

MARGARET THATCHER

BRITAIN'S FIRST LADY PRIME MINISTER?

"In politics if you want anything said, ask a man; if you want anything done, ask a woman."

London—A financial adviser left the room. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, relaxed, sat down, shucked her shoes and put her stockinged feet on the tweed settee in the sunniest corner of her long, paneled office in the Palace of Westminster. Earlier in the afternoon she had spoken in the debate in the Chamber of the House of Commons on the previous week's European referendum.

The debate was the first, experimental radio broadcast from the Chamber. Its editing, though, had not satisfied Mrs. Thatcher. "Too noisy, too confusing," she said. She had, nevertheless, shrewdly used the moment to compliment her party's recently deposed leader Edward Heath on his role in taking Britain into Europe before a national audience not usually so attentive to the proceedings of the House. Mrs. Thatcher is not a politician to miss an opportunity for conciliation.

She had spent the past four months, since a decisive win in February's elections for the Conservative Party leadership, campaigning almost continuously in the country. Now, however, apart from an urge to put her feet up after an unusually hot working day, she showed no other obvious signs of exhaustion or diminished enthusiasm. Excluding Mr. Heath, four of the five men who stood against Mrs. Thatcher in the leadership contest have now accepted posts in her Shadow Cabinet.

Though she denies it, Mrs. Thatcher is a unique phenomenon in British political life. By a combination of opportunism, decisiveness and tactical skill, she became, aged forty-nine and having earlier been only the second Conservative woman Cabinet Minister, the first woman to lead a British political party. Every Tory leader since Arthur Bonar Law in 1922 has led a government, and if this trend continues, she will (possibly around 1980) make history as Britain's first woman Prime Minister.

Face to face, she is smaller and better looking than her photographs. She long ago abandoned the hats which, in the eyes of opponents, caricatured her as the southern English Tory lady fit only for garden parties and opening country fetes. She is better dressed, dramatically slimmer, and her hair, set once a week, several shades fairer than when she entered Parliament sixteen years ago.

She fixes the questioner with sharp gray-blue eyes, sits straight and answers carefully in a tone softer than her authoritarian public voice. (She was taught elocution as a girl.) She tends to be impatient with imprecise questions and sharp with opponents who abandon an argument before her. A good listener, she rarely repeats herself and dislikes being told anything twice.

In her first regional tours as party leader, during which she drew crowds as regularly as the royal family (*everyone* is curious to see Mrs. Thatcher), she passionately restated the old Tory gospel of initiative, self-reliance and the free-market economy to supporters dispirited by the loss of two successive general elections and the subsequent confused dissension over Mr. Heath's leadership.

Judging from the crowds who mobbed her in Edinburgh (Tory

support had been dwindling rapidly in Scotland), she has succeeded in reassuring at least some of these grass-root supporters who felt themselves increasingly ignored by Mr. Heath's London policymakers. Many felt the party's severe moral defeat in February 1974 had been unnecessarily precipitated by their Government's stubborn resistance to the striking miners' union on the basis of an unworkable prices-and-incomes policy.

As Mr. Heath's controversial Education Secretary, Mrs. Thatcher was asked in the less unsettled political climate of 1973 if she wanted to be Prime Minister. "No, I shouldn't," she replied. "I'm quite often asked this. I think the first woman Prime Minister in this country will have quite a difficult time. I don't wish to be that person and I don't think there's any chance of it."

Why did she change her mind two years later? A new style of leadership, she said, rather than new policies, was needed. Since for reasons of loyalty no front-runner was willing to stand against Mr. Heath at the beginning of a bitter, possibly three-round leadership contest, she felt obliged to do so herself. She has denied, however, any calculated ambition. A combination of opportunity and duty presented itself and she took it.

She agreed with Adlai Stevenson's dictum that "self-government is for those who have learned self-discipline," with the implication that the leaders of the self-governing must have the discipline to act decisively.

Apart from Norman St. John-Stevas, former Minister of Arts, and Sir Keith Joseph, a former Housing Minister and now her chief policy advisor, none of Mr. Heath's Shadow Cabinet voted for Mrs. Thatcher in the first ballot. A majority of the Shadow Cabinet believed that Mr. Heath had to go but favored a concilia-



Margaret Thatcher, chemist, lawyer, M.P., potential prime minister, haggles with a constituent over the gap between political promises and the hard realities of workaday London.

tory leader like Mr. William Whitelaw, the architect of the power-sharing compromise between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Thatcher clinched the leadership by a huge poll of back-bench MP's in the first ballot. Some, fearing Mr. Heath's survival more than Mrs. Thatcher's seemingly improbable victory, voted for her hoping, with the Shadow Cabinet, that in the second or third ballot a man like Whitelaw would emerge the eventual winner. However, so large was Mrs. Thatcher's majority in the first ballot that by the second round she had gained an unbeatable moral advantage.

Mrs. Thatcher's steady, but largely unremarked, preparation for the Tory leadership began in the early Sixties when, as the young, assured new Member of Parliament for suburban Finchley, north London, she caught the attention of Prime Minister Macmillan who quickly gave her a junior post in the then Ministry of Pensions. ("Dogsbody" was her later description of the job.)

For Mrs. Thatcher, the middle-class daughter of a dressmaker and a small-town storekeeper, this appointment exactly suited her talents. Before her election to Parliament, experience as a barrister in that most exacting branch of jurisprudence, tax and patent law, had given her a keen appetite for the minutiae of pension legislation.

One Minister whom she served at the time remembered her impressive grasp of complicated details. "She used to deal with rather delicate personal matters with immense tact," he said. "There was no doubt that she was bound for higher things."

Margaret Hilda Thatcher was born in 1925 above the family's grocer's store in the market town of Grantham, some hundred

By John Pym

miles north of London in the flat fen country of Lincolnshire. Her father, Alfred Roberts, the son of a bootmaker, was a bookish Methodist lay preacher who sat on the local council and later became town mayor. He was *the* shining example of the sort of person—hard-working, judicious, high-principled—with whom Margaret, the second of his two daughters, was later to identify herself.

"We were brought up in a very religious background. There was more than just having to work to live, there was work as a duty," she once said. "Caring for others ran very, very strongly, so there was a tremendous amount of voluntary work." Mr. Roberts, who had started as an apprentice grocer at the age of



The House of Commons leaves the leader of the Conservative Party little time for her own house in Finchley, a wealthy neighborhood of barristers, brokers and surgeons.

twelve, retired with two of his own stores in Grantham. Their home, though without a bath or hot running water, was spotless.

Margaret, a pretty girl with bobbed hair, was in her turn a shining example of the person her father might have been had he not been forced to leave school and earn a living.

Although Sunday papers were forbidden, the Roberts home was always full of library books and political discussion. A year ahead of her age at elementary school, Margaret was at the top of her grammar school every year but one (when she was second). Games captain and a good hockey player, Margaret would have been head girl had she not won a scholarship to Oxford to study chemistry.

Her sister Muriel recalled those years: "Margaret set her sights on Oxford and Dad backed her. Her headmistress said it would be impossible because the school didn't teach Latin, but Margaret wasn't deterred. She turned up at school one day with a check from Father to cover the exam fee to Somerville College. Then she sought out the classics master at the boys' school and took the five-year Latin course in less than a year to pass the exam."

Oxford opened her life. She had never been to a dance before going up. Although the debating club, the Oxford Union, was barred to women in her day, as president of the university Conservation Association Miss Roberts found no difficulty controlling her committee of recently de-mobbed soldiers.

Mrs. Thatcher's first direct political activity for the Conservatives had been folding pamphlets in Grantham Hall during the 1935 general election. But it was not until Margaret came home from Oxford one Christmas vacation just after the war that a Parliamentary career was proposed.

"I remember the moment quite clearly. I was making coffee in the kitchen with friends after a party—that's what one did in those days. Someone said, 'Of course you'll go into politics, won't you?' And it occurred to me that, of course, I would." But that had to wait. Graduating from Oxford with second-class honors, she had to earn a living and took a job in industrial research. Although the chemical industry seemed to have a bright future in the postwar years, Miss Roberts's real ambition was to study law.

At the age of twenty-four, working in Manningtree, Essex, on ways of fixing a new sort of plastic to metal and wood, she was adopted as prospective Tory candidate for the safe Labor seat of Dartford, across the Thames in the neighboring county of Kent. She at once moved to

rooms in Dartford, commuting daily to her job and campaigning in the evenings. She nursed the seat through two general elections, creditably pushing up the Conservative poll.

Denis Thatcher, a wartime major in the Royal Artillery, ten years her senior and at the time director of his family's paint firm, was a member of Dartford Conservative Association. They met when he offered her a lift after a meeting. (Was it love at first sight? Mrs. Thatcher was asked later. "No, there were two elections to fight first.") He and Margaret married two weeks before the 1951 election, after which she resigned the constituency and they moved to a London apartment.

After studying law in her spare time, another research job and a period as personal assistant to the director of the Joint

consistently for the abolition of hanging and in favor of the abortion bill, she opposed divorce reform and did not vote on homosexual law reform. She remained silent on Home and Foreign Office affairs.

She was most at home dealing with finance; and perhaps her greatest victory as Education Secretary was boosting the school building program by preventing the Treasury from drastically cutting her Department's budget. This achievement was, however, overshadowed in the public eye by a highly unpopular decision (which she had opposed in Cabinet) to end free school milk to children under eleven. This economy was designed to raise nine million pounds (\$21 million) a year toward the replacement of dilapidated nineteenth-century primary schools.

Nowadays, with her children off her hands (Carol is following her mother into the law), Mrs. Thatcher's family life is less hectic. Had she ever had difficulty bringing up a family and working full time? "No, but I was fortunate in having my home, constituency and the House of Commons in a small triangle."

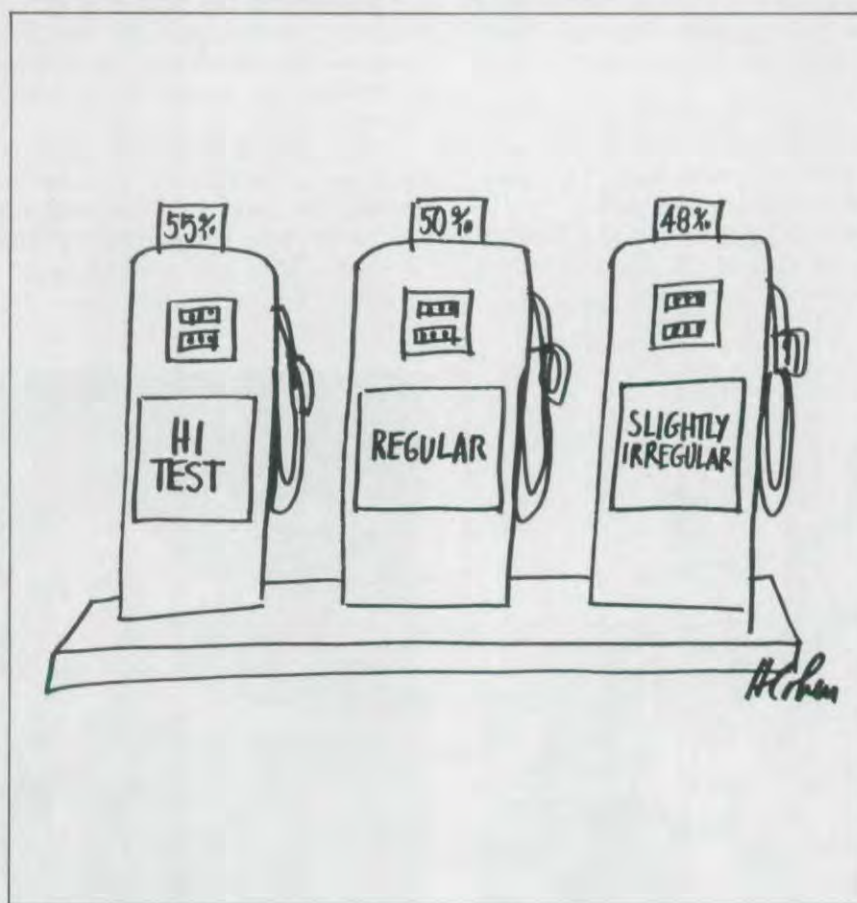
Mrs. Thatcher, who at the moment writes all her own speeches, manages on four or five hours of sleep a night and does most of her political background work in the small hours. To clear her mind she reads detective novels. She gets up around 6:30 a.m. to prepare breakfast for her husband, now a retired director of a large oil company, who deliberately keeps well out of the political limelight. Before becoming Tory leader, she liked to organize the running of their London home in Chelsea, shopping and on occasion painting and decorating it herself.

Mrs. Thatcher does not believe that being a good-looking woman greatly influenced her career. She denies, too, ever having met anti-feminism in the Tory Party. She has little traditional reverence for men. "Oh, that's a typical man's question." How had she become leader? "Merit," she replied sharply. "In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man," she told a predominantly male press conference. "If you want anything done, ask a woman."

Mrs. Thatcher is clearly confident of reaching 10 Downing Street. But, while she hopes to remain Conservative leader for the next fifteen to twenty years, so rapidly did she achieve the position that her exact political stand on many issues, particularly foreign affairs, is less clear. Her past links her to the right.

Mrs. Thatcher objects on principle to public enterprise and has in the past talked of reducing the public sector of the

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Iron Council, Mrs. Thatcher was called to the Bar at London's Lincoln's Inn in 1954, a few months after the birth of her twins Carol and Mark.

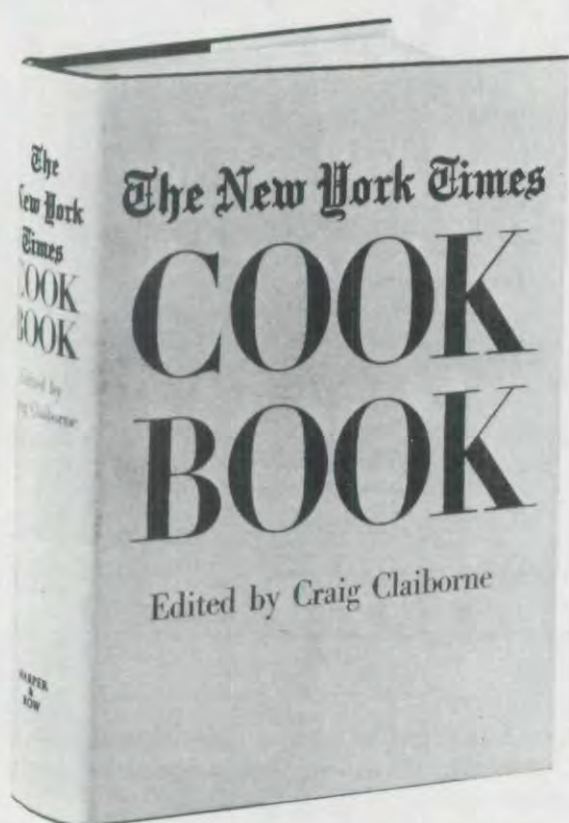
When she finally entered Parliament in 1959 for the secure Conservative seat of Finchley, Mrs. Thatcher was the first of her contemporaries to be given a junior ministry. The Tories lost the 1964 election, and for the next six years she was a front-bench Opposition spokesman on housing, economic affairs, power and transport. But it was as Education Secretary that she caught the British public's attention for the first time.

Apart from the notable maiden speech in the Commons, which she used to introduce her own Private Member's Bill for the admittance of the press to local council committee meetings, in the Sixties Mrs. Thatcher spoke on none of the major issues of social reform. Though she voted

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economy. The food and housing subsidies used by the Labor Government, she believes, conceal with disastrous effect the true cost of resources. "It enables us to be more wasteful than we otherwise would be. Where a firm makes a profit, this is an indication that the resources it is using are providing a service that's valued by its customers. Where a firm loses money, this is an indication that the resources could be better used by other industries."

The needy should be given a framework of support, while self-respecting people should be encouraged to stand on their own feet, and, if they wish, to own their homes and pay their own medical bills and put their children through school.

"The way to get more personal involvement and participation,"

Mrs. Thatcher said in 1968 and still firmly believes, "is to make the Government reduce the area of decision over which it presides and consequently leave the private citizen to participate by making more of his own decisions. What we need now is a far greater degree of personal responsibility and decision."

She receives formidable briefs from her advisers, and is reluctant to argue in the House or in public unless she has marshaled all pertinent facts for the attack. She won a notable victory in this respect during the Commons debate on the 1966 Budget, in preparation for which she read every Budget and Finance Bill speech of the preceding twenty years. Women in British political life, Mrs. Thatcher observed, are not allowed to make mistakes. ☐

Life Before the Mast

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to the taffrail that same afternoon, with a round turn and two half-hitches, by its best painter. Of course I expected the vessel would drag the boat down with her, for I had no knife to cut the painter. There was a gang board in the boat, however, which lay fore and aft, and I thought this might keep me afloat until some of the fleet should pick me up. To clear this gang board, then, and get it into the water, was my first object. I ran forward to throw off the lazy painter that was coiled on its end, and in doing this I caught the boat's painter in my hand, by accident. A pull satisfied me that it was all clear! Someone on board must have cast off this painter, and then lost his chance of getting into the boat by an accident. At all events, I was safe, and I now dared to look about me.

My only chance of seeing was during the flashes; and these left me almost blind. I had thrown the gang board into the water, and I now called out to encourage the men, telling them I was in the boat. I could hear many around me, and, occasionally, I saw the heads of men, struggling in the lake. There being no proper place to scull in, I got an oar in the after rullock, and made out to scull a little, in that fashion. I now saw a man quite near the boat; and, hauling in the oar, made a spring amidships, catching this poor fellow by the collar. He was very near gone; and I had a great deal of difficulty in getting him in over the gunwale. Our joint weight brought the boat down so low that she shipped a good deal of water. This turned out to be Leonard Lewis, the young man who had helped me to clew up the fore-topsail. He could not stand, and spoke with difficulty. I asked him to crawl aft, out of the water, which he did, lying

down in the stern sheets.

I now looked about me, and heard another; leaning over the gunwale, I got a glimpse of a man, struggling, quite near the boat. I caught him by the collar, too; and had to drag him in very much the same way I had done with Lewis. This proved to be Lemuel Bryant, the man who had been wounded by a hot shot, at York, while the commodore was on board us. His wound had not yet healed, but he was less exhausted than Lewis. He could not help me, however, lying down in the bottom of the boat, the instant he was able.

For a few moments, I now heard no more in the water; and I began to scull again. By my calculation, I moved a few yards, and must have got over the spot where the schooner went down. Here, in the flashes, I saw many heads, the men swimming in confusion, and at random. By this time, little was said, the whole scene being one of fearful struggling and frightful silence. It still rained; but the flashes were frequent, and less fierce. They told me, afterward, in the squadron, that it thundered awfully; but I cannot say I heard a clap, after I struck the water. The next man caught the boat himself. It was a mulatto, from Martinique, who was Mr. Osgood's steward; and I helped him in. He was much exhausted, though an excellent swimmer; but alarm nearly deprived him of his strength. He kept saying, "Oh! Masser Ned—oh! Masser Ned!" and lay down in the bottom of the boat, like the two others; I taking care to shove him over to the larboard side, so as to trim our small craft.

I kept calling out to encourage the swimmers, and presently I heard a voice, saying, "Ned, I'm here, close

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