jobs and rais[ing] living standards” (1.4)

***** Transition:** criticisms informed by the idea that any form of state intervention equates socialism

***** Part 2**

the damaging effects of socialism

throughout the text, MT tries to justify her social policies by proposing a new definition of the concept of society

2.1. the failure of socialism

- MT responds to those who have criticized the consequences of her policies: “causing the weak to be marginalized, homelessness to grow, communities to break down” (1.6)
- “socialism had failed” (1.9)
- “socialism [...] played on the worst aspects of human nature” (1.11)

2.2. what is a society? individuals

- “There are individual men and women, and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people” (1.29)
- condemnation of collectivist ideals that led people to believe that society and therefore governments were responsible for social problems and therefore had a duty to provide welfare to ensure social justice
- “I am an individualist” (1.35): key tenet of Thatcherism = individualism > individual accountability

2.3. the Welfare State is responsible for having created generations of dependent people

- “the confusion of society with the state as the helper of first resort” (1.34) > WS rewards people who live on social benefits instead of living on the fruit of their own labour and individual effort
- the influence of American political thinkers: the “underclass” (not to be confused with the working class) and the vicious circle of the “dependency culture” (1.40)

*** **Transition:** such an assessment of the consequences of the social dimension of the post-war consensus finds an echo in the Victorian model

*** Part 3

the relevance of the Victorian model

throughout the text, MT insists on the importance of tradition as a social reference

this is the reason why she severely condemns “socialism” for having “subject[ed] traditional values to sustained derision” (1.150)

3.1. TM’s vision of Victorian Britain

- why such a fascination with this period in British history
- “voluntary and charitable societies” (1.45): distinctive feature of the upper-middle class’ ethos; individual initiatives instead of State intervention

3.2. Victorian values

- values: self-help
- “deserving” v. “undeserving poor” (1.50)

3.3. MT’s vision of social policies

error of the post-war consensus: “we had failed to remember the distinction” (1.54-55)

“the purpose of help must [...] be [...] to restore their self discipline” (1.56)

*** Conclusion: exemple (un peu long mais reprend les idées essentielles sur le Thatcherisme) tiré de *Civilisation britannique: Le Commentaire par l'exemple*, Anémone Kober-Smith et Timothy Whitton (éds.), Editions du Temps, 2002.

Conclusion

Margaret Thatcher has often been criticised for her so-called social policies which is probably a mistake for there is no getting round the fact that she hardly implemented any at all, a decision that moreover she justified. First of all because her Conservative Party had a purely economic approach to society. Secondly because Margaret Thatcher never believed in the thesis of the accountability of society and therefore could not accept that it should be up to the Government to fight social inequalities. In her view, the Welfare State was a purely socialist invention, and it was held responsible for both the recession and what she considered as the problem of the emergence of a dependency culture. Thus, if ever any social policy was willingly introduced in the eleven years Margaret Thatcher was in office, it was in relation to this belief only. She wanted to reduce the dependency culture by restoring the incentive to work. In this respect she failed because poverty more than trebled in the years between 1979 and 1990, and dependency with it. This increase also compromised her economic achievements.

In the eleven years they were in power, the Thatcher governments did not manage to keep inflation under control and a new and very severe recession started in the late 1980s. Although its causes were numerous, some of them were to be found in the decision not to implement specific policies to tackle poverty, which led to an increase rather than a reduction in government spending. Indeed, all of her economic policies were built around the belief that the single most important priority was to cut government spending. But despite drastic reductions in social benefits, the budget allotted to the Welfare State kept increasing simply because the number of people needing help also increased. Unemployment which soared in the first few years Margaret Thatcher was in office was arguably the main culprit. Although she was not directly responsible for the decline in the manufacturing industry that caused much of it, her governments were very reluctant to take strong action to try and solve the problem. And for a very good reason. The policy that consisted in tackling unemployment through state intervention and an increase in government demand was exactly what the Conservative party condemned so virulently. Besides high unemployment also weakened trade union influence which fitted in perfectly with the governments' plans to deregulate the labour market.

Thus the rehabilitation of the economy (and notably the creation of an environment conducive to promoting employment) did not prove to be enough. Most of the jobs that were on offer in the second half of the 1980s were highly skilled and many low-skilled industrial workers who had been made redundant in the 1970s and early 1980s did not qual-

ify. With insufficient investment in education, in training for poorly qualified workers and in the Welfare State for those most in need, Margaret Thatcher trapped the new poor into poverty, failed to reduce the dependency culture and undermined the positive effects of her economic strategy.

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