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FROM : Amembassy LONDON
E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, PINR, UK

DATE: June 25, 1973

SUBJECT : Margaret Thatcher's Views on Politics and
Tory Personalities

REF :

Enclosed, as of possible interest to the Department, is a memorandum summarizing a lengthy conversation the reporting officer recently had with Secretary of State for Education and Science, Margaret Thatcher. The conversation shed little new insight into the Government's plans and policies, but taken as a whole it reveals something about Mrs. Thatcher. In her conversation she commented freely and frankly on her party colleagues.

The only woman member of the Cabinet, Mrs. Thatcher's performance has been solid, respectable and unspectacular. She has not sought to introduce radical remedies to deal with Britain's problems in education and science. Believing strongly that educational policy is not an issue on which her party could expect to gain political advantage, she has concentrated, with remarkable self-confidence, on making sure that it does not become a disadvantage. She is a strong supporter of Heath and undoubtedly is a very real political asset to the Government. She is one of the workhorses of the Government and is constantly touring the country defending its policies.

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Once touted as a potential first woman Prime Minister, it is most doubtful that she could, or does, realistically expect to lead her party. But she carries weight within Tory Party councils and can be expected to continue to play an influential role.

Mrs. Thatcher is an almost archtypical, slightly to the right-of-center Tory whose views are strongly influenced by her own middle-class background and experience. A well-educated, intelligent and even sophisticated woman herself, Mrs. Thatcher shares with others in her party a certain anti-intellectual bias. Her views on her party colleagues are interesting, but should be read with the above in mind.

Annenberg

Enclosure

As stated - Memorandum of Conversation *attwde*

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Secretary of State for Education and
Science, Margaret Thatcher
Dirk Gleysteen, Amembassy London *dy*

PLACE : Connaught Hotel, May 22, 1973

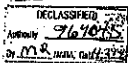
The following is a resume of a lengthy luncheon conversation with Margaret Thatcher on May 22.

The conversation started with some general discussion of the budget cuts that had been announced by Chancellor Barber the preceding day. I noted that Mrs. Thatcher had succeeded in avoiding any cuts in her department. She said that cuts for the Department of Education and Science had initially been scheduled, but that it had not been difficult for her to persuade her Cabinet colleagues to eliminate them. She said that her philosophy about the politics of her job was the importance of following a steady path. She said that, "Parties don't win elections, governments lose them". When the chips were down, education policy would not win an election and it was therefore important not to let this area be vulnerable to negative attacks.

When asked what she considered would be the key issues in the next election, Mrs. Thatcher unhesitatingly said "food prices and housing". She believed everything else would be peripheral. She also noted that food price and housing policies are both strongly ideological, i.e. policies in these areas could lead to greater or lesser dependence on government. She said she considered it a Tory duty to try to frame all government policy in such a fashion as to lessen the growing dependence of the citizen on the Government.

Commenting on Labor Party criticism of her policies in the field of education, Mrs. Thatcher said she thought little of the criticisms and this had also been the

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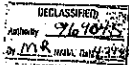
public response. She remarked that her opposite number in the shadow cabinet, Roy Hattersley, had "no spine". She characterized him as a "percentage man without character". Mrs. Thatcher was obviously contemptuous of Hattersley as a person and political opponent.

When asked, Mrs. Thatcher said she found no substantial difficulty in running her department. She had been very pleased when St. John-Stevas had been appointed as her Parliamentary Under Secretary. She said that he was not very good at administration, but was lively, full of ideas and making a useful contribution. She was happy to have him in her department.

Having begun to express her opinions about the qualities and prospects of her party colleagues, Mrs. Thatcher mentioned the following:

- John Gummer. She thought he had a first class mind and was delighted he had been appointed to his present party position (as Vice Chairman with special responsibility for youth). She thought he was doing an outstanding job and was learning from experience. She said, for example, that he had dropped the ball on a project involving political education for sixth form students, "but that doesn't matter".
- Geoffrey Howe. Mrs. Thatcher obviously respects and thinks highly of him but said he is "too willing to compromise" and she wondered if he would get "over this weakness".
- Lord Windelsham. "If he were only in the House of Commons he would be a shining light." (This was just before the Lambton-Jellicoe scandal which led to Windelsham's appointment as Leader in the House of Lords).
- Peter Walker. Mrs. Thatcher thought he was very able and a good politician but that "he doesn't have the kind of first class mind needed at the top".

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- Keith Joseph. She has tremendous admiration for Joseph and considers him brilliant, versatile and full of further promise. She said that he could handle any ministry and she was confident that he has been marked for higher responsibility.

- Reg Maudling. Mrs. Thatcher lamented that Maudling, whom she clearly ardently admires, was no longer in the Government. She commented that along with Keith Joseph and Hailsham, Maudling had one of the best minds in the Party.

Turning to some lesser lights, Mrs. Thatcher rated Tim Raison as "very, very high" on her list of up-and-coming younger politicians. She also thinks highly of Mark Carlisle. She dismissed Paul Channon as a light-weight. She acknowledged that David Howell was very able indeed, but was always "talking in phrases no one could understand". She thought that all the junior Treasury ministers (Patrick Jenkin, Terrence Higgins, John Nott) were extremely able.

Mrs. Thatcher said she thought John Biffen had once had a great future, but he was now ruined because he had made himself a disciple of Powell. She said Michael Haseltine had everything it took in politics except brains. About Christopher Chattaway the best she could say was that he was a light-weight. Mrs. Thatcher dismissed the junior ministers at the FCO, though "Balniel has a good way about him in the House of Commons".

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