Governing the United Kingdom since 1945

Margaret Thatcher and the post-war consensus

Document 1

The end of the post-war consensus

[...] For more than a generation now, people have been telling us that Socialism was inevitable. We've been told time and time again by experts that the drift is bound to be towards state control, [...] Change is coming. The slide to the socialist state is going to be stopped [...]. Labour, the self proclaimed party of compassion, has betrayed those for whom it promised to care. After five years of Labour Government, our cities and streets are less safe to walk in, our old folk and children more at risk. [...]

The Labour leader argued that Labour now stood for continuity. It was the Conservatives who wanted to change things, he said. [...] Well, what appals us is Labour’s shameless appeal to voters to accept our national decline as inevitable [...] Travel abroad, and see how much better our neighbours are doing.

Document 2

The victory of the conservative party in 1987

Kevin Kallaugher, Sunday Telegraph, 04 October 1987
Margaret Thatcher and the post-war consensus

Introduction

> These two documents deal with the relation of M. Thatcher with the post-war consensus, which was an approbation by the conservative party of the welfare state build by the Labour after the WWII.
> The document 1 : an extract from a speech of MT in 1979 before her first victory at the general elections. The document 2 : a cartoon drawn in 1987 which denounces the destruction of the welfare state due to another victory of the conservative party.
> We will try to understand why MT was so hostile to the welfare state ?

I/ The enemies of MT : socialism and british decline

> As we can read in the document 1 : "people have been telling us that Socialism was inevitable". She wants to denounce the labour as a socialist party, why ? For her socialist ideas lead to a rising involvement of state in daily life, in economy, society, education, housings... As a liberal from the New Right she considers that as a negation of freedom. In 1979, the cold war is not over, denouncing Labour as a socialist party is an harsh denunciation at that time.

> According to MT, the Labour policy leads to an unsafe country (l.6-7) and to a "national decline". Indeed, in the seventies, the British economy weakened a lot in comparison to other european powers as France or Germany. For MT, this is due to the welfare state which leads to important social spendings and taxes and decreased national competitiveness.

III/ MT’s goal : the welfare state’s decline

> On the document 2, an old woman is crossing the road. She pulls a carriage where it’s written "welfare state", while a huge demonstration of conservatives led by MT walks on her. It shows that MT wants to destroy welfare state. The old woman who embodies retired people who are weakened by MT policy. The cartoon denounces this policy. MT wants to put an end to the post-war consensus, and so, to the welfare state which is a system of solidarity protecting people from cradle to grave... That’s why she denounced the Labour, which created the welfare state, as the “self proclaimed party of compassion”.

> For MT, the welfare state leads to a "state control" as she suggests that in the document 1. For her socialist ideas lead to a state control of economy, and as a liberal she wants a free economy, she said “towards a state control" but she didn’t speak openly of the welfare state. That’s why she nationalised many state’s industries and cuts in social spendings (ex : sold social housings in mass). She was supported by British people as the document 2 shows it. She won 4 general elections.

Conclusion

> For MT, the welfare state is the embodiment of the socialist ideology of the Labour which is responsible for the national decline of the seventies.
> The harsh policy of MT is not contested by the British as showed her victories at the general elections as the document 2 shows it. It denounces at the same time the MT policy against the welfare state and the popular support she had.
**Part 1 : questions de cours (4 points)**
1/ What is the Establishment ?
2/ Why did the power of the British state decline since the 1990ies ?

**Part 2 : exercice type baccalauréat (16 points)**

The National Health Service : symbol of the Welfare state

**Document 1**

Let me for a moment take the subject which we have so much debated, the Health Service. People talk about a “free” service. It is not free. You have to pay for it. [...] This year, the Health Service is costing over £15,000 million—half the total yield of income tax. The Health Service has one million employees. It is the largest employer in Europe. It really is our job to see that it is managed properly.

I pay tribute, as we all do, to those doctors, nurses and others who work so hard to keep up the standards of care. We are all grateful for the great advances in public health since the war: the continuing decline in child mortality, the virtual eradication of diseases like diphtheria and tuberculosis, and the miraculous new techniques of surgery.

But every human institution can be improved. I reject totally the Socialist view that the most efficient organisation is the one that employs the largest number.

*Margaret Thatcher’s speech to Conservative Party Conference, 14 October 1983*
Introduction

> These documents deal with the National Health Service which provides health insurance for everybody for free in the UK, it’s an important symbol of the welfare state which tries to protect people from cradle to grave since the end of the second world war.
> The first document is a leaflet issued from the Ministry of Health which explains briefly how works the NHS at its very beginning in 1948. The extracts of the MT’s speech are criticizing the cost of NHS and especially the number of civil servants working for it.
> These two documents will help us to answer to the following question : to what extent the NHS embodies the debate about the welfare state from the post-war to the eighties ?

I/ The NHS : from a social improvement...

> The document 1 speaks about “a service for everyone – rich and poor man”. It’s typical from the Labour government of this period which got to power by promising a new society where the action of the state will lead to a decreasing gap between rich and poor people.

> Even MT, who is hostile to the welfare state is forced to recognize its successes when she said “We are all grateful for the great advances in public health since the war” (document 1). This behaviour is typical from the post-war consensus which means that for years the Conservative party support the WS (and the NHS) even if it was a Labour’s improvement.

II/... to an expensive service.

> But the NHS is more and more contested for its cost. MT represents this feeling when she says that “This year, the Health Service is costing over £15,000 million—half the total yield of income tax”.

According to her, the tax level is too high and she wants to decrease it, so the cost of the NHS is in contradiction with her policy. It’s a symbol of the Labour, which is its opponent, and she considered as a Socialist, as she said in the document 2 (l. 11).

> The NHS is financed by taxes and at the very beginning the British are told that it’s not for free because “you are all paying for it, mainly as taxpayers” as the document 1 shows. But according to MT in the document 2, “People talk about a “free” service” as if people forgeted with time where money came from.

> The number of people working for the NHS is denounced by MT when she speaks about “the largest employer in Europe”. Her goal is to decrease the size of the state which is too big for her and leads to a lack of competitiveness for Britain... and explains the decline of the country.

Conclusion

> These two documents show very well the evolution of the behaviour towards the NHS and the welfare state. Considered as a social improvement its reputation declined and the NHS is more and more see as an expensive service.
> But at the same time, MT was unable to suppress the NHS because this service was very popular... and it still exists today.