Middle East after the Arab Spring. Russia is cleverly exploiting Western divisions and weaknesses in Europe. Globalisation has created rivals to Atlantic rulers, subverting the WTO, promoting uncertain regional trade deals, and presaging multipolar international disorders. Grumpy electorates regularly turn out governments, feeding partisan dealignment and new right- and left-wing radicalisms that neither Washington nor Westminster have escaped. Anglo-American economic recoveries may have been more robust than elsewhere, but the euro-zone crisis and Japanese deflation weigh heavily on the global future. The international economy slumbers and, despite some reregulation of the financial sector, many of the practices behind the Great Recession continue. Faced with all this, Atlantic rulers have been quite unable to invent new coping strategies. Cronin acknowledges all of this but, along with everyone else, does not know quite what to make of it. A second edition of *Global Rules* may soon be needed!

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The lady turns the world

Leonardo Clausi

The Legacy of Thatcherism. Assessing and Exploring Thatcherite Social and Economic Policies, edited by Stephen Farrall and Colin Hay. Oxford University Press for the British Academy. 352 pp. £25.00.

The legacy of Thatcherism: how not to assess it? Even beyond the 'Anglo-liberal' shores, Margaret Thatcher is such a totemic figure that it could be argued—without fear of opprobrium—that the present British political settlement is still cast in a Thatcherite mould. She is looked at and remembered with nearly hysterical rapture by (almost) the whole galaxy of conservatism. She is equally hated—and such an unadulterated and unprecedented form of hatred at that—by many of those who bore and still bear the brunt of her reforms and many who did not. No British prime minister's passing since Churchill elicited both the solemnity of her funeral in London and the irrepressible bursts of Scottish and northern English jubilation. Her dicta—the one about the non-existence of society as a factual concept in particular—are often quoted and discussed. After sixteen years as a party leader, seven of which as a prime minister, her imprint on the transnational neoliberal and neoconservative agendas cannot be exaggerated. It is time to historicise, and urgently.

Stemming from a 2011 conference, this collection gathers a comprehensive set of contribution from a wide panel of scholars, each providing an examination of the impact of Thatcher-implemented reforms. Economics, housing, welfare, education, families—every nook and cranny of the history of her tenure is carefully scrutinised, and no stone is left unturned. An expert comments on each intervention, providing further insights. The route unravels through studies that were published at the very times they were investigating. Comparing them to newer data aims at ascertaining the validity of their conclusions today.

More than 300 pages saturated with graphs and statistics—particularly fascinating are Danny Dorling's 'geomorphological' representations of inequality in the country—proceed to illustrate vividly the main spatio-temporal coordinates of her hegemonic project. The roadmap, of course, was the retrenchment of the state from its modern position as a supreme economic and social player and the proportionate takeover of those abandoned territories by the invisibly handed market. Such retrenchment, it appears, was far from carefully planned by herself or by her entourage. In their opening chapter, the editors, Stephen Farrall and Colin Hay, define Thatcherism—what Stuart Hall et al. were the first to call 'authoritarian populism'—as an intersection of neoliberal and neoconservative tenets. The other major bone of contention among scholars is whether her advent constituted a radical break with the past, or was rather a mere development of intrinsically structural elements of recent British political history. The response opts for a middle ground: she was both.

The temporality/periodisation of her deeds, however, didn't seem to follow a progressive, coherent path. Hence the editors' description of Thatcherism more as a 'set of

instincts' than as a carefully planned project, a 'statecraft, shaped by agency but also by circumstances and contingencies, hesitation and expediency': another example of that carefully denoted 'muddling through' attitude which postwar British politicians of all hues are said to have exhibited. Such lack of a carefully crafted plan didn't prevent her period in office from bringing about a thorough reorganisation of the relation between central and local government and of the nexus between citizen and the state, making her tenure a critical juncture in British history.

That such juncture was to persist unchallenged into the subsequent Labour administrations is obviously a gauge of how critical it still is. If, despite its unrepentantly semi-pyramidal income structure, contemporary British society is justifiably looked at as one of the most stable in Europe, it is also thanks to the magnetism that some of Thatcher's or Thatcher-influenced policies exerted on her main political opponents. The name of Tony Blair, whose New Labour so effectively implemented many of her policies, suddenly springs to mind. In other words, one doesn't need to look at some of the arch-Thatcherite aspects of the present coalition government to realize that her hegemony in the contemporary is an acknowledged fact.

The term 'polarising', often used to denote Thatcher's figure, struggles to convey the scope of the social division she engendered on both the national and international political scenarios. If one looks at the welfarist and social leaning of the European political agenda during *Les Trente Glorieuses* (1945–75) and compares them to the quite different trajectory followed during the subsequent thirty years (1975–2015, which could be rechristened as the 'inglorious thirty'), Thatcher will quite likely appear to be the driving force behind such shift.

Much of what she did—and virtually all of what she did not—was a reaction to the postwar Fordist consensus based on a mixed economy and a strong welfare state, triggered by the crisis that in Britain culminated with the Winter of Discontent of 1978–9. A predominance of policy over politics (observable pretty much everywhere else in western Europe), the slow but gradual morphing of the citizen into customer and of government into governance and a pervasive managerialisation of surviving public services ensued in her wake. An almost perfect tuning with what Friedman-advocated Reaganomics were doing across the ocean naturally developed. All of this eventually resulted in a seemingly permanent shift in the social, and above all cultural, basis of European social democracy: in this context, maybe her biggest piece of social engineering was the transformation of the better-off echelons of the working class into petit-bourgeois property owners through the Housing Act of 1980—a social threshold indeed trespassed by many, as the current Anglo-Saxon fixation with the 'property ladder' (on a ladder you rise alone) and the not unrelated subprime crash in the USA clearly testify.

But there are many negative aspects. One is the inglorious primacy of European child poverty, still going strong in spite of the copious amounts of money Tony Blair threw at it. Another is the particularly dubious feat of morally detoxing inequality as a healthy spur for competition. Yet another is the almost unanimous embrace of some of these measures by the leaders of the hyper-diluted European social democracy.

Any work setting out to explore the many facets of Thatcherism could not be met with greater interest, particularly when it aims at separating the wheat of history from the chaff of political commentary. It stops short from seeing in Thatcher, particularly through her clever use of the card of 'outsider' within her party, the leader of its petit-bourgeois cohorts in their postwar emancipation from the upper classes that for so long constituted its backbone. It resists the temptation of defining her political parable as British leadership toward transnational neoliberalism. Wise choices maybe, particularly if one looks at the social extraction of those Tories at the helm of the country in the Cameron years. When it comes to Schröder's job reforms in Germany, the tardy provincial Blairism of Italy's Matteo Renzi, even some policies of the EU, however, the long wave of Thatcherite influence is almost unmistakable. To the whole of Britain, Thatcherism increasingly resembles what (according to the insightful liberal

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anti-fascist Piero Gobetti) fascism was to Italy: the autobiography of a nation; maybe of a whole continent.

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The Blair project

Robert Taylor

The Blair Supremacy: A Study in the Politics of Labour's Party Management, by Lewis Minkin. Manchester University Press. 864 pp. £26.99.

The creation of the New Labour project proved to be Margaret Thatcher's greatest achievement. Under the joint leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown it transformed the fortunes of the Labour party, which won three successive general elections —between 1997 and 2005—for the first time in its history. From being judged by many as in terminal decline only a few years earlier, Labour was suddenly regarded uncritically as the natural party of government. How was this accomplished? This enormously long and convoluted book attempts to explain, with an often obsessive attention to detail.

It is not entirely successful in its purpose. Lewis Minkin has made himself a distinguished academic doyen of Labour politics. In this third volume—after studies of the party conference in the early 1980s (*Labour Party Conference: A Study in Intra-party Democracy*, 1980) and then of the alliance between the party and the trade unions (*The Contentious Alliance: Trade Unions and the Labour Party*, 1991)—he is almost exclusively concerned with process as he picks his way meticulously through the interminable permanent struggle for managerial power and control inside the party's organisation after its leader John Smith's tragic death, at the age of only 55, in May 1994. Minkin does not bother to hide his personal distaste for the New Labour project, and Blair's role in it in particular. In this respect it is a welcome change from the often sycophantic treatment of the 'new' party's 'golden' years by journalists and academics alike, at least before the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

But this is not a narrative history of the Blair–Brown governments. Indeed, it is strangely narrow in its introversion. Nor is it explicitly concerned with the ideology of New Labour. Minkin's interest lies overwhelmingly in the management of the party. From the debilitating chaos and often shambolic organisation of the 1980s, the project sought to transform Labour into an authoritarian central command-and-control structure under the direction of its charismatic and flawed leader. But in the end, as Minkin explains, it failed (thankfully) to achieve the hegemony it had sought, although it came perilously close to doing so. George Orwell would have understood this. His brilliant, Swiftian satire *Animal Farm* remains an ideal text for any appreciation of the nature of the Blair Supremacy.

Inevitably, the project required the rewriting of Labour history. Blair's landslide leadership election victory in the summer of 1994 ushered in Year Zero. Neil Kinnock's sterling efforts to rescue the party from oblivion were too often ignored or derided, although, as Minkin notes, it had been his thankless task to make Labour once again fit for government. The project, with unparalleled ruthlessness, built on Kinnock's achievements. In its close attention to the manipulative techniques of modern communications, an appreciation of how to manage the media and the importance of style over substance, the project will continue to provide an admired model for those who wish to debase and hollow out democratic politics in the obsessive pursuit of power. It is unsurprising that David Cameron remains a wide-eyed admirer.

What is missing, however, from Minkin's insider analysis and narrative is any explicit attempt to explain what the Blair project was really all about, other than the personal glorification of the Dear Leader. The radical boldness of party management was paralleled by the timidity and caution of its apparent policy intentions. New Labour was more continuity than change. There was to be no serious reappraisal of what Labour should stand for. In the past, the centre-left party debated fundamental questions about the meaning of equality, the nature of the

