



The Lesson of Margaret Thatcher's Demise and the Brexit Vote

"No, no, no!" British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (shown) told the House of Commons on October 30, 1990, to a proposal for a more centralized government in Europe.



European Commission President Jacques Delors had announced his support for centralizing power in Europe, away from national governments such as the United Kingdom. He proposed that the European Parliament become the "democratic" body of the European Community, with the Commission as the executive and the Council of Ministers the senate.

Thatcher completely rejected the idea of a European super-state, which would have seriously curtailed the national sovereignty of Great Britain. Despite her having led the Conservative Party to its longest tenure of power in decades, by winning three national elections, she almost immediately faced a rebellion and ouster within her own party.

What happened to Thatcher demonstrates the immense power of the elites who favor globalization.

In Britain's system, the voters do not select the prime minister. They vote for the House of Commons, and the majority party's leader then becomes prime minister. As a formality, the monarch, then as now Queen Elizabeth II, asks the leader of the majority party to be her "prime minister," and thus the head of the government.

Thatcher was not defeated at the polls, but was overthrown by members of her own party who favored greater integration with Europe. The Conservative Party replaced Thatcher with someone who would go along with a centralized European control, diminishing the sovereignty of the United Kingdom.

Margaret Thatcher had become a champion of the free market long before she entered politics, attending lunches of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), a think tank that promoted the economic views of Friedrich Hayek. She came to believe that the implementation of Keynesian economics was the source of much of England's economic woes, and instead favored less government, lower taxes, and more freedom for business.

In 1975, she challenged Prime Minister Edward Heath for leadership of the Conservative Party, and defeated him, going on to become prime minister herself when the party won the 1979 general election. Once in power, Thatcher moved to free the British economy from many stifling government regulations, emphasizing privatization. She was reelected in 1983 and again in 1987.

In her early years in office, Thatcher supported British inclusion in the European Economic Community (EEC), campaigning for staying in during a 1975 referendum. Over time, however, she became increasingly hostile to the growing power of the European trade union. As her biographer, Charles



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on June 30, 2016

Moore, explained, “She was fiercely against monetary and economic union and the euro — and very opposed to political union. She felt Britain would be better off if it kept a distance from all of this.”

During a speech in Bruges in 1988, she announced her opposition to proposals from the European Community for a federal structure, with increased centralization of decision making. She expressed fear that their proposals were at odds with smaller government and deregulation, declaring, “We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.”

In Luxembourg, Thatcher took issue with the idea that the European Community should become a “United States of Europe.” She opposed ceding any more power to European institutions, stating that such a government in Europe would be a “nightmare.” She pointed to the example of the Soviet Union as a government that tried to run everything from the center. On the contrary, she argued, “success depends upon dispersing power and decisions away from the center.”

Thatcher had signed the Single European Act, which created a single European market, during her tenure as prime minister — an act she came to regret. In her later years, she campaigned against Britain’s exchanging the pound for the euro (the common currency for the European Union), predicting that the euro would fail “economically, politically and indeed socially.” Fortunately for the British, they did not adopt the euro, holding to the pound.

She also campaigned against pro-European-integration politician Ken Clarke in his bid for the Conservative Party leadership, stating, “He seems to view with blithe unconcern the erosion of Britain’s sovereignty in Europe.”

“The blunt truth is,” Thatcher wrote in her 2002 memoirs, “that the rest of the European Union needs us more than we need them.”

It now appears that the British public has come to the same conclusions that Thatcher reached years ago. About 70 percent of the laws governing the British people are now dictated by bureaucrats of the European Union. As Thatcher once said, no doubt recalling Napoleon and Hitler, “European unity has been tried before, and the outcome was far from happy.”

While Britain has voted to leave the European Union, the powerful forces that favor the European super-state decried by Thatcher will not go quietly into the night. As they were willing to terminate the career of the woman who had led Britain out of economic decline over the issue, they will no doubt have little reluctance to punish the British people themselves for their temerity in voting for Brexit.

Before the Brexit vote, President Obama warned the British not to leave the EU, threatening that he would put them in the back of the line for any trade agreement with the United States. German Chancellor Angela Merkel issued her own warnings as well. And after the vote, even *Late Show* host Stephen Colbert chimed in with a 10-minute tirade at the beginning of his program, calling the British “stupid” for their vote.

It’s clear that any future economic difficulty in Britain will be assigned to the Brexit vote by the media and pro-EU politicians.

Hopefully, the Brits will hold fast. As Thatcher biographer Moore noted, “Thatcher wanted a free market, but she realized maybe too late that it also increased the power of European institutions — the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. It was not a free market, but a new regulatory regime. It was a massive transfer of sovereignty from Britain to Brussels.”



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The European super-state should serve as a warning to those in America who mistakenly believe that multilateral trade agreements are just about “free trade.” If the saying, “You can’t fight City Hall” has any validity, then what influence can individuals ever hope to have with a government run by bureaucrats not only in Washington, D.C., but in distant places around the globe?

Unfortunately, some who are strong believers in free enterprise have bought the bill of goods that these trade treaties are about liberty. They are not. Rather, they are about more regulation of the market. And many of the decisions reached by the bureaucrats in Brussels have little to do with trade, but are impositions of social policy. Americans who decry the interference from D.C. over social issues in the states and local communities will have to get used to similar decrees issued by international bureaucrats, if we enact managed trade deals such as Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Those who think Congress will defend Americans’ interests in trade disputes resulting from the TPP and the like should note the recent dispute over the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL). Under that law, American consumers were entitled to know the national origin of their food found at the grocery store. But when the World Trade Organization (WTO) told Congress to repeal that law, Congress meekly did so. Does anyone really believe that actions such as this will not become the norm?

As Thatcher feared, these trade agreements are gutting national sovereignty, and it is true not only in Britain, but in the United States.



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