

Frame101x – week 3 – Episode 5

We begin this episode with a video of Margaret Thatcher, who was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 until 1990.

In her final parliamentary debate as Prime Minister, the opposition attacked her policy record.

Simon Hughes (Liberal Democrats):
There is no doubt that the Prime Minister, has in many ways, achieved substantial success.

There is one statistic, that I understand is not however challenged.

And that is that over her 11 years, the gap between the richest 10 percent and the poorest 10 percent in this country has widened substantially.

How can she say at the end of her chapter of British politics, that she can justify many people in a constituency such as mine being relatively much poorer off, much less well housed and much less well provided than it was in 1979?

Surely she accepts that that is not a record that she or any Prime Minister can be proud of.

The frame is clear:
the poor have become poorer,
and the rich have become richer.

This is a classic frame.

How does Thatcher reframe the debate?

Thatcher:
People on all levels of income are better off than they were in 1979.

The honorable member is saying that he would rather that the poor were poorer, provided that the rich were less rich.

That way you will never create the wealth for better social services, as we have.

What a policy!

Yes,
he would rather have the poor poorer,
provided that the rich were less rich.

That is the Liberal policy.

Hughes:
No.

Thatcher:
Yes,
it came out!

He did not intend it to,
but it did.

[...] Jim Sillars (Scottish National Party):
The Prime Minister is aware that I detest every single one of her domestic policies,
and I have never hidden that fact.

[...] Thatcher:
I think that the honorable Gentleman knows that I have the same contempt for his
socialist policies as the people of east Europe,
who have experienced them,
have for theirs.

I think I must have hit the right nail on the head when I pointed out that the logic of
those policies is that they would rather have the poor poorer.

Once they start to talk about the gap,
they would rather the gap were that – [indicating] – down here,
not that – [indicating] – but that – [indicating].

So long as the gap is smaller,
so long as the gap is smaller,
they would rather have the poor poorer.

You do not create wealth and opportunity that way.

You do not create a property-owning democracy that way.

Thatcher's reframe is clear:
the rich may have become richer,
but the poor have also become richer.

The gap between rich and poor has indeed widened,
but what is the alternative?

If the gap is narrowed,
the rich will be poorer,
but the poor will be poorer,
too.

What is the underlying pattern in this example?

Once again,
we are dealing with a distinction between policy,
on the one hand,
and principles or values,
on the other.

One of the core values of many social liberal and social democratic parties is equality
and equal opportunities for all.

The values of many right-wing and conservative parties are based on the idea of the free
market,
entrepreneurship and personal initiative should be rewarded.

But there's something special about values.

Almost everyone supports the idea of equal opportunities for all,
including those on the right.

Likewise,
almost everyone agrees that the market and enterprise are important,
including those on the left.

In other words,
we often share our opponents' values.

Our antagonism and resistance have much more to do with the downsides of those
values.

What are these downsides?

A strong emphasis on the value of the free market can give rise to a harsh,
“sink or swim” society in which 10% to 15% of the population lives below the poverty
line.

A strong emphasis on the value of equality can result in a dull and drab society in which
mediocrity rules and excellence is neither appreciated nor rewarded.

In his frame,
Thatcher's opponent tries to activate the downsides of Thatcher's values,
namely that the United Kingdom has become a harsh “sink or swim” society.

He specifies the policy implications:
lower wages for the poor,
inferior housing and less financial security.

Thatcher's attempt to reframe the debate takes a similar approach.

She accuses her opponents of advocating a mediocre society in which everyone comes
out below average.

This is the downside of her opponents' values.

She also specifies the policy implications:
lower wages for everyone and inferior social services due to a lack of resources.

Both players use the same framing strategy.

Who wins?

Well,
that depends on your political views.

This brings us to a new strategy in the game of framing and reframing.

First,
activate the downsides of your opponent's values and second,
make that downside specific for the world of policy.

Thatcher's belief in the value of the free market results in a society that is too harsh.

This is the downside of the free market.

The policy implications?

Lower wages for the poor and inferior social services.

No,
says Thatcher.

The value of equality of the honourable gentlemen results in a mediocre society.

This is the downside of equality.

And the policy implications?

Lower wages for everyone.

Finally,
politics is also about theatre.

Thatcher's power resides not only in her words but in her entire performance:
her voice,
her body language,
her attire,
her unflinching attitude and her humor.

Take a look at her answer to the next question.

'Would she tell us whether she intends to continue her own personal fight against a
single currency and an independent central bank,
when she leaves office?

No,
she is going to be the governor!

[Laughing] Order.

Prime Minister... Thatcher:
What a good idea!