

8-1-1986

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### Recommended Citation

Philippe Sands, *The First Thatcher Government by Martin Holmes and Thatcher: The First Term by Patrick Cosgrave*, 9 B.C. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev. 451 (1986), <http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/iclr/vol9/iss2/8>

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## BOOK REVIEW

PHILIPPE SANDS\*

THE FIRST THATCHER GOVERNMENT, BY MARTIN HOLMES, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1985, 238 pp. + index; THATCHER: THE FIRST TERM, BY PATRICK COSGRAVE, Bodley Head, London, 1985., vii pp., 240pp. + index.

Margaret Thatcher inspires very strong feelings. She is not a popular politician but she is respected and even feared by her political opponents. She has a more powerful personality than any British Prime Minister since Winston Churchill. And she will shortly become the longest serving Prime Minister of the twentieth century. Her Conservative Party was elected into Government in May 1979 on a platform committed to a radical rethinking and reworking of economic, political and social values. In the seven years during which she has been Prime Minister, she has changed fundamentally and probably irreversibly the face and rules of British politics. In terms of style, confrontation is in and consensus out. In terms of substance, the protection of labor and collectivism are out and the protection of capital and individualism are in. How successful has Mrs. Thatcher been?

Both of these books argue that Mrs. Thatcher and her first Government have been rather successful in revitalizing the British economy, injecting a sense of realism in the British people, and turning the country away from the Keynesian, collectivist and consensus path it has been following at least since the 1940's. Both writers are clearly supporters of Mrs. Thatcher's style and her political instincts and beliefs.

Mr. Cosgrave has been Mrs. Thatcher's Special Adviser from 1975 to 1979 during which time, and subsequently, he has acted as one of her major speech-writers. He knows his subject well and has first hand experience of a number of the events he describes in his work. This probably accounts for its partly impressionistic nature and for the fact that *Thatcher: The First Term* is much

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concerned with Thatcher's style and character. The work takes off where two previous books by Cosgrave on Mrs. Thatcher left off. The eight chapters are arranged somewhat chronologically, with opening chapters on the ascendancy to the Prime Ministership in May 1979 and the period in opposition in the four previous years. It ends rather optimistically with a chapter entitled 'The End of the Beginning.' In between is a collection of factual information on the major issues and events and political battles of the first term, a collection long on description and short on critique. Much of Mrs. Thatcher's character description, which Cosgrave believes to be essential to an understanding of the first term, is already known. She works extremely hard, has a strong sense of strategy and an "extraordinary" sense of will-power and self-belief. We are also told that she is a woman and that she *acts* as a woman:

She knows she's naturally impulsive, just like a woman. She believes her impulses are right, but she has so many of them that the cautious side of her mind makes her act only on some. In that sense she's not really rational or considered at all.<sup>1</sup>

Cosgrave also believes that it is the daring and resolution which she displayed during the time of the Falklands war which are her most true characteristics. He maintains, however, that the war was not the principle reason for her reelection.

Most of Cosgrave's work is concerned with the formulation and putting into effect of domestic economic policy: getting inflation and public expenditure down, and fending off criticism of the social effects of these policies from both within and without the party. The work is descriptive in dealing with the processes and the characters. Analysis is scant. Criticism is virtually nonexistent. Little is new. There is also unfortunately very little on Thatcher's foreign policy. We learn of her hatred for the United Nations and her ambivalence towards the European Community. The author misdescribes the Brezhnev doctrine<sup>2</sup> and misstates the voting provisions of the Treaty of Rome.<sup>3</sup>

His verdict on the first term is a positive one although he believes that more should have been achieved during the first year. Thatcherism is seen as a defined political concept, a combination of liberalism in the domestic market place and nationalism in foreign policy. Whether or not it will survive Thatcher is not discussed. The spirit of Thatcherism, we are told, reflects a traditional Conservative approach, albeit one which hasn't been seen since the mid-19th Century.

Holmes' *The First Thatcher Government* is an altogether more thoughtful and complete work. He is concerned with changes in economic policy formulation between 1979 and 1983, with the way in which policies became reality, and with

<sup>1</sup> P. COSGRAVE, *THATCHER: THE FIRST TERM* (1985).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 84.

the manner in which the nature of contemporary conservatism has changed. The focus is narrower and the presentation more thematic. The work is accordingly more satisfying, particularly as the tone and writing are more scholarly.

The Introduction is devoted to the Government's objectives and policy formulation in the first six months. The main body contains a chapter each on the key economic areas: inflation, unemployment, public spending, the unions, industrial policy, and the 1983 election. Holmes considers domestic economic policy, run according to monetarist economic principles, to be broadly successful. Keynesianism and consensus are out. The control of inflation has been an "impressive economic achievement."<sup>4</sup> The overall record on pay claims is one of "sustained success."<sup>5</sup> The curbing of union power an "unspectacular achievement, but achievement nonetheless."<sup>6</sup> Even the massive rise in unemployment since 1979 is essentially not the responsibility of the Government. The final assessment is "an encouraging and good one" and the writer supports the politico-economic revolution which has occurred in Britain.

Both books, then, support the advent of Thatcherism in terms of style and substance. Holmes is more rigorous in his analysis, but the conclusions are similar. Neither work taken alone, however, gives a complete picture of the first Thatcher term, or at least of its effects on certain sectors of British society. It is true that Thatcher has had some successes, most notably in apparently restoring to the country a sense of purpose and direction and attempting to remove the feeling of the inevitability of Britain's decline. The demise of consensus politics is addressed by both authors at length, and welcomed, but there is little from either on the arrival and impact of confrontation politics. Much else is wrongly ignored: the plight of the unemployed; the decimation of the British manufacturing industry; the flight of domestic capital overseas; the takeover of British industry by the United States and Japan; the economic disintegration of certain regions; the growing centralization of administration and decisionmaking; the disembowelling of local government; the failure even to attempt reform of certain inefficiencies and inequities, such as the local government rating system; the crisis of morale in health and education; the increase in social tension and the division of the population between those in and out of work; the failure to control the abuses flowing from the deregulation of capital; and the City. All these need at least to be addressed critically to give a fuller picture of the first Thatcher term. The failure to do so sterilizes both accounts.

Two areas of particular interest to readers of this Review are also omitted. The first is the failure to discuss the way in which Thatcherism has politicized

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<sup>4</sup> M. HOLMES, *THE FIRST THATCHER GOVERNMENT* 68 (1985).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 73.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 138.

previously 'sacred' pillars of society. One thinks particularly of the legal profession. The Government has made extensive use of legislation to achieve social change. Much of it has been designed to be used by those in the private sector, such as the labor legislation by employers and non-striking workers against unions. The effect of this has been to politicize the judiciary, at least in the eyes of those who are bearing the brunt of the legislation. This was most clearly seen during the miners' strike in 1984. And the legal profession itself, the Bar, has recently used the legal system against the Lord Chancellor, one of its own members, to seek an annulment of an administrative decision not to increase legal aid fees by more than 5 percent. Such willingness to litigate as a means of challenging government would recently have been considered unimaginable.

The second omission of note is any analysis of the Thatcher Government's uneasy relationship with its partners in Europe. This relationship has recently been strained further by the unique and uncritical support of Mrs. Thatcher for American policy towards the Soviet Union and Libya and by her willingness to encourage a stronger presence for American multinational corporations in Britain at the expense of their European competitors. At issue is Britain's role in the international community. Her international effectiveness and future economic success is directly tied to that of the European Community: it is vitally important that responsibilities to that Community be fulfilled.

In conclusion, these two books provide a useful and readable introduction to the economic aspects of Margaret Thatcher's first term of office. They are by no means comprehensive and, by large scale omission, they fail to reflect the more painful impact of Thatcherism.

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LAW AND ORDER IN THE NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS. By ROBERT J. GORDON AND MERVYN J. MEGGITT. University Press of New England, 1985, 283 pp., appendix, bibliography, index, \$35.00.

*Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands*<sup>1</sup> by Robert J. Gordon and Mervyn J. Meggitt is a study of a tribal society — the Enga — where the public peace is threatened not by the random stranger-to-stranger violence familiar to western urbanites, but by the ravages of inter-tribal and inter-clan warfare. In the authors' words: "A climate of suspicion and distrust appears to be a common

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<sup>1</sup> ROBERT J. GORDON AND MERVYN J. MEGGITT, *LAW AND ORDER IN THE NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDS* (1985).