

# THE PARTY'S OVER

## How Liz Truss Became the Briefest PM in British History

**Just a few short weeks ago, a political crisis in Britain led to a new Conservative Party leader and a new prime minister, Liz Truss. And now, Truss herself is gone. What happened this time?**

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### The New Maggie?

Liz Truss was not an obvious choice as leader. The image she tried to present was as a strong woman with right-wing ideas on both social and economic issues: “the new Margaret Thatcher”. Her personal background, however, did not really fit the story. Like Thatcher, she was politically active as a young woman, but she was originally left-wing. She even campaigned to abolish the monarchy. Before the Brexit vote, she campaigned to stay in the EU.

Over the past few years, Truss has worked hard to prove herself to the right wing of her party, especially its membership (members of the public who pay a yearly fee to the party and can vote on certain party issues, especially electing a new leader). She became known for nationalistic speeches and anti-European comments, and she repeatedly posed for photographs that were based on classic images of Thatcher.

### Truss's Culture War

Truss's main opponent in the leadership election, Rishi Sunak, was seen as a “technocrat”: someone known for a focus on technical details of economic policy, not ideology. He had support from many Conservative MPs with a more politically centrist view. Truss, however, saw that the key to becoming the prime minister lay in reaching the party membership.

Truss turned to some of the most right-wing members of her political party. These included people who are very passionate about “culture wars” issues (such as how the history of the British Empire should be remembered, whether statues of slave traders should be removed and what toilets transgender people should use). Opinion surveys had shown that such issues were generally low priorities for most British voters, who were more worried about the cost-of-living crisis. However, they were very important to the small population of



party members – and these were the people whose votes she needed. The culture war became a big part of her leadership campaign.

### The Birth of “Trussonomics”

Truss also made promises of economic reforms. Her approach was quickly nicknamed “Trussonomics”. She promised to cut taxes heavily, but said this would lead to so much economic growth that there would be more – not less – public money to pay for services like the police and NHS (National Health Service).

Most economists and many politicians (including Sunak and his supporters) said that this theory was not realistic, but it appealed to the Conservative party membership a lot more than Sunak's insistence that tax increases were necessary to fight the economic crisis.

### A Bad First Day in the Office

From the moment Truss stepped into 10 Downing Street (the PM's official residence), things started to go badly. She began by sacking one of the country's top civil servants (the officials who make politicians' promises into real action), which was seen as a threat to anyone who was not loyal to her. She also gave all the top jobs in government to her political allies, pushing out most people who had supported Sunak.

This had two damaging effects. It meant that she made a lot of powerful members of parliament very angry at a time when she was already not especially popular. And it meant that jobs requiring “technocratic” skills (such as the departments for health and finance) went to people who were more motivated by ideology.

### The Disastrous “Mini-Budget”

Normally, changes to finance policy are made once a year in a special announcement called a budget. Truss and her new Chancellor (the British version of a minister for finance), Kwasi Kwarteng, wanted to make some changes immediately. They announced some steps to limit increasing heating prices, which would cost the government up to £60 billion over the next six months. At the same time, they announced big tax cuts that would mostly help richer people and businesses, but that would cost the government about £45 billion.

The economy instantly exploded. The pound fell dramatically, interest rates rose to record-breaking levels, and several big pension funds (the companies responsible for the money people get when they retire) almost crashed. The national bank had to step in, spending tens of billions of pounds to try and control the crash. It turned out to be the single worst day for the country's economy in 30 years.

### The Minister's Fall

Both the economic and political crisis grew over the next several days, with the national bank spending more and more money trying to control the disaster while Truss and her supporters refused to change their policies and blamed everything on others.

Eventually, Kwarteng resigned. His replacement as Chancellor was one of Truss' oldest opponents and an ally of Sunak. As Truss sat silently beside him in parliament, he announced the cancellation of one tax cut after another – and then announced there would be big cuts to public services. Trussonomics was dead.

### Going... Going... Gone!

By this point, most of the discussion was not whether Truss would go, but how and when. A newspaper joked that a lettuce would last longer, then bought one and started printing pictures of Truss and the lettuce every day, taking bets over which would go first.

Truss missed an important debate in parliament as MPs made jokes about her. One minister was forced to tell parliament that she was “not hiding under a desk”. There were claims of physical violence in parliament as Conservative party officials tried to force their MPs to vote the way the government wanted. There were more resignations. Dozens of Conservative MPs wrote to party officials demanding that Truss be forced to leave. And then she was gone, having been in the top job for just 44 days – the shortest term of office for a prime minister in British history.

And if you're wondering: the lettuce lasted longer.