ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #57
Margaret Thatcher
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Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to weird and wonderful stories and learn fascinating things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Margaret Thatcher, The Iron Lady.

[00:00:29] She was the first and so far only female leader of the UK, Europe's first female prime minister, and someone who was either a fantastic modernising leader that **laid the foundations**[1] for decades of prosperity for Britain, or the worst leader in British history who stole milk from children, destroyed hard working jobs, and changed the **fabric**[2] of Britain for the worse.

[00:00:59] It all depends on who you ask of course.

[00:01:02] I am pretty excited about today's episode.

[00:01:06] So what we will do today is first talk about who she was and what she did.

[00:01:12] We'll talk about why she was and still is loved by some and hated by others, and by the end of the episode, you should at least be able to make up your own mind about what **side of the fence**[3] you want to be on.

[1] created the basic conditions from which something could develop

[2] basic structure and character

[3] which of two opposing opinions

[00:01:31] Okay then let's get started.

[00:01:35] Margaret Thatcher was born in 1925 in England.

[00:01:40] After studying at Oxford and a brief **stint**[4], a brief period, as a chemist and lawyer, she became an MP, a member of parliament at the age of 33 for the Conservatives.

[00:01:56] She **rose**[5] through the party and was elected its leader in 1975.

[00:02:03] And then led the Conservatives to victory in three general elections in 1979, 1983, and 1987.

[00:02:13] So she was Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1989 and was frequently referred to as the most powerful woman in the world throughout the 1980s.

[00:02:29] When she came to power in 1979 the UK was a very different country to what it is today.

[00:02:38] **Inflation**[6] was very high at 23% in the late 1970s.

[4] a period of time spent doing a particular job

[5] moved up to a higher and more important position

[6] the general rise in prices over time

[00:02:44] The **trade unions**[7] in the UK were much stronger than they are now, with around one in four people forming part of a **trade union**[8] in 1979 versus about one in eight now.

[00:03:01] And taxes were much higher, the highest rate of personal tax in the UK was 83% and now the highest rate is 45% so taxes were almost twice as high for the highest **earners**[9].

[00:03:18] Thatcher **subscribed**[10] to a **neoliberal**[11] view of the world and believed that the UK's **reliance**[12] on government, and the state to provide for you was not only the **root cause**[13] of the lack of economic growth, but just not how people should live.

[00:03:39] She thought that people had become dependent on the state, and if this could be reduced, if private enterprise could be encouraged and inefficient enterprises could be shut down, then this would open a brand new chapter in the UK's development, leading to better **outcomes**[14] for everyone.

[7] organisations of workers that protect their pay and working conditions

[8] an organisation of workers that protects their pay and working conditions

[9] people who receive money from work

[10] agreed with and supported

[11] supporting free markets, private business and a smaller role for government

[12] the state of depending on someone or something for help

[13] the main reason why a problem exists

[14] results

[00:04:03] At the time she was in power, remember, the USSR was **in decline**[15] and it seemed clear that Russia's experiment with communism was not resulting in **prosperity**[16] for its people.

[00:04:20] And in the US, **across the pond**[17], Ronald Reagan was in power in the White House.

[00:04:27] He was also pushing a similar **neoliberal agenda**[18], one where privatisation was encouraged and the philosophy was around reducing the size of the state with the view that the private sector was the best way to drive growth.

[00:04:46] So in several countries across the world, there was this **neoliberal** experiment, with the view that this was the way to grow the economy, to raise living standards for people and just generally how society should be, how people should live.

[00:05:06] It was almost the **parallel opposite**[19] to communism and in many ways it was a reaction to it.

[00:05:15] Thatcher was a **firm**[20] believer in this view of the world, saying "the state has no source of money other than money which people earn themselves. There is no such thing as public money. There is only taxpayers' money."

[15] becoming weaker and less successful

[16] a situation of having money and success

[17] on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean

[18] a set of political aims and plans

[19] the complete opposite

[20] strong and not likely to change

[00:05:33] She had already actually **implemented**[21] several policies while she was just an MP, as Education Secretary, policies that **hinted at**[22] what she would do if she got the PM job, and displayed her views towards public spending.

[00:05:53] The most famous of these relates to milk in schools for children.

[00:06:01] Since 1944, children in schools in Britain had been given free milk in order to make sure that every child was at least given the basic **nutrients**[23] at school by the state.

[00:06:16] As part of the plan to reduce people's **reliance** on the state and reduce public spending, Thatcher stopped this free milk, only allowing it to be given to younger children for **nutritional**[24] purposes.

[00:06:34] Obviously there was a big **backlash**[25], a big negative reaction, and Thatcher earned the **nickname**[26] "Margaret Thatcher, Milk Snatcher."

[00:06:46] So to snatch is to take something away quickly from someone.

[00:06:52] So it's not a great nickname to have really, but it did not stop her **ascent**[27] to power, her rise to power.

[21] put into action

[22] suggested indirectly

[00:07:02] When she won the general election in 1979 she had a **mandate**[28] to continue her mission to reduce people's **reliance** on the state and, in her mind at least, to build a more independent society.

[00:07:20] She made some enormous changes to British society in her 10 years in power, and we don't have time to cover all of them today.

[00:07:31] So we will talk about **coal**[29] mines, privatisation, and housing, and look at three of the **legacies**[30] that she left behind.

[00:07:44] Firstly, in the 1980s there were still lots of **coal** mines in the UK, mines that supported hundreds of thousands of jobs and provided economic opportunities for families often in more rural areas without other job opportunities.

[00:08:06] Without the mines, these jobs would be lost and it would lead to economic **hardship**[31] for hundreds of thousands of people in these areas, particularly in the North of England.

[23] substances in food that the body needs to grow and stay healthy

[24] connected with the food the body needs to grow and stay healthy

[25] a strong negative reaction from many people

[26] an informal name given to someone, often as a joke

[27] rise

[28] the authority to carry out policies, given by voters in an election

[29] a hard black rock dug from the ground and burned for heat and power

[30] things that remain from the past because of what someone did

[31] a situation of difficulty and suffering, especially from lack of money

[00:08:20] However, Thatcher saw that a lot of these mines were actually **unprofitable**[32].

[00:08:28] They were owned by the state, but actually cost more money to operate than they brought in in revenue, so they were losing money.

[00:08:39] Thatcher proposed to close the mines, which of course would result in thousands of people losing their jobs and thousands more families being affected.

[00:08:51] The **trade unions**, as I said earlier on, were very strong at this time, and the miners went on strike.

[00:09:02] In 1979 alone, 29 million working days were lost, and it's estimated that this cost Britain about one and a half billion pounds.

[00:09:18] Thatcher wouldn't **budge**[33], she wouldn't negotiate with the miners.

[00:09:23] The result, as you may know, was the closing of **dozens**[34] of British mines, the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, and of course communities being hugely affected by the sudden removal of this industry that had provided employment and support for a large proportion of the local residents.

[32] losing money; not making money

[33] change her opinion or position

[34] large numbers

[00:09:47] And even now, if you go to areas where there used to be a strong mining community, Margaret Thatcher is still, generally speaking of course, **despised**[35].

[00:09:59] She is hated.

[00:10:01] She has never been forgiven and is viewed as someone who **needlessly**[36] destroyed communities and lives.

[00:10:11] Her view, however, was that she was modernising Britain and it made no sense to just keep industries open if they made no financial sense,no business sense.

[00:10:24] She was a neoliberal and **propping up**[37], supporting a failing industry was completely against everything she believed in.

[00:10:35] One of her other great beliefs was in privatisation, that the state shouldn't own things and that it should sell off, it should privatise as much as it could.

[00:10:48] So that's exactly what she did.

[00:10:52] First came the big industries, gas, water, and electricity, which had previously been state owned.

[00:11:01] These were sold and turned into private companies, in effect.

[35] strongly hated

[36] without any good reason

[37] giving money or help to stop something failing

[00:11:08] The view was that they would be better run, better managed if they were privately run, and this would result in a better service and lower prices for people.

[00:11:21] The results of this privatisation 30 years later are still **mixed**[38].

[00:11:29] It's clear that privatisation has caused improvements in performance within some industries, but not all.

[00:11:37] And indeed, there are still some calls for the state to renationalise some of the industries that had been privatised under Thatcher, such as the train networks.

[00:11:52] The other big privatisation that happened under Margaret Thatcher was the privatisation of council housing, of state housing.

[00:12:02] In 1979, 42% of people in the UK lived in something called a council house, a house owned by the local government.

[00:12:15] They were a tenant in that house, so they paid rent ultimately to the government.

[00:12:23] Margaret Thatcher believed that everyone should at least have the right to own their own home, and so she **embarked on**[39] a campaign to encourage tenants in council houses to buy their own houses, to become owners of property as opposed to tenants.

[38] partly good and partly bad

[39] started something new and important

[00:12:44] Of course, even though houses were a lot cheaper back then, people didn't have the cash **sitting around**[40] to just buy a house.

[00:12:54] So the prices were reduced dramatically from the market price, often up to 50% lower, and people were also given a hundred percent **mortgages**[41] so they could effectively buy the house completely with borrowed money from the bank for a lot less than the price should really be.

[00:13:18] And 1.6 million council houses in Britain were sold like this, sold off **initially**[42] to the people who lived in them, but later on there was nothing stopping them from being resold to anyone, including private investors.

[00:13:36] So now, 40 years later, a large proportion of these council flats are owned by buy-to-let landlords, people who buy properties just to rent them out afterwards to others.

[00:13:52] And it's hard to deny that this policy of Thatcher's has contributed greatly to the increase in house prices in the UK.

[00:14:03] Indeed, house prices under Margaret Thatcher increased by 251% which is more than under any other prime minister in British history.

[40] available and not being used

[41] loans from a bank used to buy a house

[42] at first

[00:14:16] Talking more about her **legacy**[43], there isn't really anyone in recent British political history who has been quite so divisive, who has divided opinion so much.

[00:14:31] Of course, prime ministers and leaders since then have **varied**[44] in popularity and the man in the job right now, Boris Johnson **has his fair share**[45], both of **diehard**[46] fans and people who think he's a disaster.

[00:14:48] But the changes that took place under Thatcher on British society, things that have really **left a mark**[47], are like nothing that came after, or even that came before.

[00:15:01] I was actually not even three years old when Margaret Thatcher lost power, so I won't try to tell you about this from my own personal experience of being there at the time.

[00:15:13] But even if you were too young to have lived under her, you did know about her.

[00:15:22] Memories **run deep**[48] and the name Thatcher and the **implications**[49] of her policies are continuously felt by future generations.

[43] the effects that remain from what someone did in the past
[44] been different from each other
[45] has quite a lot
[46] extremely loyal and unwilling to change their support
[47] had a lasting effect
[48] are very strong and last a long time
[49] effects and consequences

[00:15:33] I used to have a girlfriend from a town called Wakefield, which is just outside Leeds in the North of England, and an area where several mines were closed by Thatcher.

[00:15:48] And I remember when I first went there, to Wakefield, this would have been in 2010, so 20 years after Thatcher lost power, the conversation seemed to naturally arrive at Margaret Thatcher, and I could see her dad just getting angrier and angrier just at the thought, just getting angry at things that had happened 30 years before.

[00:16:18] And when Margaret Thatcher died in 2013 you could tell a lot about the **political leanings**[50] of newspapers in Britain, of whether a newspaper was right wing or left wing by the **headline**[51] on the front page the day after she died.

[00:16:38] The Daily Mail had the headline, "The Woman Who Saved Britain", The Daily Express, another fairly right wing newspaper, had "Farewell Iron Lady", The Socialist Worker paper had the headline, "**Rejoice**[52], Thatcher's Dead - Special **Pullout**[53]".

[00:17:02] And when she died, people **scrambled**[54] to **unpack**[55] her **legacy**, to truly understand the impact of what she had done.

[50] the political opinions someone tends to support

[51] the title of a newspaper story, printed in large letters

[52] be very happy and celebrate

[53] a separate section of a newspaper that can be removed

[54] hurried in a disorganised way to do something

[55] examine and explain in detail

[00:17:15] Yes, she had been responsible for the losses of hundreds of thousands of industrial jobs and **fundamentally**[56] changed the **fabric** of British society.

[00:17:30] But did this privatisation drag Britain out of an economic **funk**[57], of a period of very slow growth?

[00:17:40] And did it **set the stage**[58] for the economic growth that Britain has enjoyed since she left office?

[00:17:50] Whatever you believe, and whatever you think of Margaret Thatcher, it's hard to deny that she was a political **phenomenon**[59], a pretty amazing woman, and a very important figure in British political history.

[00:18:06] I just want to end this episode with a quote from a man called Richard Longworth, who is the former foreign correspondent for the American newspaper, The Chicago Tribune, who sums it up pretty well, I think.

[00:18:22] He said "she was perhaps the most admired, hated, fascinating, boring, radical and conservative leader in the Western world."

[00:18:34] The only thing that I think we can all agree on is that she is pretty **divisive**[60].

[56] in a very basic and important way

[57] a period of low activity and little progress

[58] create the right conditions

[59] a person who is extremely successful or remarkable

[60] causing strong disagreement between people

[00:18:41] So if you ever want a way to start up a conversation with someone in Britain and know that they probably will have a lot to say, you can just ask them what they think of Margaret Thatcher.

[00:18:54] You'll probably be listening for a while.

[00:18:56] Okay then, that is it for this episode of English Learning for Curious Minds.

[00:19:05] I hope it's been an interesting one.

[00:19:07] There is obviously a lot more to say about Margaret Thatcher, and I didn't mention Northern Ireland, the Falklands war, Poll tax, Hong Kong or hundreds of other things that she has a huge impact on, otherwise, this podcast would have been hours long.

[00:19:26] But I do hope that it has given you a bit of background and we've covered a few interesting ideas that give you **the measure of**[61] the woman.

[00:19:36] As always, I would love to know what you thought of the show.

[00:19:40] You can email hi hi@leonardoenglish.com.

[00:19:45] Okay then you have been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:19:51] I am Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[61] a clear idea of the character and abilities of

[END OF PODCAST]

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Laid the foundations	created the basic conditions from which something could develop
Fabric	basic structure and character
Side of the fence	which of two opposing opinions
Stint	a period of time spent doing a particular job
Rose	moved up to a higher and more important position
Inflation	the general rise in prices over time
Trade unions	organisations of workers that protect their pay and working conditions
Trade union	an organisation of workers that protects their pay and working conditions
Earners	people who receive money from work
Subscribed	agreed with and supported

Neoliberal	supporting free markets, private business and a smaller role for government
Reliance	the state of depending on someone or something for help
Root cause	the main reason why a problem exists
Outcomes	results
In decline	becoming weaker and less successful
Prosperity	a situation of having money and success
Across the pond	on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean
Agenda	a set of political aims and plans
Parallel opposite	the complete opposite
Firm	strong and not likely to change
Implemented	put into action
Hinted at	suggested indirectly

Nutrients	substances in food that the body needs to grow and stay healthy
Nutritional	connected with the food the body needs to grow and stay healthy
Backlash	a strong negative reaction from many people
Nickname	an informal name given to someone, often as a joke
Ascent	rise
Mandate	the authority to carry out policies, given by voters in an election
Coal	a hard black rock dug from the ground and burned for heat and power
Legacies	things that remain from the past because of what someone did
Hardship	a situation of difficulty and suffering, especially from lack of money
Unprofitable	losing money; not making money
Budge	change her opinion or position

Dozens	large numbers
Despised	strongly hated
Needlessly	without any good reason
Propping up	giving money or help to stop something failing
Mixed	partly good and partly bad
Embarked on	started something new and important
Sitting around	available and not being used
Mortgages	loans from a bank used to buy a house
Initially	at first
Legacy	the effects that remain from what someone did in the past
Varied	been different from each other
Has his fair share	has quite a lot

Diehard	extremely loyal and unwilling to change their support
Left a mark	had a lasting effect
Run deep	are very strong and last a long time
Implications	effects and consequences
Political leanings	the political opinions someone tends to support
Headline	the title of a newspaper story, printed in large letters
Rejoice	be very happy and celebrate
Pullout	a separate section of a newspaper that can be removed
Scrambled	hurried in a disorganised way to do something
Unpack	examine and explain in detail
Fundamentally	in a very basic and important way
Funk	a period of low activity and little progress

Set the stage	create the right conditions
Phenomenon	a person who is extremely successful or remarkable
Divisive	causing strong disagreement between people
The measure of	a clear idea of the character and abilities of

Language spotlight

1. Lay the foundations

- **Meaning**: To create the basic conditions that allow something to develop or succeed later.
- **Synonyms**: pave the way, prepare the ground, set the stage
- **Antonyms**: undermine, hold back, stand in the way
- **Examples**:
    - Her early research **laid the foundations** for the treatment we use today.
    - Good habits in childhood **lay the foundations** for a healthy adult life.

2. Side of the fence

- **Meaning**: One of two opposing positions in an argument or disagreement.
- **Synonyms**: side, camp, position
- **Antonyms**: middle ground, neutral position, compromise
- **Examples**:
    - On this issue, my brother and I are on opposite **sides of the fence**.
    - Before the vote, everyone had to decide which **side of the fence** they were on.

3. Across the pond

- **Meaning**: On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, usually meaning in the USA when said from the UK, or in the UK when said from the USA.
- **Synonyms**: in America, over the Atlantic, on the other side of the ocean
- **Antonyms**: at home, in this country, locally
- **Examples**:
    - The film was a hit in Britain but nobody **across the pond** had heard of it.
    - My cousin moved **across the pond** to work in New York.

4. Embark on

- **Meaning**: To start something new, important or difficult.
- **Synonyms**: begin, launch into, set out on
- **Antonyms**: finish, abandon, give up
- **Examples**:
    - After university, she **embarked on** a career in journalism.
    - The company is about to **embark on** a major expansion into Asia.

5. Leave a mark

- **Meaning**: To have an important effect that lasts for a long time.
- **Synonyms**: make an impact, leave an impression, make a difference
- **Antonyms**: be forgotten, pass unnoticed, fade away
- **Examples**:
    - That teacher really **left a mark** on everyone in my class.
    - The war **left a deep mark** on the country for generations.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. What did Thatcher believe was the root cause of Britain's lack of economic growth?

a) The influence of the Soviet Union on British industry

b) People depending too much on the government and the state

c) Taxes that were too low for the country's highest earners

d) The small number of workers who belonged to trade unions

2. Why did Thatcher earn the nickname "Milk Snatcher"?

a) She raised the price of milk sold in British shops

b) She closed many dairy farms in the North of England

c) She stopped free milk for most children in schools

d) She banned milk from school canteens across Britain

3. Why did Thatcher want to close many of the coal mines?

a) Many of them cost more to run than they earned

b) The miners had asked for them to be privatised

c) She wanted to replace coal with nuclear power

d) Most of them had run out of coal to dig up

4. How did the government help council tenants to buy their homes?

a) It gave tenants the houses for free after ten years

b) It paid half of every tenant's rent for several years

c) It lent tenants money directly from the local council

d) It cut prices and allowed mortgages for the full price

5. According to Alastair, what can we all agree on about Margaret Thatcher?

a) She was clearly the best leader in British history

b) People hold very strong and opposite views about her

c) Her privatisation policies failed in every industry

d) She is now mostly forgotten by people in Britain

True or False

6. Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1989. (True/False)

7. In 1979, about one in eight people in the UK belonged to a trade union. (True/False)

8. Thatcher agreed to negotiate with the miners after they went on strike. (True/False)

9. Gas, water and electricity were state owned before Thatcher privatised them. (True/False)

10. House prices rose more under Thatcher than under any other British prime minister. (True/False)

Fill in the Blanks

11. After studying at Oxford and a brief _____, a brief period, as a chemist and lawyer, she became an MP

12. Thatcher was a _____ believer in this view of the world

13. So it's not a great nickname to have really, but it did not stop her _____ to power, her rise to power.

14. Thatcher wouldn't _____, she wouldn't negotiate with the miners.

15. Memories ___ deep and the name Thatcher and the implications of her policies are continuously felt by future generations.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does "**subscribed**" mean when Alastair describes Thatcher's view of the world?

a) Paid regularly to receive

b) Agreed with and supported

c) Signed her name at the end of

d) Wrote a short article about

17. What does "**backlash**" mean in the story about free school milk?

a) A sudden fall in milk prices

b) A sharp blow from behind someone

c) A strong negative reaction from many people

d) A quiet change in government policy

18. What does "**unprofitable**" mean when describing the coal mines?

a) Dangerous to work in

b) Owned by private investors

c) Very old and run down

d) Costing more than they earn

19. What does "**mixed**" mean in "the results of this privatisation 30 years later are still mixed"?

a) Partly good and partly bad

b) Combined into one company

c) Shared between two countries

d) Confused and impossible to measure

20. What does "**funk**" mean in "an economic funk"?

a) A style of popular music

b) A period of little progress

c) A sudden rise in prices

d) A strong feeling of fear

Answers

1. b) People depending too much on the government and the state
2. c) She stopped free milk for most children in schools
3. a) Many of them cost more to run than they earned
4. d) It cut prices and allowed mortgages for the full price
5. b) People hold very strong and opposite views about her
6. True
7. False
8. False
9. True
10. True
11. stint
12. firm
13. ascent
14. budge
15. run
16. b) Agreed with and supported
17. c) A strong negative reaction from many people
18. d) Costing more than they earn

19. a) Partly good and partly bad

20. b) A period of little progress