

PRIME MINISTER

Herewith a copy of the Article which I have written for our Association Year Book, at which you glanced last evening.

20th July, 1982

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ARTICLE FOR THE EASTBOURNE CONSERVATIVE
ASSOCIATION YEAR BOOK BY IAN GOW

The Battle for the Falkland Islands will prove to be a major turning point in Britain's post-war history. Its full significance cannot yet be measured. But already the crisis, with its pain and its pride, its fortitude and its suffering has made the nation conscious of emotions and strengths which have been slumbering, although not asleep, for many years. For nearly three months, our domestic anxieties appeared mundane. Because of the Campaign in the South Atlantic, the grander and more heroic themes of national life could be discussed, once more, without embarrassment.

The Falkland's conflict, 6,000 miles away, it is true, awakened a real sense of national unity. Those serving in the Task Force were a true cross-section of our people. It may be sad that it took a battle to remind us how deep is our underlying unity and how keenly felt is our common heritage. But it is real nonetheless; and once experienced it will not easily be forgotten.

The conflict underlined, too, the value of real national leadership. Many, who had been either agnostic or critical of the Prime Minister have recognised her supreme qualities for

the first time. We may remind ourselves, with advantage, of the words of a former Conservative Cabinet Minister who, on the day following the Argentine invasion, during the Emergency Debate in the House of Commons on Saturday 3rd April said this:-

"The Prime Minister, shortly after she came into office, received a soubriquet as the "Iron Lady". It arose in the context of remarks which she made about defence against the Soviet Union and its allies; but there was no reason to suppose that the Right Honourable Lady did not welcome and, indeed, take pride in that description. In the next week or two this House, the nation and the Right Honourable Lady herself will learn of what metal she is made".

Eleven weeks later, on 17th June 1982, during Prime Minister's Questions, Mr. Enoch Powell followed up his earlier statement with this Question:-

"Is the Right Honourable Lady aware that the report has now been received from the public analyst on a certain substance, recently subjected to analysis, and that I have obtained a copy of the report? It shows that the substance under test consisted of ferrous matter of the highest quality, that it is of exceptional tensile strength, is highly resistant to wear and tear and to stress, and may be used, with advantage, for all national purposes".

The Spring of 1982 was the most testing time for Mrs. Thatcher's Premiership. Whatever the future may hold in store, nothing can take away from her those qualities of courage and persistence for which a nation cries out in time of trouble. Her leadership has been echoed, in many ways and in many forms by her fellow countrymen, military and civilian, involved in the conflict.

The Battle in the South Atlantic has heightened national pride. We all felt a glow of admiration at the heroism of Colonel "H" and of others.

Mrs. Thatcher is now the most formidable political figure of her generation - twelve years younger than Mr. Michael Foot and five years younger than Mr. Roy Jenkins.

Within two years the Government will seek a new mandate from the British people.

Long before the Falkland Islands filled our thoughts, something very remarkable was happening in British politics.

The Government, after three years of struggle in increasingly difficult world conditions, was beginning to recover in the opinion polls and in public support.

Last Autumn, the rise of the S.D.P. was the hot news. People even began to talk of the possibility that the S.D.P. would be the largest Party in the next House of Commons. But early in 1982, in the famous phrase of Shirley Williams, "the bubble had burst a bit". Somehow the attraction of middle way

indecision had begun to fade; the British people had begun to see through the muddle of the middle.

This is hardly surprising. More and more, in Eastbourne and elsewhere, people want Britain's deep-seated problems, neglected by successive Governments for so long, to be tackled decisively, consistently, persistently and courageously.

Of course it would have been possible for this Government to let trade union political power go on growing. But the country said, quite clearly, that things had gone too far.

Of course it would have been possible to have allowed inflation to go on climbing, funded by growing public subsidies and borrowing. But the country said, quite clearly, that it wanted both inflation and borrowing down. And down they are. We will persevere on that deliberately chosen path.

Of course it would have been possible to have left the State sector in its unnaturally enlarged condition, with free enterprise and personal ownership excluded from many areas of the nation's life. But here, too, the demand for radical change was insistent.

Of course it would have been possible to have allowed over-manning to go on and to perpetuate the myth that somehow we can strike our way towards prosperity. But today there is a growing recognition that it is not virtuous, but vicious to allow three men to do the work of two.

Commonsense, idealism and our refound national pride combine to make this an age of reform and not of fudge. And that means setting very firm objectives and sticking to them, even at a high price. It means persevering where principle is involved and especially in areas where appeasement has eroded and corroded the values which, in our hearts, we know to be true.

During the lifetime of this Parliament, our resolve will not weaken. The Government will not waver. To do so, would be to betray the deepest instincts of the British people.

And when the next Election comes, we will have laid the strongest foundation which we have known since 1945 from which to advance upon the formidable social and economic problems which have been our bitter legacy and which a new Tory reforming administration in the middle and late 80s will tackle and overcome.
