

0. LIFE at CHEQUERS and DOWNING STREET - Story
Preface

1. ABOVE the SHOP in GRANTHAM

2. MARGARET and DENIS

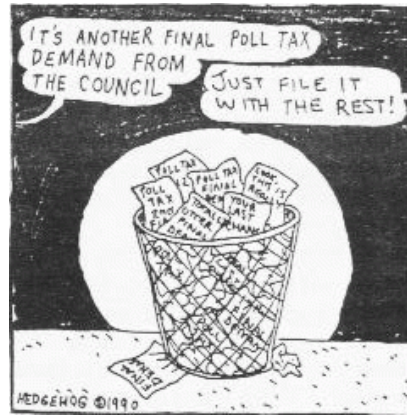
3. MARGARET THATCHER, MP

4. THATCHER'S WAR - THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

5. LIFE at CHEQUERS and DOWNING STREET

6. LOSS ... of POWER and DENIS

7. IRON LADY - FINAL YEARS



In 1990, the "Poll Tax" required people to pay for community services, provided by local governments, at the same rate—no matter one's economic circumstances. The tax, which Margaret Thatcher supported, was wildly unpopular. People refused to pay it, as depicted in this political cartoon by "Hedgehog." Copyright "Hedgehog," all rights reserved. Small image provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

Not everyone was pleased with Margaret Thatcher, following the Falklands victory.

By 1984—a year after her reelection—she had fought a hard battle with coal miners and their union. In October of that year, she was the target of an assassination plot while visiting Brighton.

Finalizing a speech she planned to deliver on the 13th of October, 1984, the Prime Minister was working alone, after Denis had gone to bed. At about 2:45 AM, she glanced at the clock. Less than fifteen minutes later, the Grand Hotel room she'd been in—just moments before—was in utter ruins.

She had narrowly escaped death when a bomb exploded in a nearby bathroom.

Some of her closest colleagues, and their spouses, were either wounded or killed. John Wakeham lost his wife, Roberta, and was massively injured himself after being trapped in the rubble for seven hours. In all, five people died and thirty-four more were injured.

Commenting to the press, right after the attack, Mrs. Thatcher noted that neither she nor the government would be stopped by terrorists. With added resolve, she moved forward with her agenda.

Two months later—on the 16th of December, 1984—she met Mikhail Gorbachev at Chequers.

A beautiful country estate—given to the nation by Arthur and Ruth Lee (Lord and Lady Fareham) for the benefit of Britain's prime ministers—Chequers (Denis Thatcher once observed) is reason enough to have the government's top job. Within its stately walls, surrounded by a magnificent landscape, world leaders have an atmosphere within which to keep clear heads and talk freely.

Although Gorbachev was not yet leader of the Soviet Union, Maggie famously declared that he was someone with whom she could "do business."

In fact, the Prime Minister had been searching for more than a year to determine whether there was someone, inside the USSR's hierarchy, with whom she (and other Western leaders) could work. According to Geoffrey Howe (then her foreign secretary), Mrs. Thatcher carried out a

...deliberate campaign to get inside the [Soviet] system. (Geoffrey Howe, quoted by David Hoffman in *The Dead Hand*, at page 168.)

With her staunch anti-communist approach, coupled with her close friendship with Ronald Reagan, the Prime Minister made good on her claim that "Gorby" could be trusted. Historians credit the three leaders—together with Pope John Paul II—with significantly contributing to the end of the Cold War.

Elected again in 1987—the first Prime Minister to achieve that milestone in more than 160 years—Margaret won in a landslide, but the country was divided. By her tenth year in office—in 1989—Denis wanted her to retire, while she was still on top, but MT believed she had more work to do. Carol reports that her father was worried:

In a year, she'll be so unpopular you won't believe it. (Carol Thatcher, *A Swim-on Part in the Goldfish Bowl*, page 210).

Even within her own party, Margaret had major disagreements on important topics.

While some of her cabinet ministers believed that Britain should be part of the European currency—known as

the Euro—the Prime Minister vigorously disagreed. She foresaw trouble, if the UK joined forces with Europe in such a dramatic way. She thought the sovereignty of her country demanded that Britain keep its own currency—the pound sterling.

Then there was the infamous poll tax. Its actual name was the "Community Charge," but by any name too many people thought it was unfair. The point was for people to pay taxes to support local services, provided by local governments. The problem was that the amount of the tax was the same for everyone, no matter one's economic circumstances.

How could it be fair—people wondered—for poor people to pay exactly the same amount as rich people? Riots erupted and Nigel Lawson (Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer) resigned from the cabinet, in protest.

Denis' prediction—about his wife's popularity within a year—turned-out to be right. By the end of 1990, Mrs. Thatcher would have to leave her flat at Number 10 Downing Street and her weekend residence at Chequers.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/LIFE-at-CHEQUERS-and-DOWNING-STREET-The-Iron-Lady>

Questions 2 Ponder

Why Is Being a Political Leader Risky Business?

Margaret Thatcher took some popular and some unpopular stands. In 1984, she narrowly escaped death when a bomb, planted by an Irishman in a Brighton hotel, went off in a nearby bathroom. Undaunted, she declared she was not giving-in to terrorists.

By the time she was Prime Minister for ten years, Thatcher wanted to keep serving but her husband wanted her to retire while she was still on top. Not following Denis' advice, Thatcher forged ahead with policies which became very unpopular and polarizing (even in her own cabinet).

Being a political leader can be very risky. What are some of those risks?

Is it a good idea, or a bad idea, for a government leader to be uncompromising? Explain your answer.

Is it fair for one family member to put the entire family at risk, due to whatever ambitions that person may have (either political or something else)? Why, or why not?

Media Stream



Chequers - Prime Minister's Retreat

Image of Chequers, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Margaret Thatcher - 11-Minute Standing Ovation

Photo of Margaret Thatcher at the 1987 conference in Blackpool, online courtesy Margaret Thatcher Foundation.

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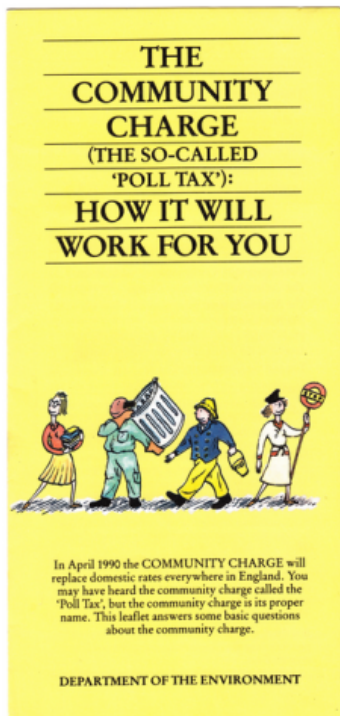
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Thatcher and Gorbachev - 1988

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Poll Tax - Community Charge Poster

Leaflet regarding the UK Community Charge ("poll tax") online courtesy UK National Archives.

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Poll Tax Riots - March, 1990

News clip, from ITV News, online via YouTube.

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Margaret Thatcher and the 1984 Coal Strikes

Clip of Charles Moore interview with Peter Robinson for "Uncommon Knowledge," sponsored by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

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Brighton Bombing - 1984

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Margaret Thatcher - Remarks after Brighton Bombing

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Thatcher, Gorbachev & Reagan - Ending the Cold War

Clip of Charles Moore interview with Peter Robinson for "Uncommon Knowledge," sponsored by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

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