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## Thatcherism

Throughout the 1980s, British politics was dominated by Mrs Thatcher. She imposed upon her Conservative governments a monetarist policy which had been of marginal importance before she became Conservative leader. The basic philosophy was one of rolling back the state, reducing the burden of welfare and allowing unfettered industry access to more funds to develop and expand to meet the market's requirements. These views went back to the ideas of Friedrich von Hayek, whose book *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) argued that economic planning necessitated tyranny. Indeed socialism was the pathway to totalitarianism, for it offered economic and social security which held hidden dangers: when security is understood in too absolute a sense, the general striving for it, far from increasing the chances of freedom, becomes the gravest threat to it. These views were revived and revised by Rhodes Boyson in his collection of essays *Down with the Poor* (1971), and were given some support by the Heath Government of 1970–4. Boyson referred to the need to end paternalism and clearly stated that 'Not only is the present welfare state inefficient and destructive of personal liberty, individual responsibility and moral growth, but it saps the collective moral fibre of our people as a nation.' From the mid-1970s, Thatcher and Joseph promoted these views and the Conservative Party's 'conversion' to monetarism, free-market principles and a *laissez-faire* view of society. The philosophy of the New Right, which was of marginal importance in the 1960s, occupied the centre-stage of British politics in the 1980s and early 1990s. One central theme of the Thatcher administrations was the freeing of enterprise and initiative from the interference of the state. This meant that state expenditure on welfare had to be cut (Documents 7 and 9). As Keith Joseph once wrote, 'Cuts mean cuts'.

For more than a decade, the views of the New Right gathered strength. The promotion of the new philosophy of 'independence' was supposed to bring with it a whole array of benefits. It was to

reinvigorate the economy, encourage competition, foster moral strength and character; remove the need for the welfare state (and the NHS), revitalise the family and regenerate self-discipline. Above all, it would emphasise that the 'nanny state' of Beveridge and the Labour Party must be swept away, that trade unions must be controlled more effectively and that collective rights must be removed (see Chapter 3).

Thatcherism was thus a major departure from the political consensus on welfare which some historians feel had dominated British politics since 1945; it was also a fundamental change of direction for the Conservatives. The new policies sought purpose and conviction rather than consensus, focused upon the destruction of trade union power and the changing of the balance of private and public assets in the nation by privatisation.