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**Sujet
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Margaret Thatcher's legacy is one of devastation

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<https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/margaret-thatchers-legacy-is-one-of-devastation>

Forty years after Margaret Thatcher came to power, coalfield communities like mine are still dealing with the fallout of her government's actions. But despite this the potential of our people and places persists, writes Barnsley Central MP Dan Jarvis

Britain's coalfield communities powered the industrial revolution and created much of the national wealth upon which the UK economy was built. Margaret Thatcher's impact upon these communities was devastating, and to this day my constituents' reaction to her name remains overwhelmingly visceral and unforgiving.

Thatcher's rise to power came at a highly contested period of our country's history. Despite high inflation and widespread economic and social inequality, the majority of the baby boomer generation were more socially mobile and had better financial prospects than any generation before or since. And, although imperfect, coalfield communities like those of Barnsley were productive and had economic purpose.

Then, in 1979, Margaret Thatcher was elected to office, broke with the post-war Keynesian consensus, and ushered in an era of neo-liberalism. Hers was an ideology of privatisation, deregulation, the primacy of the free market, the abdication of societal responsibility, and a reduced role for the state – one focused only on minimising inflation and enabling capitalists and capitalism. It is an ideology to which, unfortunately and mistakenly, many still adhere.

Throughout Thatcher's entire time in office, for only two years (1987 and 1988) did the UK exceed the economic growth witnessed under Callaghan in 1978; for only two years (1988 and 1989) did she run a budgetary surplus; and never once did she reduce unemployment to a level below that of even the highest level of unemployment experienced by the post-war Labour governments that preceded her.

Yet despite the lack of evidence of any positive macroeconomic impact of her time in office, Thatcherite economics remains mistakenly lauded.

The negative impact of her government is far easier to identify and can still be seen in the long-term structural issues present today. Issues that include growing inequality, the over reliance of our economy on a poorly regulated financial sector (and our resultant over exposure to the 2007-8 crash), and also the north-south income, wealth, power and productivity gaps that harm both our economy and our society.

From the reduced expectations of the multi-generationally unemployed, to the social isolation that a lack of community services brings, to the paucity of opportunities for both our young people and those who want to change career – 40 years after Thatcher came to power, I see first-hand that in Barnsley we are still dealing with the consequences of her actions.

In coalfield communities like mine, Thatcher's legacy is one of devastation. For her, defeating the miners and destroying the industry that employed them was both personal and political. It wasn't just their jobs she took; it was their sense of purpose and professional pride.

And it wasn't just the coal industry she was attacking; it was the communities centred on it. Once referring to the miners as the "enemy within", the way Thatcher treated them and their families was unconscionable.

Rather than stimulating alternative employment and reskilling these communities, Thatcher's government just destroyed the industries, walked away and – in order to massage the unemployment figures – pushed many job seekers on to disability benefits.

Thatcher's policies precipitated increased spending on social security benefits not only during the years immediately after the pits closed, but also the decades since. Reduced regional employment opportunities and increased dependency remain a central aspect of Margaret Thatcher's legacy.

Communities like those I serve as both a mayor and an MP, have never had the help they need or the resources they deserve; 18 years of Tory government created such decline that it took over a decade of revenue redistribution under Labour just to arrest it.

But the lack of structural reform during the noughties has meant that it has taken just nine years of ideologically driven austerity – consistently hitting the poorest communities the hardest – for this Conservative government to have undone nearly all the previous Labour government’s work.

The uncomfortable truth, for all democratic socialists, is that by not dealing with structural inequalities in either power or wealth, New Labour failed to future-proof the progress we made.

For 40 years – and under Conservative, Labour and coalition governments – the UK’s economic strategy has been too focused on the financial industry, too city-centric, too laissez-faire, and too dependent on the hope that wealth would trickle down and prosperity would ripple out.

This has failed coalfield communities like mine but, despite this, the potential of our people and places persists.

If we are now to unlock this potential, we must see Thatcherism for what it is – a failed experiment. We must return to the post-war consensus of social responsibility and Keynesian economics, and we must strengthen the capacity of our regions to drive economic growth in a way that is responsive to local needs.

As we prepare for the future – and for life beyond Brexit – all our regions and nations must be given the opportunity to distance themselves from both Thatcher’s legacy and her ideology; building a future that leaves no one behind.

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