Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

Thatcher & Sons: A revolution in three acts [1]

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I have just finished reading Simon Jenkins' *Thatcher & Sons*, and would thoroughly recommend it to readers of this blog. As a history of the Thatcher and Post-Thatcher era it is fascinating: the writing is superb and ? for a political book ? it's a real page-turner.

The book's strength lies in its political analysis. Jenkins identifies not one, but two distinct Thatcher revolutions ? one good, one bad ? both of which have been enthusiastically carried on by her successors, Major, Blair, and Brown.

The first revolution is the one usually associated with the Iron Lady ? the liberation of the economy from the unions and the post-war socialist consensus. This revolution saved Britain from being the "sick man of Europe" and made the continued economic growth and prosperity that followed possible.

But it was accompanied by a 'second revolution', which was altogether more malign, consisting of the massive centralisation of power in Whitehall, the destruction of local government, and the rapid proliferation of quangos, regulations, and targets. As the first revolution runs out of steam, the second continues to gain pace. As Jenkins says, our everyday lives are now dictated by central government to an extent that would be unthinkable in most other countries ? even 'left-wing' ones.

The solution, Jenkins argues, lies in a 'third revolution' ? the massive decentralisation of power to local government, to the counties and cities (and subordinate boroughs and parishes) to which people feel a sense of allegiance. As 'bonfires of controls' were lit across the country, the death of the quango would be upon us.

Compelling stuff. I've long been a keen localist, and Thatcher & Sons leaves me more convinced than ever. You can buy it here, from the ASI bookshop.

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