Anarcho
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July 20, 2008

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While something to oppose, suggestions of a state funeral for Thatcher seem fitting as neo-liberalism implodes around us. Nationalising her death seems an ideal insult. It also shows how bankrupt and Thatcherite New Labour is — as if we needed more evidence!

Thatcher: Putting the fun back into funeral

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When I saw the headline on the front page of the Mail on Sunday that Thatcher could be having a state funeral, I was quite disgusted. That this story was published with the consent of No 10, it simply reinforced the obvious fact that New Labour really is the child of Thatcherism – and how bankrupt it is. However, when I thought about it I started to think that in a way it would be a fitting testimony of a bankrupt ideology which has failed, and failed big time. After all, as a firm advocate of privatisation and "market forces" the fact that her funeral is to be nationalised is a shocking insult to her political legacy and memory. Surely, it should be privatised? Shares sold to raise funs for a private event, with private individuals refusing to coerce their neighbours into marking the death so many of them are looking forward to?

What could be more symbolic than Thatcher's death being marked by means of the state, using tax-payers money? Not, I must hasten to add, that I think we should have a state funeral for the evil woman. In spite of its wonderful irony, such a nationalised event would still cost money and that is money bet-

ter spent on, say, the NHS rather than allowing us an opportunity (if we really needed one!) to sign ***"Ding, Dong the wicked witch is dead"*** with gusto! It could, however be moot as there are fears that Britain's overstretched armed forces would not have the numbers to line the route which a coffin. Particularly as many attendees would be seeking to make sure she is actually dead.

Apparently the funeral would acknowledge the exceptional impact of her 11-year premiership. If by "exceptional" it is meant "exceptional in its badness", then they may have a point. Somewhat fittingly, Thatcher has lived to see her experiment on the British people come off the rails. Soaring utility bills show that privatising Gas, Electricity and Water may have been good for "the City", but it did not guarantee low bills for consumers. The "dash for gas" part of the Tories politically motivated assault on the miners has back-fired. Then there was the abolishing of credit control, which allowed the economy to boom somewhat (just in time for an election) before that consumer spending bubble burst, resulting in her second deep recession. Now, again, people are worried about debts and negative equity. Still, "the City" did well, and that is what really counts.

Workers are grumbling about inflation outstripping pay raises, with more and more saying that their income has remained static for too long. Cries of *"rip-off Britain"* have become commonplace, with the competitive market being recognised as little more than competition in whom among the few will exploit the many the most. With the unions weakened, this is not surprising. Without the ability to take collective action, workers are seeing more of the wealth they produce appropriated by their economic masters. And who "tamed" the unions, so producing their situation? Thatcher. Even the likes of **the Sun** are moaning about *"fat cat"* pay, forgetting that it was Thatcher that widened the gap between rich and poor while, of course, opposing (like Thatcher) the

only means of combating inequality, namely strikes and unions. And as inequality soared, social mobility has fallen – as would be expected, given that it is far easier to climb a hill than a mountain.

Rest assured, when the statistics office started to show how bad things were getting Thatcher acted quickly – and stopped them collecting and publishing them (for example, the figures on individual wealth and earnings). Still, easy credit (i.e., debt) and housing bubbles allowed the so-called middle-classes to maintain the illusion of wealth while being squeezed along with the rest of us to make the rich wealthier. And as an added bonus, debt also trapped those that unable to live within their means into the system by making their livelihood increasingly dependent on not rocking the boat. Taking strike action is much less appealing when faced with paying the mortgage or credit card bills.

While the tax-share under New Labour is high, it has not quite reached the record level achieved under Thatcher. Talking of taxation, she loved making it regressive. Under her, VAT increased from 8% to 17.5% and was also levied on utility bills for the first time. Her cuts in income tax for the rich were paid for by rising indirect taxation on the rest of us. The proportion of GDP spent by the government under Thatcher stayed at around 40%, yet she funnelled it away from welfare, housing and education and spending it on warfare, a massive expansion of the central state powers and bureaucracy, paying for the costs of high unemployment, and rising police salaries to keep them loyal. P

ensioners are up in arms, urging that the link with salaries be reintroduced. Thatcher broke it. Tax-payers are grumbling about taxes, yet who was it who doubled VAT and put it on essentials? The sublime irony of the Tories opposing New Labour's extension of student fees should not be lost on anyone who remembers who introduced them in the first place. New Labour has raised the notion that people

in negative-equity could have their houses bought by the council, with them becoming a tenant, simply because there is not enough social housing available. Thus Thatcher's "right to buy" council houses has come unstuck, along with the housing-bubble which gave the illusion of prosperity first in the late 1980s and then a decade later.

Will that be allowed? Only with central state approval, given the awkward fact that local councils have had their powers reduced by Thatcher's hatred of local democracy and her aim to centralise everything in Whitehall and unelected Quangoes to stop people stopping the free market by voting the wrong way between general elections. Then there is the awkward fact that much that is wrong with to-day's Britain in social terms can be traced back to the values she promoted so strongly during her time as prime minister. The breakdown in families and communities is the logical result of market forces becoming paramount, along with the notion that there is *"no such thing as society."* And who said that again? Oh, that would have been Thatcher. And now, 29 years too late, the Tories have discovered that jobs are the key to a stable family life!

Then there is the recent media campaign on "broken Britain" and rising crime. Unsurprisingly, Cameron has not mentioned that crime rates doubled under Thatcher – which is understandable, as the Tories like to consider themselves strong on law and order. Yet, as with the economy, this "strength" does not survive a meeting with reality. For those who were paying attention, the 1980s were marked by high unemployment, high interest rates, high inflation, mass bankruptcies and home repossessions. This was achieved, in part, by the ideological embrace of Monetarism, the disastrous policy of trying to control the money supply. This helped produce the deepest recession since the 1930s, with one fifth of the UK's industrial base being wiped out and unemployment rose to its highest level since World War II, with prolonged mass unemployment for over a decade (and best not mention the pushing of the long term unemployed onto disability benefits and other tricks to artificially lower the figures).

Thatcher was great for the minority at the expense of the majority. If she is to be buried anywhere, it should be under an open-air disco so we can dance on her grave. And the cost would be minimal as there are plenty of people willing to do it for nothing.