

## **Britain in 1979**

I would like you all to cast your minds back to the beginning of history, to the dawn of time itself, to the period before Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister.

One would rise in the morning, probably listening to the state radio or watching the state TV. In the bathroom someone might clean their teeth and wash with state water, heated perhaps by state gas, state electricity, state coal or state oil. At breakfast he or she might consume a state egg, cooked on a state-made gas stove or a state-made electric cooker. They would use a state steel knife or spoon to eat it with.

Pausing only to pick up the state mail, probably three days late, from the doormat, one might lock one's state owned house (and 35 percent of them were), and unlock one's state-produced car. Stepping carefully over the garbage dropped by the state refuse collectors or the litter left by the state street cleaners, one might head for one's state job. After dropping off the children at their state school, and the spouse, perhaps, at the state hospital, and carefully avoiding the state-produced trucks and buses on the road, one might park in the state garage and head in.

The morning might be spent on the state telephone. Perhaps a trip might be arranged on the state airline, taking off in a state-made aeroplane from the state airport, reached by a state bus service. Perhaps a day trip might be planned on the state railway, even staying perhaps at one of the state hotels. Or maybe a state ferry journey on a state-built ship from a state-owned port. One had quite a choice.

The point is that in 1979 one could go through an entire day without necessarily encountering the productive, private sector of the economy at all. And all of these state industries were inefficient, all costly, and most were loss-making and required high taxes to subsidize them. Not only that, they all added to the costs of private businesses by inflating their travel, communications and energy costs.

We still have a state mail service and a state-owned London Underground, but the rest has gone. Looking back it seems like a nightmare. It was real though. It happened, and we were lucky we finally woke up from it.