13. The Thatcher governments

Thatcher as leader

Character:
- Conviction politician = follows policies based on own beliefs.
- Dismissive of Post-War consensus.
- Middle class background- daughter of grocer.
  - Self-reliance/improvement central to upbringing- influenced her political beliefs.
  - Outsider- not traditional Tory background- suburban/from trade/a women.

Ideology:
- Based on some traditional Conservative thinking e.g. Tory intellectuals such as Powell.
- Thatcher’s own political/social instincts.
- New Right think tanks/academics.
  - Rejected Keynesian economics- favoured monetarism/free-market economics.
  - Encouraged individuals to take responsibility for own actions.
- Emphasised order in society- family central to this.
  - Thatcher ‘Who is society? There is no such thing as that!’/‘There are individual men + women + families.’
  - Supportive of police/tough on law + order issues.
  - Mid-1980s- accusations police become politicised especially industrial disputes.

 Ministers

‘Wets’ = derisive nickname to Tories Thatcher regarded as soft about social consequences of Monetarism.
  - Stood against Thatcher in 2nd ballot 1975- 79 votes against Thatcher’s 146.
  - Natural consensus politics/doubted Thatcher’s judgement.
- Heseltine- Westland affair- damaged Thatcher’s image/showed not always an effective manager of her cabinet.
  - Over whether US or European-led consortium should take over Britain’s last remaining helicopter company.
  - Major power struggle between Thatcher & Heseltine/highlighted deep divisions about role of government in economic decisions.
  - Heseltine favoured/ Thatcher authorised company permitted confidential legal advice from Attorney General to be leaked in press to discredit Heseltine?
  - Heseltine stormed out of cabinet/resigned.
- Prior- employment minister.
  - Disagreed with Thatcher over anti-union legislation/ believed too friendly with Trade Unions.
  - Demoted- moved to Northern Ireland 1981/replaced by Tebbit.
  - Resigned 1984- quick to attack Thatcher’s early government.

‘Dries’ = nickname to Tories who were firm in their support for Monetarism.
- Howe- Chancellor of Exchequer.
  - Longest serving cabinet minister.
  - Resigned over government’s policy towards Europe/Thatcher’s downfall.
- Lawson- Chancellor of Exchequer 1983-89

Internal Labour divisions/formation of SDP
- 1979-83 Labour came close to political oblivion.
- Contest for deputy leadership 1981- Healey (more moderate) + Foot (Left-Wing)- Healey won.
- 1981 key personalities broke away to form new party = SDP.
  - Leaders of new SDP/28 Labour MPs followed- felt driven out by extremists taking over Labour.
  - Impact on national policies:
    - Williams won sensational by-election in Conservative seat Crosby Nov 1981.
    - March 1982- Jenkins won Glasgow Hillhead.
15. Impact of Thatcherism on society

Sale of council houses
- 1980-Housing Act- gave tenants right to buy their council house.
  ⇒ Discount 33-50% depending on length of time had lived there.
  ⇒ 100% mortgages.

Aims:
- Gain popularity from working class (usually voted Labour).
- Create property owning democracy.
- Ideological battle to bring down T
- Labour initially opposed but 1985 dropped opposition due to popularity especially in south.
- 1982- over 100,000 council houses sold annually.
- 1983- government made £1.9b- brought in revenue.
- Good for social mobility.
- Sale- predominantly better-off areas- little impact on less desirable estates (North).
- Number + quality available for rent reduced sharply/waiting lists grew/rent prices rose.
- Many housed in B + B accommodation- expensive/unsuitable for families.
- Councils ordered to use sales profit to reduce debt not build houses.
- Divisions within working class- those able to climb up social ladder v those falling further into poverty.

Miners’ strikes and other industrial disputes
- 1984 NCB announced 20 pit closures (Scargill claimed secret plan was actually 70).
  ⇒ Coal stocks built up at power stations.
- 1984-85 Miner’s strike- Thatcher called them ‘enemy within’.
- 1984- unions put under pressure to hold ballots before strike action called.
- 1984 June- Battle of Orgreave- 8000 police v 5000 miners.

Causes:
- NCB announce 20 pits closed 1984- lost 20,000 jobs.
- Scargill- militant Left Wing (Marxism)- president of NUM.
  ⇒ Ideological battle to bring down T
- Thatcher called them ‘enemy within’.
  ⇒ Presented as a revolution- trade-union led picketing workers in London to overthrow the ruling class.
- Thatcher aimed to destroy Post-War consensus of government + Trade Unions working together.
  ⇒ Closing down unprofitable coal pits fitted with Free Market economic/small government ideas.

Tactics of miners:
- ‘Flying pickets’- striking miners transported to working pit to protest to intimidate workers to join.
- Physical confrontations- by April 1984 4 in 5 miners striking.
- Scargill focused on saving coal pits/communities.

Tactics of government:
- Thatcher started stock piling coal at power stations- learnt from Heath’s mistakes.
- National Coal Board working with Lawson (energy secretary) for 2 years.
- Used police to protect working miners/control strikers- retrained/full riot gear.
- Labelled ‘enemy within’ to turn public against.
- Thatcher appointed MacGregor to run NCB (he had a fierce reputation as union buster in US ‘Mac the knife’).

Outcomes:
- Spring strike- coal not so much of necessity and only ¼ UK energy from coal so was easier to withstand.
- Kinnock (Labour) refused to lend strikers support as Scargill hadn’t balloted miners- lacked moral authority/legitimacy.
- Overall 70,000 miners balloted in run-up to dispute but 50,000 voted to keep working.
- Scargill’s alienated moderates/never got Labour support/demonised in press.
- Mines closed down- end of deep coal mining- devastating for large areas in the North/Wales
  ⇒ Economic realignment- industrial to post-industrial- private businesses/white collar.