



PRIME MINISTER

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E & OE - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister were you surprised, as the rest of us were, with Mrs Thatcher's decision?

PM: No, I wasn't surprised. I was talking to my people yesterday and I thought that that was the most likely outcome. Either that or they would support her for this immediate election and seek her resignation a little bit later on. I think the events of the past week, particularly starting with the speech of Sir Geoffrey Howe, that fairly mortally wounded her.

JOURNALIST: What will be the impact of her departure, do you think?

PM: Well it will change the prospects of politics in Britain. All the polling and one's intuition suggested that the conservatives had virtually no chance of winning with her. Equally they seem to suggest that they have got a reasonable chance with a new leader. I would have thought that Neil Kinnock probably had his tongue reasonably substantially in his cheek when he said he thought it was good news.

JOURNALIST: Do you think it will make the Commonwealth a less abrasive organisation?

PM: Well let's be fair to Mrs Thatcher in some respects in regard to the Commonwealth. I mean when you talked about the Commonwealth and Mrs Thatcher it all was through the prism of South Africa and on that she certainly was a force for divisiveness - that's true. But she was a very, very positive contributor to the good works of the Commonwealth in many other respects and it would be churlish not to acknowledge that.

JOURNALIST: You've had the odd angry word with her. What conversation sticks in your memory?

PM: I suppose generally the arguments about South Africa are the ones that stay in one's mind. But again to be fair to Mrs Thatcher - and I think it is appropriate through their period in office and afterwards to be fair to people - she did take very constructive views about assistance to the South African situation via the help that she thought ought to be given to the frontline states and so on. So my memories of Margaret Thatcher are mixed. Certainly the

incorrect position I think she had all the way through on South Africa - I remember that. But I also remember the great courage of the woman. I mean, on South Africa she was always one out and she was never intimidated by the odds. She had the courage of her convictions and she would fight to see that they were put, even if we all thought that she was terribly wrong on them.

JOURNALIST: She's left her own country though a much more divided society?

PM: Yes she has. That's true. It's for her country really to make the judgement about her impact on that country. I would be hypocritical if I just, now that's she's finished, spoke simply in glowing terms of her because I think she was a force for backwardness on certain issues. But again in regard to the relations between Australia and Britain she must be given credit. I mean when she came out here in 88 she was committed to strengthening the relationship. She went out of her way in 1989 when we were over there to marshal all the forces to ensure, not just that that was a successful visit but that all Ministers and Departments of the British Government were directed to ensuring into the future the best possible relations. So that's the picture of Margaret.

JOURNALIST: Can you be enticed into a tip as to the replacement?

PM: No. Speaking from afar I think that the one that I know best and for whom I have a very high regard is Geoffrey Howe.

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