

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

We would like to thank The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P., for agreeing to be interviewed by 'The Harrovian'. On October 4th, Simon Sebag-Montefiore and Scott Martin met the Prime Minister at Number 10. ~~This is~~ ^{These are extracts from} their interview.

Q. What were your feelings about the jingoism displayed by the tabloid press during the Falklands conflict?

What would you describe as jingoism? It is a word which is frequently used.

— I would believe that it's
— Being over-patriotic.

I don't believe you can be over-patriotic when you stand for a country which stands for honesty, integrity, freedom, justice, and you are defending these things.

Q. But what about some of the headlines in the tabloid newspapers when, for instance, the General Belgrano was sunk, which seemed to imply that it was a very good thing?

Leave aside the question of the Belgrano. We were invaded, our people were invaded. What do you think these people would have felt if we hadn't gone to reclaim the islands. They would still have been under Argentinian rule.

— Yes, I'm not questioning the fact that it was the right thing to do to go back and take the islands ...

~~You can't take the islands, retake the islands.~~ You cannot retake islands, I'm afraid, without loss of life. Equally, let me say this to you. We lost 235 lives in the Falklands. The Russians shot down a Korean airliner and lost 269 lives in one set.

Q. What do you think about the role of British troops in Beirut?

I think that if there hadn't been the multi-national force - it is four of us, the United States, Italy, France and ourselves and we have by far the smallest contingent, just about 100 and our presence is symbolic - there would not, I believe, have been a cease-fire in that country. If you are just going to let whoever wishes go and ruin a country and take it over, who comes next? Someone has to try to uphold international law.

Q. In view of the doctrine of monetarism, will you pursue a policy of reflection eventually if unemployment continues as it is?

No, certainly not, because if you start to print money you very soon run into a situation where you have even higher unemployment than you have now.

2. You call it monetarism. It's a new name; it doesn't mean very much. I will tell you what it is. It is honest money. It is a system that means that the supply of money is equal to the production of goods and services in the economy. Now that is honest money. Anything else is dishonest money and it is totally wrong for a government to have dishonest money.

Q. Is it right to use the antics of Scargill and Livingstone to discredit the Left?

I don't use the antics of Scargill and Livingstone ever. I don't use the antics of Scargill and Livingstone ever. I point out as I have done just now, reasonably and honestly, why I think their policies won't work.

Q. How important was Seatchi and Seatchi to your image in the election campaign?

Not important at all. They had nothing to do with my image.

Q. Really?

Nothing whatsoever to do with my image. They are trying to put across a message, not an image at all. We are the image; no-one can alter that.

Q. Is there too much centralisation in Downing Street, both from the constitutional point of view, and personally being too much to take on?

Well, you know the people who always write and pontificate so much about the Prime Minister are usually those who have never done the job.

— But they still have a right to comment.

In modern life I think that the role of Prime Minister you do have to do much more. I can't remember Winston Churchill (and we are just coming up to Churchill Songs) ever having to do a television interview. ^{You didn't have any radio interviews} No, we don't centralise too much at Number 10 at all. ^{It has come since then}

Q. What about the plan to have a communications centre inside Number 10.

We haven't got a communications centre for the whole government in Number 10. We have no intention of having any. ^{re: 12c} The government information services; ^{it is} not centred in Number 10. But every Prime Minister has had a chief press officer and it is right and proper that Number 10 should know what is going on and be the first to know.

Q. Are you ever embarrassed by your ministers speaking out when they shouldn't?

If I was, I shouldn't dream of saying so.

Q. Is there any secret to your enormous vitality in such a demanding job?

I was born that way, I was trained that way, I have gone on acting that way. I don't think you can just come to it. You must be born fairly

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fit and then you must train yourself to work extremely hard ... I would need a lot more sleep than I do, if I made a habit of having more sleep. You can train yourself to work a larger number of hours per day, train yourself not to get tired, eat the right things, don't eat too much before you are going to do quite a lot of work. Just as an athlete can train himself to run faster, by training each day, by regularly exercising, by having someone say, 'Come on, you can do a bit better than that'. So, it is not a thing that comes suddenly. Equally, you can train yourself to concentrate if someone teaches you. But you can't make an athlete out of someone who isn't basically physically fit. So you have got to have the right constitution.

Q. How do you manage to relate your references to Victorian values to today's world of high technology and scientific advancement?

Well, you are mixing two things. A value is really acting by certain standards and if you look at the Victorians there was self-reliance, initiative, hard work: the biggest era ever in our history for the increase in voluntary service. Most of the schools which, when I was Secretary for Education, I wanted to replace, were built in the Victorian age and a lot of them by the churches. There was really an enormous increase of personal responsibility and it did begin to bring within the reach of ordinary people the things which hitherto had only been within the reach of the few.

But the values are not the technology. You have got to have values whether you are a sweeper in the streets or a scientist, who has just discovered the latest quantum theory. I don't think these values have gone and that is why, when I start to talk about these things, they still find an echo in peoples' hearts. The most selfish thing of all would be to be just concerned with your own life and your own generation. I think you have got to think about future generations. The Victorians did; they built for the future. And they saw in this enormous empire we had gathered that we tried to take the best of our law and the best of our honesty to nations which we administered. And many of them saw the best of our law and the best of our honesty and the best justice that they had ever seen, so it wasn't a bad record.

Q. Do you think people in Britain work hard enough?

I'm afraid that we do not produce as much per head as many other countries still. We have got a lot better than we were, but if you are running in a race it is not only your own better performance today compared with several years ago, it is how the other people in the race are running as well. So we are not anything like good enough yet.

Q. You have often been mentioned in connection with Churchill. Do you see yourself as Churchillian?

4. No, no-one can see themselves as Churchill. That would be too arrogant and too conceited for words. But I am the greatest admirer of Churchill. As I said in a recent speech, he saw clearly, he warned clearly, he acted clearly and in that sense I try to do the same; but to measure myself by him - I wouldn't dream of doing that, but I learn a lot from him.

Q. How important do you see the role of public schools as being in this country today?

Very important indeed. Far more important than the 5% who benefit from independent schools. If ever you have a total monopoly of education by the state, you have nothing to compare their performance with. So every single person in this country profits from there being independent schools. Also, it is a part of a free society - the right to spend my money as I wish.

Q. What sort of attributes do you think someone leaving public school should have?

The greater the privilege you have experienced, the greater the responsibility you must shoulder: responsibility to your country, to your community, to your family for upholding the standards of this country, for being leaders. I used not to understand when people said to me that what we want in this country is leadership. I now do understand it and I think you understand it in a way at school when no-one knows what to do and someone gets up and says, 'I think we should do this, for this reason'. That is leadership. We all of us sometimes fail, but we must try again. You must be seen to work hard, seen to be willing to go and help with anything in the community - it may be to help with disabled, or it may be going to teach youngsters cricket. You must be seen to be bold and brave if you go into the armed forces. The greater the privilege - and it is a privilege to go to Harrow - the greater the duty and the responsibility to your family and your school, to your community and to your country.

Q. Are you personally governed by any particular philosophy of life, or do you take decisions day by day, expediently?

No, I don't take decisions by expediency. I never have done. That is why I do believe we have to try to get personal responsibility in our society. The moment people start to look to the state for everything you find that if the state does everything for you it has to take everything from you. That would be the end of personal liberty. I remember when I was just about your age being taught by my parents that we were people who didn't have to be told what to do. If we were in a tight corner we could take the initiative, because we were the sort of people who were used to using our own loaf if you like, using our own nous, because this was the way we had lived. You can't get that if you run the state in such a way that the moment a person has a problem they come to the state to solve it. You have got to have personal

5. responsibility and personal initiative. There are certain things that only government can do - the defence of the realm, law and order, and defence of the currency. Then you have a safety net; that's where your welfare state comes in.

Q. Is there any point in giving viscounties to people who are childless?

Well, Willie has four daughters as a matter of fact. It has been a tradition that our Speaker has a viscounty. It is a method of honouring him for what he has done. He was one of our very best Speakers and therefore, as he had performed, so was he honoured. Willie Whitelaw has been an outstanding politician. And when I say that you have to uphold high standards, always look to Willie, because his loyalty, his sense of honour and duty, his shrewdness have been quite outstanding, and he deserves it. I think we are a country that has a hereditary system. I think that hereditary titles should still be given for outstanding service; not just for anything, but for totally outstanding service. After all, our whole monarchy is hereditary.

Q. Would you accept a hereditary peerage?

I'm not going to get into me. I'm busy doing my job here and I'm very happy and I hope to be doing it for a very long time. And it can't be done in their Lordships' House.

'She's two minutes away', the young man in the golden epaulettes said and then he sprinted back to his position midway down the long hall that cuts straight through the middle of Downing Street, from the front door to the garden. All of a sudden, that front door opened and a man in a suit stood silhouetted against the light: how we awaited a glimpse of that famous profile! But as the house filled with that eclectic tension of civil servants checking the schedule of a Prime Minister down to the nearest second, we found ourselves in a waiting room, silent, high-ceilinged, majestic. There we mullied over the galleries of history we had seen ...

On entering No 10, looking so small from outside one had the feeling of entering an enormous, gilded, plush, rabbit warren: civil servants, secretaries, wandered around, some gossiping in camp public school tones, others with a glint of ambition in their eyes, keenly going about their business. From everywhere came the tapping of type-writers, the hum of voices, the necessities of power. The doorman, an elderly Scotsman, bade us wait....

There is only one x The Cabinet Room with its grand chairs, its portrait of Walpole, etc great portraits and glinting inkwells, spoke of bygone imperial greatness, which the present incumbent was perhaps trying to recapture; the Prime Minister's chair, larger than all the others, ready for her to sit in, filled me with terror. The ceremonial rooms, full of portraits of figures like a haughty Wellington, or a grim Churchill, impressed us no end, though after our interview, the Premier told us that British leaders live in less state than any others - and she pointed up to the little flat 'where we live'.

the only one with arm!

Up the great flight of stairs at the centre of the building were all the portraits of every Prime Minister from Walpole to Callaghan and, passing these great men, staring out of history at us, they were like icons in a great temple of power; and so we found ourselves in our waiting room, which was where the Prime Minister's library was stored. Opening the cupboards, feeling like schoolboys stealing cakes, we feasted our eyes on the books given by every cabinet minister, spotting the messages of politicians from Lord Samuel to Harold Wilson; Lord Reading to Iain Macleod. Suddenly, a man bounded through the door and hiding a book behind our backs, we adopted angelic poses of innocence, but he just said, 'Wrong door' and disappeared, like Mr Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland.

We were summoned; as we approached a plush drawing room a woman crossed our line of vision and I realized we were to meet the apex of the pyramid of state, the first female Premier and probably the most radical leader since the war. A bejewelled hand shook our hands and a figure in a blue dress

pointed us to our chairs; the hair seemed darker than on T.V., the eyes were bright, she was frailer than I thought, but just as strong: it was like meeting a movie star after seeing all his films.

Throughout the interview the Prime Minister radiated a mixture of confidence and ~~grace~~^{love}. The sheer ~~force~~^{strength} of her opinions prevented her losing a point - to give an inch would be to surrender part of the determination that had carried her so far: within seconds, a raised finger, a frigid stare and a quiet sentence had reduced us to a state of terror, and from then on we realized that we had the choice of either being crushed beneath a rampart of righteousness, or of facing the titan and taking her ~~stare as a compliment~~^{forcefulness}. In interview, her methods were extremely impressive and she used any loophole in the question to turn the question onto the questioner. Her answers though were a pleasure in their length and content, so that never did we feel that we were not professional interviewers taking on the premier of the land. Her answers were spoken in the full voice we all know, but her most effective denunciations of her questioners were quiet, curt and as effective as acid.

The tension was released at the end of the interview by the Prime Minister showing us the view out of the window. Walking down the street it felt like an age since we had walked so confidently through a mob of screaming anti-vivisection women, through the gate and had strutted up Downing Street. As we emerged, we felt drained and looked back at that black, shiny door with enormous respect and enormous relief, ~~as if we had just been released from the torture chambers of the Great Khan.~~