

Thatcher's Legacy on the North East: A Case Study of Three Initiatives

Bailey Schwab
Student No: 170378158
History and Politics VL12

My investigation:

- A case study of three initiatives developed in the North East under Thatcher- Nissan Car Factory, Teesdale Business Park, and Gateshead Metro Centre.
- My preliminary thoughts were that in the North East, the memory of Thatcher in the North East is one of regional decline, mine and pit closures, and the destruction of local communities by an insensitive, uncaring Tory government.
- Conclusion: the region's decline had started before 1979 due to poor industrial relations throughout the 1970s, poor governmental economic management, and globalization. Furthermore, my research suggests that Thatcher played a first-hand role in attracting various forms of inward investment into different North East regions which have had positive long-lasting impacts.

Methods:

- I interviewed notable former and current politicians such as Lord Norman Tebbit, Chris Mullin, and Dr. Paul Williams.
- Extensive use of the surrounding literature.
- I visited the Thatcher Archives in Cambridge University to obtain access to confidential cabinet and private documents of the time period.
- Writing up my findings in a 12,000-word report.



Thatcher at opening ceremony of Nissan, 1986.



Thatcher at opening ceremony of Metro Centre, 1986.



'Walk in the Wilderness, 1987'.

Nissan

- Cabinet documents in the Thatcher Archives show that Thatcher had a first-hand role in bringing Nissan into the North East – this would run contrary to the comments about Thatcher being insensitive to the North East's industrial culture
- Nissan provides employment for 7000 people directly and for over 40,000 in its supply chain – it is one of the biggest employers in the North East
- My research suggests that the only cloud on the horizon is Brexit – access to European markets was a big incentive for Nissan to invest in Britain

Metro Centre

- Developed within the Gateshead variant of the Enterprise Zone scheme; Enterprise Zones were established in 1981 by the Thatcher government in order for free markets to take over development in deprived areas instead of local planning
- The Retail Park employs up to 9000 people and thousands more indirectly. Many forget this was developed due to the incentives the Thatcher government provided developers through the Enterprise Zone schemes.
- Developer Sir John Hall claimed the Enterprise Zone allowed him to build ahead of time due to financial incentives and lack of bureaucratic overseeing

Teesdale Business Park

- Developed under the Teesside variant of the Urban Development Corporations (UDC) which were bodies set up by the UK government in 1981 and were charged with the urban development of an area, outside the usual system of Town and Country Planning
- Local government was seen as a hindrance to development especially during the inner-city problems of the 1980s thus, a new approach was taken in the form of the UDCs and the Enterprise Zones
- What currently rests on the derelict site Thatcher walked on in 1987 is a Durham University Campus; a college Campus; residential housing; business offices; environmental agency offices; a radio station (formerly TFM radio); Tees Barrage; a hotel and restaurants