“A Proper Send-Off” for Thatcher

Abstract: In this chapter, Hadley considers the ceremonial funeral accorded to Thatcher and the debates surrounding its cost and scale. Hadley analyses the tension between the private, intimate aspects of the funeral and the public elements of it, arguing that it became a national pageant that was less about Thatcher – the woman or the politician – and more about a display of nationalism. From this official display of respectful mourning, the chapter turns to consider the protests at the funeral and the death parties held in former mining communities. Although these celebratory responses are distasteful in burning effigies of Thatcher, Hadley seeks to understand them as a protest against the lasting legacy of Thatcher’s policies.

Nine days after her death, on 17 April, Margaret Thatcher received her official “send-off” from the British people in what was, as many commentators noted, a state funeral in all but name. The preparations for the funeral had been put in place long before the announcement of Margaret Thatcher’s death, and opposition to the funeral plans had been mounted almost as soon as they were made public. In 2008, an episode of the news satire programme *Mock the Week* addressed the possibility of a state funeral for Margaret Thatcher. Obviously the panelists’ remarks were designed to shock and amuse, but, as is often the case with humour, they revealed a fundamental truth – in this case, about the strength of feeling that Thatcher’s death provoked. Andy Parsons questioned the decision to have the funeral at St Paul’s Cathedral in London suggesting that “there’d be a much better turn out” if the funeral was held in the North “because there’d all be loads of people in the streets having a party”. This regional division in attitudes towards Thatcher is also evident in Frankie Boyle’s response to the proposed cost of the funeral: “for £3m they could give everyone in Scotland a shovel and we would dig a hole so deep that we could hand her over to Satan personally”. These comments stand as a stark prediction of some of the most vehement responses that, as we have seen throughout this volume, surfaced in response to Thatcher’s death. In particular, they indicate the resurgence of anti-Thatcher feelings in those parts of the country that were most negatively impacted by Thatcher’s policies. Moreover, these comments hint at what was to become the central issue in the debate surrounding Thatcher’s funeral: whether the cost of the funeral was justified for such a divisive politician.

Crisis of the projected cost of the funeral implicitly questioned the state’s decision to officially honour such a divisive politician. As with the nature of Thatcher’s funeral, criticism of the cost had appeared even before Thatcher’s death. An e-petition, which had accumulated 33,832 signatures by the time it closed on 10 October 2012, adopted the language of Thatcher’s neo-liberal economics to protest the cost of the funeral. It asserted that “In keeping with the great lady’s legacy, Margaret Thatcher’s state funeral should be funded and managed by the private sector to offer the best value and choice for end users and other stakeholders” (“Thatcher state funeral to be privatised”). After Thatcher’s death was announced, several reports appeared concerning the projected cost of the funeral, which ranged in their estimates from £10 million to around £4 million (Hope). On 29 July, however, the BBC reported that the final cost had been £1.2 million (“Funeral of Baroness Thatcher”). While some