

## 30th Anniversary Dinner Lord Forsyth

We are here to celebrate a famous victory and to pay tribute to a great Lady who not only saved Britain but together with Ronald Reagan, ended the cold war, tore down the iron curtain, and enabled millions to escape the tyranny of communism.

Margaret, It is wonderful to have you here with us to tonight on the 30th anniversary of our 1979 election victory. I was a mere spear carrier in your army and it is marvelous that James MacKay, Alan Stewart and Ian Lang are with us this evening along with so many friends and colleagues who fought and won three general elections under your leadership. My abiding memory of being in Margaret's Government was of relentless work and pace.

David Davis then a new member of Parliament stopped me as I was rushing through the member's lobby and said, 'Slow down, Michael, Rome was not built in a day'. 'Margaret Thatcher was not the shop steward on that job' I said hurrying on. As a Government we knew exactly what we stood for and where we were going and on any policy matter we could finish each others sentences. On the big issues no one needed any briefing to know the line to take. Unlike today, Britain had a Prime Minister who loved an argument and was prepared to listen to you, provided you had the facts and could make a case. If you

had not done your homework, however, you would quickly feel the weight of her famous handbag. Behind all this work and drive was a woman driven by the values she had been brought up to respect of hard work, thrift enterprise and responsibility to the community. When Margaret said there is no such thing as society she was saying society is not the State or somebody else. It is you and me and all the communities and associations we form naturally that pick up the burden. All of us have obligations to our fellow citizens which we must meet individually rather than leaving it to some institution.

When Margaret wanted to redecorate the study in no 10 she paid for it herself. She always paid cash and never signed the bill in the members dining room and many of her colleagues who did so were given stern lectures on the dangers of debt and credit. Margaret, you lead by example. That is why you commanded such loyalty and it is the secret of your success.

You have to be over 50 today to remember the horrors of labour in the 1970s. The winter of discontent left the dead unburied and rats roamed the streets of our cities which were piled high with uncollected garbage. Union militants stood guard outside our hospitals deciding which patients could be admitted.

Only four years earlier, we had seen the three day week; the lights going off in our homes and businesses and trade union militants drive a Conservative government from

office. Inflation was rampant at 24.2% in 1975 and a pound in 1974 was worth only 49p by 1979 with interest rates at 14%.

In 1978 those Unions turned on Labour under Callaghan and people said that no Government could govern without the consent of the trade unions. Britain was a basket case, a country with a great past and no future. Universally regarded as the sick man of Europe. The American commentator and anglophile William Safire said 'Britain offers a first class example of how to ruin a fine country' sadly something which is all too true again today thanks to Gordon Brown.

This was the era when you could wait two years to get a phone line from the state owned monopoly telephone company. Coal, steel, ship building, gas electricity, were all nationalised and hemorrhaging billions in taxpayers cash. The Trade Unions ruled the roost. The closed shop meant they could take away workers' livelihoods by refusing membership and their immunities put employers over a barrel with their flying pickets, secondary action, restrictive practices, demarcation disputes and inter Union rivalry.

The result was Britain was hopelessly uncompetitive. It took British Steel twice as many man hours to make 1 ton of Steel as its European Competitors. Strikes were

commonplace with 29million days lost in 1979. When Cecil Parkinson went to the soviet Union as the new Trade minister his Communist opposite number told him they were no longer prepared to buy from Britain because of the poor quality of goods and the unreliability of deliveries.

The Government controlled prices, wages, dividends, and exchange rates. The man in Whitehall did know best right down to how many pounds you were permitted to take on holiday abroad. There were penal taxes on work enterprise, consumption and wealth transfer. In Scotland there were more people in state owned housing than in the communist countries of eastern Europe.

Margaret, You and your colleagues were determined to reverse Britains decline by releasing the energies of the British people and removing the dead hand of State control. Together with Keith Joseph you had a plan and it meant a fundamental change of direction. Keith startled his cabinet colleagues by rejecting the post war consensus and confessing 'I have only recently become a Conservative'

The new Conservative Government wasted no time and abolished exchange,dividend, price and wage controls. The 1979 Manifesto promised to cut income tax at every level and you did just that reducing the top rate despite

deepening recession and huge opposition. You knew borrowing would push up interest rates, printing money would stoke inflation and that cutting penal tax rates would increase revenue. The 1981 budget cut borrowing from £13 billion to £11 billion amidst howls of protest. Today the deficit seems to go up by £11 billion every month! 364 economists wrote to the newspapers saying your policy would not work. By 1983 inflation was down to 3.7%, output was up and we had record productivity. Funnily enough we never heard from these economists again.

You, Margaret, Keith Joseph, Geoffrey Howe and a small number of others had to argue the case for change in economic and trade union policy against a largely sceptical Cabinet. You often said with 10 good strong men we can achieve a lot but I never had more than 6 and observed in your memoirs

**‘A number of men I have encountered in politics exhibit the characteristics they attribute to women-  
vanity and an inability to take tough decisions’**

I believe your strength came from deep seated conviction and an almost total disregard for yourself. Margaret you never cared about what people said about you but you did care about what people said about your country. You had

the measure of some in the party who you described as seeing you as **‘that women- someone of a different class, a person with alarming convictions that the values and virtues of middle England should be brought to bear on the problems which the establishment consensus had created’**

The urgent need was to create new jobs in industries with a great future rather than a great past. Small and medium sized businesses were given encouragement and support. The removal of restrictive practices saw the City blossom into a world class financial centre and privatisation meant businesses that were once a burden on the exchequer became tax contributors. Breaking state monopolies, encouraging competition, lowering taxes and returning control of the trade unions to their members unleashed a new age of enterprise and wealth creation. Council House sales meant thousands of families were given the chance to have capital for the first time in their lives and freed from municipal controls that even decided the colour of their front door. Workers in privatised companies were given shares in the business as she set about achieving her vision of a meritocratic property owning democracy.

One man still believed Trade unions should be able to bring down democratically elected governments that did not do his bidding. Arthur Scargill, elected for life as President of the NUM , refused his members a ballot and

set out to destroy the Conservative Government by calling a strike. But this time he had chosen the wrong Prime Minister. Margaret Thatcher is not just a politician with convictions. She is also tactical and pragmatic. She had a map and a compass and knew exactly where she was going but was capable of changing to a more tortuous route to ensure arrival at her destination. By 1984 we had prepared for the day when Scargill would confront the Government. The miners strike was a disaster for the coal industry and was scarred by violence and intimidation as the leadership sought to defy the laws of the land and the laws of economics. The miners were lions led by donkeys. They deserved better and I shall never forget the courage shown by the working miners. One of them is now our chief whip in the House of Commons, Patrick McLoughlin. I would not advise any rebels to take him on! Ted Heath had asked the question in 1974 Who Governs Britain? And he had lost. But 10 years later the Conservative Government was ready to answer-resoundingly.

There is one Union which has your unwavering comittment and support. The Union between Scotland and England, the union which binds the United Kingdom. We are Conservatives and we are Unionists. Writing about Scotlands Tories you said

**‘Life is not easy for Scottish Tories; unlike English Conservatives they are used to being a minority party, with the Scottish media heavily slanted against them. But these circumstances gave Scottish Conservatives a degree of enthusiasm and a fighting spirit which I admired, and which always guaranteed a warm hearted and receptive audience. Some leading Tories though a small minority hankered after a kind of devolved government but the rest of us were deeply suspicious of what that might mean for the future of the Union’**

Some on the left argue that the Thatcher revolution enabled Labour to create the Scottish Parliament. Of course the opposite is true . It was Labour’s defeat in the referendum on the Scotland Bill that lead to Margaret tabling a motion of no confidence in the Callaghan Government. We won it with the support of the SNP, which precipitated the 1979 election. Labour changed their minds on devolution cynically believing it would entrench their power in Scotland. George Robertson’s famous boast that ‘Devolution would kill nationalism stone dead rivals Gordon Brown’s ‘no more boom and bust in the stakes for catastrophic errors of political judgement. Labour having created the Parliament allowed their best and brightest to skulk off to Wesminster and watched as their long held hegemony in Scotland evaporated.

We Conservatives are democrats and practical people. We respect the decision of the electorate who voted for a Scottish Parliament. We opposed the principle because we believed it would damage Scotland's interests and threaten the Union. We could not see an answer to Tam Dayell's West Lothian Question. We wondered how an executive could be held to account for expenditure it did not have to raise in taxes and if it did was that not independence. We agonised at the impact of Scotland losing its place and voice at the centre of the United Kingdom Government. We worried that a devious, nationalist administration might abuse the powers of government to create conflict and try to destroy the Union. As Conservatives we believe it is irresponsible to bring forward reforms that have not been thought through. That it is reckless to embark on a journey with no sense of the end direction. Today, we have a Scottish Parliament but all of the central problems remain unresolved. But my friends they cannot remain unresolved forever.

Contrary to some people's beliefs it was easy to get a hearing from the Prime Minister if there was a problem in Scotland. George Younger persuaded her to abolish domestic rates because of the savage impact of a revaluation in Scotland and soaring council spending. Our opponents claim the Scots were guinea pigs for the Poll Tax but the truth was it was imposed on England following a public outcry at the unfairness of the system

for funding local government in Scotland. The rating system took little account of ability to pay and the burden had become unbearable for pensioners on fixed incomes living in the family home. It was grossly unfair just like the Council Tax today and you Margaret despite the obvious political hazards were determined to put it right. The Poll Tax was undoubtedly badly implemented mainly because of Treasury opposition. It was set too high and had insufficient exemptions but the principle that everyone who receives council services should make some contribution to their cost according to ability to pay was the right one. Today the problem of local government finance remains unresolved.

Margaret, Your resolute defence of the Union never waivered. It was only matched by your determination to uphold the Rule of Law and never to give in to aggression. That first Parliament was clouded by tragedy as the IRA singled out and murdered some of your closest friends and colleagues. Airey Neave, a war hero who had masterminded your leadership campaign and Ian Gow your brilliant PPS were both victims of republican car bombs. At the Conservative Conference in Brighton they attacked you, the Cabinet, the Party, and democracy itself directly. The Brighton bomb took the lives of Tony Berry, Muriel Mclean, Roberta Wakeham and left

Norman Tebbit and John Wakeham seriously injured and Margaret Tebbit paralysed for life. Emerging from the wreckage you ordered that the Conference must start on time and at 9.30am it did just that in a display of courage and determination, amidst great grief and sorrow that sent a message to the terrorists and the world that democracy would always prevail, however great the atrocity.

After Suez Britain seemed to have lost her self confidence on the world stage much as the United States was weakened by Vietnam. In 1979 an aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union was building a military machine beyond anything needed for self defence. They had invaded Afghanistan and insisted on a crack down against Solidarity in Poland with the imposition of martial law. The communists were expanding their interests globally particularly in Africa. Margaret you abandoned detente and stood up to them, insisting on deploying cruise and Pershing missiles to maintain our defences. They called you an Iron Lady. You told them they were right- Britain needed an iron lady. Again there was huge protests led by people like Canon Kenyon Wright then campaigning for CND and George Robertson who protested against the nuclear deterrent at Faslane. Yes that's the same George Robertson who later became Secretary of State for Defence, Nato Secretary General and received the Presidential medal of freedom from George Bush!

Later you engaged with Gorbachev and began the dialogue which ended the cold war and liberated the peoples of the Soviet empire. **‘We dont need walls to keep our people in’** you told them and on a visit to Berlin in 1982 you said in a powerful prediction of what would follow

**‘You may chain a man but you cannot chain his mind. You may enslave him but you will not conquer his spirit. In every decade since the war the Soviet leaders have been reminded that their pitiless ideology only succeeds because it is maintained by force. But the day comes when the anger and frustration of the people becomes so great that force cannot contain it. Then the deifice cracks,the mortar crumbles- a day liberty will dawn on the other side of the wall’**

No one imagined that General Galtierri would invade the Falkland Islands in 1982 . I would like to have been a fly on the wall when your Defence Secretary, John Nott, reported to you that the MOD’s initial view was that Falklands could not be retaken once seized. Your reported response was swift and to the point **‘We have to get them back’**

Key principles were at stake. Aggression must never be allowed to succeed. The Rule of Law must prevail. Britains honour as a nation and her determination to defend her interests were on trial. What was the alternative you asked

**'that a common or garden dictator should rule over the Queens subjects and prevail by fraud and violence- not while I was Prime Minister'**

Enoch Powell speaking in Parliament which was recalled to sit on a Saturday referred to the Russians calling you an iron lady.

**'In the next week or two this house, the nation and the Rt Hon Lady herself will learn of what metal she is made'**

Francis Pym ,the Foreign Secretary and Al Haig favoured an accommodation with the Argentineans which meant withdrawing the task force and sanctions against Argentina and going back on our commitment to uphold the wishes of the Islanders.

He put his proposals to the war cabinet despite the Prime Minister's opposition. Aterwards Margaret you said

**'I could not have stayed as PM had the war cabinet accepted Francis Pym's proposals. I would have resigned'**

Francis's plan was defeated and so was Galtierri in a remarkable victory that restored Britain's standing in the world, freed the Islanders and the Argentineans of a brutal dictatorship and brought democracy to Buenos Aries.

The Prime Minister was viciously attacked for sanctioning the sinking of Belgrano by Tam Dayell and others but it was one of the key and decisive actions of the war. The Belgrano threatened the task force. After her sinking the entire Argentinean navy retreated to port and never came out again

Imagine the relief Ladies and Gentleman on hearing **‘There are white flags flying over Stanley’** for the families of the service men and women but also for this Lady who had lived with the prospect of casualties and disaster for 11 weeks.

After Victory was declared Enoch Powell asked the Prime Minister another question in Parliament

**‘Is the Rt Hon Lady aware that the report has 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 mater of the highest quality and that it is of exceptional tensile strength, is highly resistant to wear and tear and to stress and may be used to advantage for all national purposes’**

Ladies and Gentlemen as some of you know I like climbing high mountains. I would love to have a go at Everest but my family have other ideas.

With considerable financial sacrifice, hard training, a good team, competent leadership, luck, stamina and determination it is not an impossible dream.

These days there are fixed ropes all the way up. People even say the south coll route is easy, which it is not, and more than 2700 have done it. For Sir Edmund Hilary in 1953 it was an entirely different proposition -there were no fixed ropes, no known route, no modern technology to fight the cold and extreme conditions, no certainty that it was even possible. He had to find the way and with courage and determination he succeeded where so many others had failed. That is what Margaret Thatcher did for Britain. She took on what seemed an impossible task and with resolution and guts charted the route out of the wreckage left by socialism. She changed the way people thought about wealth creation, enterprise and the role of the state. Part of her legacy was the destruction of socialism and the creation of New Labour. Today we are back to the 70s in a Britain on the brink of bankruptcy thanks to the meddling excesses of Gordon Brown, the irresponsibility of some bankers and the searing incompetence of the regulators and monetary authorities here and in the United States. Old Labour is back. Margaret's fixed ropes of sound money, living within our means, controlling public expenditure and smaller

Government to release the enterprise of the British people are still in place. We know that we can climb this mountain and we have in David Cameron and Annabel Goldie a formidable summit party. In truth my mountaineering days are over but I am willing to be a Sherpa on this expedition as should everyone who cares about our country. We can succeed in putting Britain back on top of the world. It will take time, hardship, sacrifice and determination. Our inspiration lies in the victory in 1979 and the example of this great lady who saved our country.

The toast is Lady Thatcher and the victory of 1979.