

The acknowledged leader of Parliament's populist left after Margaret Thatcher's rise in 1979, Tony Benn has the distinction of being Britain's longest serving Labor MP, with a 51-year tenure that lasted from 1950 to 2001.

This interview offers a scathing critique of Margaret Thatcher's economic counter-revolution and corporate privatization, and her influence in globalization.

Corporate Influence in Government

INTERVIEWER: According to one analysis, the economic history of the last 20 years is a story about governments retreating from the marketplace and allowing free markets to reign. Do you buy that?

TONY BENN: No. What's happened is big corporations have seized governments and taken them over, making the state much stronger in the interest of corporate finance. That's what has happened. The state in Great Britain is much more powerful than it was when Mrs. Thatcher came to power. She destroyed trade unions, she destroyed local government, she limited free speech, and she recruited a lot of riot police. So the idea that market forces have weakened the state is nonsense. It's been strengthened. The people who control market forces have taken over the state. I met an old governor of Ohio a year ago, and he said to me, "You'll never have democracy while big business buys both parties and expects a payoff from whichever one wins." We're not represented anymore. We're managed on behalf of global capitalism, and that's why in Seattle and Prague and everywhere else in the world, people are beginning to stir, because they realize they're being managed now. Nobody represents them.

The Global Economy: "An Economy for Gamblers"

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe the global free-market economy as we know it today?

TONY BENN: Well, it's not really new, is it? In the 19th century there was a global economy—it was known as the British empire. We sent troops to India. They very obligingly brought the goods we produced in Birmingham, and they would send us cheap raw materials. If they didn't, we had the redcoats to put them in their place. We tried it in America, and it didn't work there, but it did work elsewhere. And imperialism has come back now. In the post-World War II years, the decolonization occurred, and European empires gave up. Now the United

States is a new empire, bombing Sudan and bombing [other] countries at will, and in a way it's not all that new. It is a reversion toward Victorian economies and politics, and I think people are beginning to see that as well. It's a reversion in the sense that the welfare state is being turned back into Lady Bountiful and charity. Instead of people paying when they are well and getting [the benefits] when they need them, they are paying, whether they have children or not, for children to be educated. That's what [the socialist initiative] was about. It was insurance, a national insurance in a world where we see ourselves as a family and not a jungle.

INTERVIEWER: You have described this global economy as an economy for gamblers. What do you mean?

TONY BENN: I mean the money that crosses the exchange rates every day is in pursuit of a quick buck. There was a rogue trader guy called Nick Leeson, who was a stockbroker working in Singapore, and he was gambling in the futures market, and he lost £500 million. I wondered how he got it. He got it by gambling. And he brought down a bank that employed him. And those are the gamblers. The world is run by gamblers.

I mean, what real wealth is created by the stockbrokers on Wall Street? None at all. They're gambling with wealth created by other people. Real wealth is created by miners, tool makers, nurses, doctors, and engineers. You never hear about them, because the gamblers are the richest, and they dominate the media. They, the wealthy people, run the media, so we don't hear about the other problem.

"Progress Comes from Underneath"

INTERVIEWER: What significance do you see in the demonstrations in Seattle and Prague?

TONY BENN: Oh, I think the demonstrations in Seattle and Prague, and there was one in London as well, are an indication that young people have lost confidence in the democratic process because they see all the guys at the top as the same. Democrat or Republican, they're both funded by big business. Vote New Labor or Tory, they're all funded by big business. They're nagging us, and they don't listen to us, and so on. I suppose it's as significant as the demonstrations in South Africa before the end of apartheid, when the blacks were not

COMMANDING HEIGHTS

Tony Benn

3

represented. And in the end, apartheid collapsed. It's as important as the demand for women's right to vote. I mean, when my mum was born in 1897, women didn't have the vote. They got the vote by demonstrating and chaining themselves to the railings. They were sent to prison, denounced as being violent, went on hunger strikes, were forcibly fed by wardresses, and then they had to change the law. Progress comes from underneath. And Congress and Parliament are the last place to get the message. My definition of progress is this: As you come out with a progressive idea, it's completely ignored, notably by the media. If you go on, you're absolutely mad. Then if you go on further, you're dangerous. Then there's a pause, and suddenly you can't find anyone who doesn't claim to have thought of it in the first place. And that is how progress is made. It begins at the bottom and permeates at the top. So this obsessive media study with leaders, what the significance of Keith Joseph, Mrs. Thatcher, President Reagan was, is irrelevant, really. It's what people will and won't put up with. And I think in the end, the ballot boxes, with all the mistakes it makes, the voting machine and the ballot box do give you a chance to sack the people who govern you, and that means they have to listen. But there's no way you can sack the corporations or the gamblers. You can't sack them at all. They're there forever.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that one of the key issues for the protestors at the World Trade Organization meetings is a kind of anti-corporatism, that they see big corporations as creating most of the problems?

TONY BENN: Well, there's a mixture. The trade unions were against the WTO because you sack people in Seattle and start production in Taiwan, say. The churches didn't like the crudity of worshiping man rather than God. The police movement saw all this as a threat. It was a combination of forces. It was very, very interesting and had a very, very wide appeal. The media presented it as they always do, as violent. But the real violence in society is in the fact that we're killing 5,000 babies a month in Iraq because of the sanctions. That's real violence. But a little bit of trouble and somebody throwing a brick at a McDonald's hamburger joint isn't the sort of violence that capitalism engages in on a regular basis. So I think people see that, and I think young people at the moment would rather be in Prague than attending conventions of political parties in Britain because they don't think that it will make any difference, whoever they vote for.

Keeping Corporate Influence in Check

INTERVIEWER: So do you see the pendulum swinging back the other way? Will the movement progress toward free markets, or reverse and go back again?

TONY BENN: I don't think anybody, even for a moment, suggested you shouldn't be able to buy a cheap bar of soap in one shop against another that's more expensive. That's not the point. It's corporate power that it's about. I mean, the political power of a big corporation—I've dealt with them all my life. I mean, I was the energy minister, so I used to deal with the oil companies. And Esso once came to me and said, "We're not working with you because you're of a different political philosophy." So I said, "Thank you very much," and they went out. I had all the North Sea oil and I had to allocate it, so I didn't give any to Esso. They came back a year later, and they were on their knees. Amoco wouldn't cooperate, so they didn't get any more North Sea oil, so they sacked their top management and came back and got it [from me]. I mean, we're much more powerful in dealing with big corporations than anyone believes. I remember IBM tried to cancel out our devaluation of the pound by raising the price of all their goods. So I put pressure on them, and they had to capitulate. But you've got to fight for the people you elect.

I mean, take the wartime parallel if, when London was being bombed, Churchill said, "Don't blame me; it's a world war," people would have said, "Well, bloody well buy some more spitfires." And it's no good us saying, "It's globalization." Well, tell the multinationals they can't do it, and they'd have to fall into line, because why do they spend millions and millions of dollars and pounds on public relations if they don't want to be popular? And if the government said, "We're not having that with Ford," then Ford would realize they'd better change their policy. Governments are big purses. I mean, if Ford closes its plant in Dagenham, I'd say to them, "We're never buying another Ford car for the ministry of defense, for the police force," [and] Ford would capitulate in five minutes. But we've been brainwashed into believing that we're at the mercy of the corporations. We are not at the mercy of the corporations, but they tried to control us, and now they buy political parties to be their agents. That's why the guys who go to Prague and Seattle don't like it, and they're right.

Planning the Peace: Britain's Mixed Economy

INTERVIEWER: According to one view, what happened after the Great Depression was a huge loss of faith in markets and governments everywhere. ... Is that your view of what took place?

TONY BENN: Well, before the Great Depression, the gamblers ran capitalism and brought the economies down. And what happened? The war followed the Great Depression. In war you mobilize everything. Governments tore down the railings in Britain and America to make bullets. They rationed food, they conscripted people, and they sent them to die. The state took over. And after the war people said, "If you can plan for war, why can't you plan for peace?" When I was 17, I had a letter from the government saying, "Dear Mr. Benn, will you turn up when you're 17 1/2? We'll give you free food, free clothes, free training, free accommodation, and two shillings, ten pence a day to just kill Germans." People said, well, if you can have full employment to kill people, why in God's name couldn't you have full employment and good schools, good hospitals, good houses? And the answer was that you can't do it if you allow profit to take precedent over people. And that was the basis of the New Deal in America and of the postwar Labor government in Great Britain and so on.

INTERVIEWER: Can you give us a sense of the idealism and the hopes that were prevalent in Great Britain in 1945 at the end of World War II?

TONY BENN: Well, I came back in a troop ship in the summer of 1945. I was a pilot in the RAF [Royal Air Force], and I was picked, as a 19-year-old, to be a Labor candidate for Parliament. And we had all these soldiers that had been fighting in Asia, in Burma. I had been in the Middle East. And of course they all said, "Never again. We're never going back to unemployment, to the means test, to fascism, to rearmament. We want to build a new society." That was the hope, and it was that hope that gave us the welfare state, gave us the National Health Service, gave us full employment, gave us trade union rights. That hope really rebuilt the country from the bottom up. And it was a marvelous system. It was done against a background of terrible deprivation. Our houses had been bombed, our factories had been bombed, our railways were bankrupt, our mines were bankrupt. We built it up, and people said, "This is better than allowing a lot of gamblers to run the world, where they're not interested in us, but only in profit."

COMMANDING HEIGHTS

Tony Benn

6

INTERVIEWER: Foreigners looking on, from the outside, were astonished when Winston Churchill, the great war leader, lost the 1945 election.

TONY BENN: Not at all. Winston Churchill was a Conservative who had been a supporter of the policies that led to the tragedy when he was chancellor of the Exchequer. He stuck to the gold standard and was willing sacrifice people's jobs in the interest of so-called financial stability. You've got it happening again now with the euro. Mind you, I knew Churchill. He was very kind to me, and he was a marvelous war leader, but he wasn't the man we wanted in peacetime. And it wasn't personal anyway. Nobody saw that. They realized that what we wanted was a new society. That's what we voted for, and by God it made a difference. The first thing we did at the end of the war, when we were bankrupt, was to triple the widows' pension. We didn't have two pennies to rub together, but justice took precedence over financial propriety, and that was a very hard time. We rationed food, and we were short of everything, but by God we put people ahead of profit.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of a man was Clement Attlee [Churchill's successor as prime minister]? What inspired him?

TONY BENN: Well, Attlee was in World War I. When he came back, he was the mayor of Poplar in the East End of London. He saw the terrible poverty, and he said, "If you look around the world, what are the problems? They're all caused by the private ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange." And in the manifesto of 1945, he said the prewar slumps were not acts of God; they were the result of too much power in the hands of too few people, who behaved like a state within a state, and we have to take our future into our own hands. He was a very remarkable man. I sat with him in Parliament for some time before he retired.

INTERVIEWER: What was he like?

TONY BENN: Well, he was a very modest man. Churchill contemptuously said, "There's a lot to be modest about." But of course it wasn't true. Attlee was a man of very few words.... He was monosyllabic in answer. He was a marvelous chairman, utterly committed. He was very knowledgeable, and he handled the Cabinet giants who built it all up again. He was really

remarkable. And when we were defeated in the election of '51 and Churchill returned, we had the biggest vote we'd ever had, a bigger vote than the Conservatives, but the quirks of the electoral system gave Churchill a second term. So that man is remembered. Not that politics is made by individuals, you know—it's mass movements that make politics. So you mustn't concentrate too much on the individuals concerned, though sometimes they play a role in articulating the aspirations of the people they lead.

INTERVIEWER: Tell us more about what Attlee's government did when it came to power and nationalized the commanding heights of the economy.

TONY BENN: Well, the railways were absolutely bankrupt. I mean, they had been absolutely destroyed before the war because they didn't invest, and therefore, when we brought the railway, we brought rubbish, and we re-equipped them, put them on a proper footing. The pits, the mines, were ill equipped. The conditions were awful. Over one million miners were killed or injured in the years between 1926 and 1935—over one million. And people wouldn't put up with it anymore. So it was an act of regeneration, of renewal. And even today, you know, America boasts of being a free-enterprise society, but it pours billions of pounds into defense, into nuclear power, into space, all of which filter their way into the economy. The United States economy is driven by state investment and state ownership, and in America, of course, the schools are public. There are a handful of private schools, but in America there's a nationalized education system. And most countries recognize the value of that. Nobody's privatized the police force and nobody's privatized the army, because they're essential. And so when you look at it that way, it becomes a little bit clearer, and I think a lot of people now realize that's the argument in Britain today. If you brought the railways into public ownership, you'd have 80 percent support in the population. The railways are rotten. They're neglected, they're ill run, and so on. They're not making proper investment. People are now ready for public services that are publicly financed. And that is the change that's occurred partly as a result of the damage Mrs. Thatcher did.

The Purpose of Nationalization and Planned Economies

INTERVIEWER: What were the principles behind the nationalization of Great Britain's industries after World War II?

TONY BENN: Part of the problem was you couldn't make money if you had no equipment, so you had to reequip the industries. So, of course, the railways were reequipped. They are, after all, the spinal cord of a modern industrial society, aren't they? You have to have a proper railway system. In most countries of the world, public transport is subsidized because it is unprofitable to run services in rural areas where perhaps there may be a handful of houses that have no service. This whole idea of whether profit or services is the key is what lies at the heart of the argument. What Mrs. Thatcher did was to take the huge power of the state and transfer it from looking after people to looking after big corporations. And now people are being driven back to where they were before the Industrial Revolution when they were serfs in the presence of the great barons of the private corporations, most of which were international in character.

INTERVIEWER: The British example of a mixed economy was arrived at democratically, or at least nonviolently. Was that a norm that was copied throughout a lot of the new independent countries?

TONY BENN: Quite a few copied it, but it wasn't our idea. I mean, Winston Churchill nationalized the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1914. I've got his speech. I used to quote it to the Conservatives in the House when I set up the British National Oil Corporation. He said governments are being exploited by the big oil trusts, so the first nationalized oil company in the world was created by Winston Churchill in the old days when he was a Liberal. Now a lot of countries do it. The Tories set up the BBC, Henry VIII nationalized the Church of England, and Charles II nationalized the Post Office because he wanted to open everybody's letters. So nationalization has got nothing whatever to do with socialism. Nationalization is the state control of essential services. Socialism is all about democracy. It gives people an opportunity to buy, collectively by their vote, what they can't afford personally—the good schools, good hospitals, good transport, good fire brigade, new museums, art galleries. And the great achievements of municipal enterprise, of which America has many examples, are a product of people voting for the services they want. Whereas otherwise only the rich can afford them.

INTERVIEWER: What about the model of the centrally planned economy, a mixed public and private marketplace under a central plan which is directed by a government?

TONY BENN: Well, I think a lot of people came to the end of the war realizing that if you wanted to meet people's needs you had to have some greater plan. After all, every company in the world, Bill Gates of Microsoft and all the others, they're all planned. They decide where to put their money. They don't leave it just to market forces. They have a strategy and governments should do the same. This idea that you could leave everything to the market ... I mean, suppose you went back to the old days when there was no fire brigade. In the old days if you wanted to have your house covered by fire, you went to a fire insurance company, and they gave you a plate, and you stuck it on your house. If the house caught fire, the fire brigade would go up and down, but they'd only put out the fire in the houses that were insured with them. Of course there was chaos, because you could have your house destroyed by the house next door catching fire, which wasn't insured. So this idea of public service is so sensible, and funny enough, now people are seeing it all over again as they see the insecurity, the inequality, the injustice, and indeed, in many countries, the brutality of market forces. What is it? Seven million children die every year in a world where we're supposed to be so marvelously productive. Companies are bigger than countries. Ford is bigger than South Africa. Toyota is bigger than Norway. I dealt with all the multinational companies. Huge. [These multinationals are] bigger than nation states and trying to impose their will upon nation states, and I don't think nation states are going to accept it. Even in America, Texas can't impose duties on goods from California, but if Texans want to subsidize Texan products, that's not illegal under the American constitution. So this idea that market forces have won the day is a complete illusion, spread by academics adhering to this new religion of monetarist fundamentalism. Monetarism is much more dangerous than Islamic fundamentalism because they want to destroy everybody and make them just serfs of the gamblers who spend billions of dollars, trillions of dollars, across the exchange rates every day in search of a quick buck.

Democracy and Capitalism: Ideas in Opposition?

INTERVIEWER: You've talked about the academics and the monetarists and so on. In Great Britain, the charge to undo the welfare state was led by Keith Joseph. Keith Joseph was concerned about a sense of freedom. What's the difference between your sense of freedom and his sense of freedom?

TONY BENN: In 1945 in the election, I drove a loudspeaker van around in the campaign, and we went to Covent Garden, and there was a guy called Knocker O'Connell. ... He did a political

poem for me, and one line was this: "'F' stands for freedom, what Britain brags about. If you can't afford your dinner, you're free to go without." And that was the sort of freedom that capitalists believed in. You were free to starve if you weren't rich. This idea that keeping people down is the way you get freedom is ridiculous, because the world is dominated by multinational corporations that have never been elected. You can't get rid of them. How do you get rid of Bill Gates? You can't do it. But at least you can get rid of Clinton or Blair or Major or Bush. You can't get rid of corporations. And they are the ones who are dictating what sort of a world we live in. I think capitalism has one thing in common with communism: They both detest democracy. I used to go to Moscow on ministerial visits, and I'd meet the central committee for the Communist Party, and they had not been elected. And I would meet the commissars, and they had not been elected. And then I'd go on a ministerial visit to Brussels, and I'd meet the commissioners; they hadn't been elected. I'd meet the central bankers; they hadn't been elected. Communism and capitalism want to run society from the top, and you're allowed to decide whether you want Bush or Gore or Blair or Major, but you're not allowed to discuss capitalism in Russia or socialism in the West. Do you see what I mean? It's a very interesting thing to observe. Market forces destroy democracy by putting money above the voting machine or the ballot box.

Nationalized Industries of the '70s: Highly Successful or "Clapped Out"?

INTERVIEWER: Would you accept that the British economy by the mid- to late '70s was a mess?

TONY BENN: Well, I think there were a lot of problems. There was the oil crisis, and we may have another one. We're talking, remember, about the end of the year 2000. With a war in the Middle East, rising oil prices could throw the whole world economy into collapse again. So you have to recognize, as [Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan once said, that events can often change things. But what we did at the end of the war, to employ everybody, was a remarkable achievement. We built 400,000 houses. We built a health service, absolutely free when you needed it. You paid for it when you were well, and you got it for free when you were ill. Everything. No charge for spectacles or prescriptions or anything. That was a huge advance in human improvement. And now, increasingly, they're trying to privatize the health service so the rich will be able to afford to be looked after, but other people won't.

INTERVIEWER: But the nationalized industries, do you think they were a success in the late '70s?

TONY BENN: Well, they were much better than what was there before, and they were better than what we have now. I mean, the pits, the mining industry has been privatized, and there are no pits left, and we've got 1,000 years of coal under our territory. When I was minister of energy, secretary of state by the time I left office, one-quarter of the North Sea was owned by the government. [It was owned by the] BNO, British National Oil Corporation. It's all been sold off by Thatcher. So in the middle of the fuel crisis, you suddenly realize that the policies being pursued by a socialist government were in the interests of the public. And people see that now, you know. They're beginning to understand it now. But during the Cold War, of course, what they said was if you're against capitalism you must be an agent for the KGB; you must be working for the Kremlin; we're about to be invaded by the Red Army—all of which was rubbish, but they used that to frighten people away from policies that really were in their own interest.

INTERVIEWER: There's a quote [about] Mrs. Thatcher ... from [mayor of London and former Labor minister "Red Ken"] Livingstone. He said when they took power they discovered that the nationalized industries were a bunch of "clapped-out businesses." Do you agree?

TONY BENN: No, of course not. When they were privatized they began making a profit. But I tell you, I went across to the House of Commons library the other day to dig out two things: the subsidies to the privatized railway companies and the dividends paid by the privatized railway companies. And many of the dividends paid are paid out of the public subsidy, and the companies then run the railways for the least investment they can. It's a rotten system. And the bus services have disappeared in rural areas. The trains are unreliable. And people don't like it. I know it's against the philosophy of the 1980s to think anyone could ever want decent public services, but they do, and they're prepared to pay for it.

Margaret Thatcher's War with the Miners

INTERVIEWER: You said there's 1,000 years' worth of coal under the ground in Great Britain. The Thatcherite economists would say, "But we were digging up coal at twice the world price." Now, what's your argument against that?

COMMANDING HEIGHTS

Tony Benn

12

TONY BENN: Oh, very simple. I mean, I was in charge of nuclear power for a long time, and I remember when I was told that nuclear power was cheap, safe, and peaceful. It turns out nuclear power is three and a half times the cost of coal. Far from being safe, it's deadly dangerous, as we know from Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. And thirdly, it's far from being peaceful. All the plutonium from our civil nuclear power stations went to America to make warheads for the bombs. We were lied to about nuclear power. And the British mining industry had the cheapest deep-mined coal in the world. Of course I know you get coal strip-mining and open pits more cheaply, but that destroys the environment, whereas deep-mined coal goes under. No, Mrs. Thatcher fought a civil war against the miners because she didn't like the miners' union. It had no economic justification whatever.

INTERVIEWER: But why did she take on the miners?

TONY BENN: Because the National Union of Mineworkers is a very strong trade union. I mean, Mrs. Thatcher was at war with half the country, or at least a substantial part of it. She used to talk about the miners as the enemy within, and these were people who'd served in the war, dug the coal, provided the Industrial Revolution, fired the ships that went round the world with British goods, and she treated them as an enemy. And of course in the end she was thrown out, and Arthur Scargill was reelected as the president of the NUM. Mrs. Thatcher was thrown out by her own party, and that gave me a lot of satisfaction.

INTERVIEWER: What were the miners fighting for? Was it more than just their jobs?

TONY BENN: They were fighting for their right to employment at the work they did, and for the community, because the mining communities—and I represent one of them where all the pits have been closed—are in a state of mass deprivation. It was the price they paid for Mrs. Thatcher's political campaign against trade unions. That's what I meant when I said the state was more powerful under Mrs Thatcher. She used it ruthlessly to destroy anybody who got in her way—local government, trade unions, anyone. So whatever else you could say about her, you can't describe her as an agent of liberty. She was an agent of repression in the interests of capital.

INTERVIEWER: What has happened to the miners and their community now?

TONY BENN: Well, it was destroyed. I mean, there are miners still, but the mining area has only a few thousand left. At the beginning of the century there were 750,000 miners. But the coal is still there, and we're going to need that coal, because as we now know, the price of oil is going up and up and up. Any country that has coal is sitting on a goldmine—black gold, they call it. And we'll have to dig it again. There's no question about it. And you can turn coal into oil, you can scrub the plants, you can have fluid burning, you can bring the oil ashore from under the North Sea where there's so much coal. There's a tremendous opportunity there, but not while you allow your policy to be dictated by hatred of trade unions and a desire to please big corporations.

Globalization: "Free Movement of Capital, Not Labor"

INTERVIEWER: The free-market economy works against the coal miners in Great Britain. Other economies become more and more productive, but the mines in Great Britain, they were five miles deep, and it took six hours out of a working day to get to and from the coal. Meanwhile, we can buy coal abroad from Poland, from South Africa, from Australia at half the price. So what is your challenge to that free-market model? What's the other kind of model there can be?

TONY BENN: Very simply, any company can sack people in Britain and close the pits or close car factories and open them up in Malaysia, where the wages are very much lower. So you lay off people who go on the dole in Britain. You then exploit low-paid workers in Malaysia. But if the low-paid workers in Malaysia want to come to Britain and say, "We get higher wages in Britain," you keep them out under immigration control. Globalization is not internationalism at all. It's the free movement of capital, but not the free movement of labor. We discovered that some of the miners' pension funds were actually being invested in pits in South Africa under the apartheid regime, where the trade unions were illegal. So miners with their own deferred savings were funding cheaper competition against their own jobs. People won't accept it. They didn't accept it, and they fought a bonny battle. You wait and see: The battle is now moving very much in favor of a fair and decent society, and the gamblers will have to be controlled in some way to prevent them destroying the manufacturing industry. In America it's happening, too. I mean, your manufacturing industry is all going to China now. The United States may have high-tech and defense, but a lot of the manufacturing industry in the United States is

now drifting away to Third World countries where the wages are lower. ... It's not a very good system.

A Critique of Margaret Thatcher's Legacy

INTERVIEWER: A number of people would say, for better or worse, that Mrs. Thatcher was the most historically significant peacetime prime minister of this century, apart from Attlee.

TONY BENN: She destroyed our manufacturing industry. She brought unemployment to the highest rate we'd had since the prewar years. She began to dismantle the welfare state. She deprived the health service of the resources that it needed. She deprived education, schools, and so on, and she did enormous damage to the fabric of society. In the end, her own party threw her out. They didn't want her anymore. They introduced the poll tax, and that finished her off. So I think Mrs. Thatcher will not be remembered as a great figure, but she was a passionate advocate of money running the world instead of the people running their own society. That was her great contribution to a debate that I think she has lost.

INTERVIEWER: You say you think she has lost the debate, but on the whole what appears to be more or less Thatcherite policies—privatization, deregulation, and so on—are sweeping the world. It's not re-nationalization and collectivism.

TONY BENN: Well, it depends what you mean by sweeping the world. Look at what happened [at the World Trade Organization meetings] in Prague and Seattle. Even if you look at Belgrade, people are now saying, "Well, if no one will listen at the top, whether they're communist or capitalist, we'll take it onto the streets." I think that is the real danger. If you destroy democracy, people take power into their own hands, and in the prewar years, that led to fascist governments coming to power. I think the real danger is cynicism leading to fascism. I remember Hitler coming to power. I bought *Mein Kampf* when I was a kid of 10. I've got it in the basement down in this house, and I look at it, and the arguments that Hitler put forward are not so very different from the ones that are now being put forward in terms of market forces and free enterprise, except that he threw this state even more powerfully into the defense of the rich.

INTERVIEWER: There's a Labor government running this country again, and yet they've reversed none of Mrs. Thatcher's reforms. Doesn't that suggest that they buy her argument?

TONY BENN: It's not a Labor government—it's a New Labor government following a policy called the Third Way, symbolized by the Dome, a big structure containing nothing, and they're now in serious danger of losing the support of people who put them there. But the British establishment supported New Labor in 1997 because they thought it was going to follow Mrs. Thatcher's policy, and we'll see how it works out. But it isn't the Labor Party that's in office; it's New Labor, a new political party of which I happen not to be a member. It's probably the smallest party ever in the history of Britain, but they happen all to be in the Cabinet, so they're quite powerful.

INTERVIEWER: But they've not reversed Thatcher's policies.

TONY BENN: No, no, I agree with you. I think they've carried on privatization and deregulation. And look at the BSE [Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis, or "Mad Cow Disease"] crisis. Mrs. Thatcher deregulated the farming industry so you could feed dead animals to other animals, and it led to the BSE outbreak and destroyed the farming industry in Britain. It's a perfect example of deregulation, and it did enormous damage because our meat was banned abroad. That was Mrs. Thatcher's contribution.