

Hands up Maggie, you were right!

As a young black teenager growing up in Britain in the 1980's, I thought Margaret Thatcher was the most evil woman in Britain. But who could blame me, as I was a young man influenced by the socialist views around me. Most of my friends were blacks, mainly West Indians who had been oppressed in post war Britain. I also hung out with left wing extremists. My heroes at the time were politicians like Ken Livingstone known as 'Red Ken', who had always openly supported the 'Black cause' and at the time headed the Greater London Inner Authority (GLC) which had been generous with their grants. I was also influenced by Labour party leaders such as Michael Foot, Tony Benn, and Denis Healey. Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins and David Owen who I also admired had left the Labour party to form the Social Democratic Party.

Mrs Thatcher's hard line policy on Immigration was something that gave me a cause to consider her racist. An opinion that was shared by many people at the time, but it took me many years to understand what this woman was trying to do. She was simply yielding to the warnings of Enoch Powell, who had lost his shadow cabinet post, by warning Britain of the 'Immigration Explosion'. A problem that is currently plaguing Britain. During her tenure as prime minister, immigration control was tight and apart from the Irish Republican Army (IRA), terrorist groups found it almost impossible to operate within the shores of Britain. Benefit fraud was controlled, and refugees and asylum seekers trying to take advantage of the 'British generous benefit system' were dealt with. Those working hard for their cash did not feel cheated by thinking that they were paying for losers, benefit frauds, illegal immigrants through their taxes. Everybody was happy and satisfied until Maggie departed in 1990. The laws on immigration have now become much more relaxed, which has bought about the emergence of numerous asylum seekers and refugees. Britain is changing!

The Falklands war was another of Mrs Thatcher's achievements. When Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, a British colony in 1982, the great leader sent a message to the world, 'Don't mess with Britain'.

Mrs Thatcher single handily dealt with the miners' strike of 1984. Prior to that, previous post war prime ministers like Atlee, Wilson, Heath and Callaghan had to battle the trade unions that were growing stronger. Wilson had initiated a white paper titled 'in place of strive', which had indicated that the reason for Britain's low industrial productivity was as a result of 'strikes'. Heath introduced the Industrial Relations Act of 1971, which did not help the problem. Mrs Thatcher showed the whole world in 1984, when the miners came to their knees and conceded defeat that she was in control. She made it clear, that trade unions were a thing of the past. Arthur Scargill the miner's leader was never the same man again after the strike. Unfortunately in her absence, unions seem to be emerging again. The tube strikes are becoming a regular occurrence these days.

A 'no nonsense' woman, which earned her the name 'Iron Lady' she negotiated for Britain at almost all the economic summits that she attended, like a woman going to the market, and getting the best deal for her and her dependents. Her foreign policy was equally outstanding. Improving the Trans Atlantic relations with the Americans and initiating a relationship with the Russians by making it clear to the world that she could do business with Mikhail Gorbachev.

Mrs Thatcher was a survivor, and had proved this, when she survived the terrorist attack on her and other members of her cabinet in the bomb attacks at the Conservative annual party conference in

Brighton. The incident made her stronger. There were attacks to bring her down and end her political career, but she always ended up victorious. There was no stopping her and many people realised it. She had survived three general elections and won them with an overall majority.

It took back stabbing from members of her cabinet to finally bring her down in 1990. But by the time she left office, Britain had emerged as one of the largest industrial countries in Europe.

I have now got to understand her strict policies, and although I am not on the same side of politics with her, I have to take off my hat and give it to her.

I have never had the opportunity of writing about a prime minister, but I had to jump at the opportunity of doing this one, because as far as I am concerned, Thatcher was actually greater than Churchill.

Rest in Peace Maggie.

You were right after all! Well done!

Jide Ogundimu is a legal practitioner at Jide Ogundimu & Co Solicitors.