

Charles Moore -- The Legacy of Margaret Thatcher
interviewed on July 14, 2011
This is an unedited transcript of the interview

Peter Robinson: Welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. I'm Peter Robinson. Be sure to join us on Facebook at Facebook.com/UncKnowledge. You can submit questions, comments, suggest guests – Facebook. One of Britain's most distinguished journalists, Charles Moore is a former editor of *The Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* newspapers and of the *Spectator* magazine. Mr. Moore is the authorized biographer of the Right Honourable the Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven, perhaps better known simply as Margaret Thatcher. Charles Moore – welcome. Segment One – The Iron Lady – Until the Second World War, Britain represented the richest nation in Europe, the most powerful nation on Earth and the ruler of an empire that covered a quarter of the globe. By 1979, three and a half decades later, Britain had lost its empire, become a power of the second rank, and had seen its living standards drop below those of Germany, Italy, France. Briefly, to set the scene – to set the stage as it were before the Iron Lady enters, what accounted for that decline and what did it feel like? You were starting your career at this period in the '70s.

Charles Moore: Well Peter, in starting my career, I saw this very clearly because I came into Fleet Street and journalism in October 1979, which was just after Mrs. Thatcher became Prime Minister. And so, there was all the mess that she had just taken over. What it meant was for example, very high inflation and perhaps above all a very, very severe control of labor by the labor unions. So industry functioned very badly. You couldn't bring about change. You couldn't sack people. You couldn't create new jobs and the trade unions were highly political so their leaderships were trying to run the country. And it was believed by many people that you could only run the country through a deal between the politicians and the leaders of the labor unions. And so you get the labor unions trying to sort of decide what economic policy would be. And there was any amount of closed shop restricted practices, so it did feel very much as though there was very little hope. And we had these enormously wasteful nationalized industries – coal, steel, –

Peter Robinson: Shipbuilding.

Charles Moore: Ship building, the cars were effectively – almost all the motor industry was affected.

Peter Robinson: So striking that you mentioned coal, steel, and shipbuilding and those were the industries that had been dominant a century before.

Charles Moore: Yes.

Peter Robinson: But the socialist policies had in effect frozen British industry into a 19th century position in the second half of the 20th.

Charles Moore: I think that's right. I think what happened was that for political reasons it was felt that you had to – if an old heavy industry was doing badly the thing to do was to “save it,” which in fact meant not allowing development, change.

Peter Robinson: Taxing the productive segments of the economy –

Charles Moore: Exactly so.

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Peter Robinson: – to allow the unproductive –

Charles Moore: Exactly so and the tax rates were correspondingly high, so if the tax rate on unearned income, so called unearned income – when Mrs. Thatcher came in was right up in the nineties. And even so called earned income was up in the eighties. So it was enormously burdensome and restrictive.

Peter Robinson: Enters Margaret Thatcher. [Video playing of Mrs. Thatcher]

Margaret Thatcher: Mr. Chairman, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen. I stand before you tonight in my Red Star chiffon evening gown. My face softly made up and my fair hair gently waved. The Iron Lady of the western world.

Peter Robinson: The Iron Lady, that sobriquet comes from what?

Charles Moore: Mrs. Thatcher made a very powerful speech in which she attacked the principles of détente and said that we were ignoring the dangers from the Soviet Union. And the Red Army newspaper, *Red Star* came back at her, obviously controlled by the Communist Party.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Charles Moore: And it said she's the Iron Lady and this was the best compliment ever paid you by a critic, by an enemy, because they meant it to say how hard and unfeeling and dreadful she was, but of course, that's exactly what she wanted to be seen as in relation to Soviet communism.

Peter Robinson: Now, Charles I want to get to the policies, to the events of the Thatcher years. But first – where did this come from, that self-possession, the toughness. There she was. This is, as I recall this speech was delivered a year or so – some months before she became Prime Minister.

Charles Moore: Years.

Peter Robinson: Years before she became Prime Minister and here she is taking on the Soviets and equating with the Soviets the Labour government. This is a breathtaking act of defiance and this woman was raised over a grocery shop in Grantham, a medium-sized, nondescript town in middle, nondescript England.

Charles Moore: You're right, but I think by the way you've described it; you've fastened onto why she felt able to speak in this way. It was precisely because she came from this – what you might call the wrong side of tracks background and because she was a woman in a man's world that she had a very independent approach. She never thought "I must go with the crowd." Right back in Grantham, her father a grocer, local politician, and a Methodist lay preacher – he would say things to her like "dare to be a Daniel. Be – stand up for what you believe, don't worry about what the crowd says" and she would have taken that to heart very much. And then as she

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made her way through life, she is essentially acting alone. She's not – there is no big group of pals helping her.

Peter Robinson: She's not a part of the "Old Boys Network."

Charles Moore: Absolutely not, neither by sex nor by character. And of course, very ambitious. But she had very strong beliefs and I think what most struck her, as she grew up and matured in politics, was the horror of her country going downhill and of the sense of failure. And what Margaret Thatcher cares about so much is the idea that her country has enormous potential and that needs to be brought out. And for the Conservative Party above all – the Conservative Party of which she was a member to fail in that – which she felt it had done in the mid '70s was a terrible rebuke.

Peter Robinson: Segment Two – The Falklands – April 1982, you are a young journalist and you will remember all of this vividly, Argentina invades and occupies the Falklands. I happened to be in Britain myself at the time and it was a complete shock. The first question was why would they care, why would anybody want these Falkland Islands. I remember people saying to each other – describe to us Prime Minister Thatcher's response.

Charles Moore: Well the invasion of the Falklands was, among other things, completely unexpected, except by a very few people. And so the British government didn't actually know that it was going to be invaded by Argentina until a day before the event took place. And therefore, obviously there were virtually no preparations. And here we are we have –

Peter Robinson: By the way, I should state the Falkland Islands are in the South Atlantic, about two hundred and fifty miles from the coast of Argentina and about six thousand miles –

Charles Moore: Yes, more I think.

Peter Robinson: More than six – well, six thousand or more miles from the United Kingdom.

Charles Moore: Yeah and the Falkland Islands are a British colony – were and are a British colony, but a colony, unlike many, where everybody in it wanted to be – they were all of British descent and they wished to continue to be with Britain. And so the question was here was an act of military aggression. What do you do about it? And basically Mrs. Thatcher understood that if you didn't respond, the government would fall because the indignation was total about British public opinion. And the marines that we had, we had a very small garrison out there, they were captured so complete humiliation. And so the question is, what do you do? And Mrs. Thatcher didn't know what to do in the sense that there were no preparations for this. The logistics are terrible, the politics unprecedented.

Peter Robinson: If I recall – you may correct me on this. But as I recall, there is an especially vivid scene in her autobiography in which she is being briefed on all of this. And John Nott, who is the Minister for Defense, who has earlier that day rounded up the admirals and said, "what's going

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to be happening, what are we going to do," presented to Mrs. Thatcher the view of the Defense Ministry that essentially the Falklands were lost. And there was one man –

Charles Moore: This is essentially correct. By chance almost all the main people who are supposed to help with these decisions were out of the country that day. And that turned out to be a good thing, because Mrs. Thatcher was sitting in the House of Commons, having herself a long-running meeting and trying to work out what they could do. Drafting a letter to President Reagan and asking for advice and assistance and so on. One admiral, the First Sea Lord, was in town and he'd just been inspecting naval positions, so he was wearing his uniform and he heard this meeting was going on. He wasn't asked to it. And he came bursting into it in the House of Commons.

Peter Robinson: Leach, was it not?

Charles Moore: Leach, Henry Leach. And he sort of found his way through and Mrs. Thatcher was very, very pleased to see him, because she always respected the armed services. And she didn't know what to think about all of this from a military point of view. And so everyone was very gloomy, including John Nott, the Defence Secretary, who you mentioned. And she said, "Well, First Sea Lord, what can we do?" And he said, "Well, Prime Minister, we can send a task force." And she said, because she had very little military experience at this point, early – she said, "What's a task force?" So he explained and she said, "How long would it take to get ready?" And he said, "Three days." And she said, "How long will it take to get to the Falklands?" And he said, "Three weeks." And she said, "You mean three days, don't you?" He said, "No, no. Three weeks, three weeks." She had no idea of the geographical.

Peter Robinson: Right.

Charles Moore: And she said, "Can we do it? Can we reconquer the islands?" And he said, "Yes, Prime Minister we can. And though it's not for me to say, I think we must." And so she got interested and she said, "Why? Why do you say that?" And he said, "Because if we don't do it, we will be a country whose word counts for nothing in the world." And of course then she was really on her mettle. And suddenly she'd been given the sense that it was possible. Because no matter what her ambitions, if she's advised by everybody that it's not physically possible, she has to give up, but ah it's possible. So she says "right, let's make ready the task force" and the cabinet agreed to that on the Friday night. Big debate in the House of Commons on Saturday night, which she survived though with some difficulty and the task force set sail on Monday. And once it's in the sea on the way or on the sea, I should say, very hard to turn it back. And what Mrs. Thatcher then had to manage was an incredibly difficult diplomatic situation when you are trying to see if you can get a nonmilitary solution without conceding the crucial points. And she had to hold off people who wanted to appease Argentina.

Peter Robinson: And everyone, as I recall, everyone – I say everyone – the economists, the *Financial Times*, the whole diplomatic corp – I mentioned that these small island were much closer to Argentina than to – thousands of miles from Britain, only a few hundred miles from Argentina. The population was a few thousand.

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Charles Moore: Yes.

Peter Robinson: Many more thousands more than that of sheep.

Charles Moore: Yep.

Peter Robinson: But the population was only a few thousand, so the notion that you cut a deal was overwhelming.

Charles Moore: It was overwhelming in the minds of diplomats, but the opposite feeling in the minds of the British people.

Peter Robinson: So she had the people with her more or less from the get go.

Charles Moore: Yes. But of course, it could have died because of sheer military failure apart from anything else. So the loneliness of her position in this and the difficulty of trying to work out what to do and the –

Peter Robinson: And Leach was not representative really, it was almost by kind of a sweet miracle that the one man who had mettle, happened to find his way into the meeting at that moment.

Charles Moore: That's right – to be fair to the others, they did have mettle, but they were just very, very aware of the difficulty. It was a very, very serious logistical, strategic difficulty. How would you land on the island's terrible weather? No cover so you get attacked by very effective Argentine Air Force and so on. However, Mrs. Thatcher saw that you had to do this, unless you could get peace with honor and Argentina was so stupid that it didn't offer that. She had a lot of to-ing and fro with the United States, often very tense. It often was not very easy with Secretary Haig. President Reagan slightly hedging his bets, because there was a genuine and very understandable U.S. fear of resurgent communism in South America. But in the end, the strength of her – our alliance with the United States and her personal friendship with President Reagan meant that they came down on the British side. So we had all the logistical and sort of diplomatic backup we needed. And then it was a wonderful military achievement and the British forces distinguished themselves and they won and with a relatively small loss of life and virtually no – I think two or three civilians died in the whole conflict.

Peter Robinson: Correct. I believe there were two or three civilians on the *Belgrano* – *Belgrano*, the Argentines lose the *Belgrano*, the British lose the *Sheffield*. In other words, two ships went down, nine hundred and seven killed, seventy-four days of conflict, but Britain wins. [tape of Margaret Thatcher]

Margaret Thatcher: And it's great. Marvelous forces, every single one of them. It's just been, it's just been everyone together. and that's what matters. We knew what we had to do. We knew what we had to do and we went about it.

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Peter Robinson: To me what is so striking about that is that you can hear the crowd singing *Rule, Britannia* in the background, just off Downing Street.

Charles Moore: Which of course now, they wouldn't be allowed to do because of security apart from everything else.

Peter Robinson: Segment Three – The Strike. 1984, the National Coal Board, which is the government body that oversees Britain's nationalized and heavily subsidized coal industry announces that the game is about to change. Instead of subsidies without end and accommodation with the unions without end, it intends to close twenty unproductive, unprofitable mines. Twenty thousand jobs will be eliminated. In certain towns in the north, virtually the only source of employment is about to come to an end. The National Union of Mine Workers is led by a man called Arthur Scargill. Tell us about Arthur Scargill and what he chooses to do.

Charles Moore: Well in a way, Arthur Scargill was the best gift to Mrs. Thatcher, because there had been a long history of confrontation with the National Union of Mine Workers. But before that, they had been led by fairly moderate people, who were very difficult to argue with politically because they had the sort of moral stature. Arthur Scargill was a hardline communist. Not actually a member of the Communist Party, but an ultra extremist –

Peter Robinson: He called himself a Marxist, as I recall, there was no –

Charles Moore: Yes, that's right.

Peter Robinson: We're not casting aspersions,

[Laughter]

Charles Moore: And he had a declaredly political agenda. He wanted to defeat and overthrow the Thatcher government and he also actually had money, which was later exposed, from Soviet Russia and from Libya. So you were up against something that really was subversive of the political order. But the Tories had a history of losing in all of this and indeed, Mrs. Thatcher herself had given in to the miners in 1981 with a similar, comparable dispute, because she wasn't ready. And by this time, she was ready. She'd got the coal stocks prepared to last out a strike and she changed the law about picketing, so that the union could now be held liable in the courts for secondary picketing and that made it much easier to distrain union funds.

Peter Robinson: Let's take a look at her response to Arthur Scargill and the strike. [Video of Thatcher interview].

Interviewer: You talk about the ruthless, manipulating few. Now will you not negotiate with them ever?

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Margaret Thatcher: I will never negotiate with people who use coercion and violence to achieve their objective. They are the enemies of democracy. They are not interested in the future of democracy. They are trying to kill democracy for their own purposes.

Peter Robinson: Pretty tough. The strike lasts about a year as I recall and in the end it just fizzles – the miners go back to work.

Charles Moore: Yes,. Another great advantage Mrs. Thatcher had in this was that Arthur Scargill never had a ballot for the strike, because he knew that if he did, he wouldn't win it.

Peter Robinson: That's why she gets to talk about a small minority of – manipulating the larger –

Charles Moore: Exactly, she always knew that he didn't have all the miners with him. And right through the strike, a third of them went on working and as in the later part that grew to half and so on. But he called on union solidarity to make the strike happen. And of course, it was very dangerous, very hard going, and there was a point about halfway through where it really did look as if she would lose it. But she pulled through in this knowledge that he didn't really have the legitimacy. And so though a lot of people hated it because it was all very tough and unpleasant and bitter, she did essentially have the moral argument on her side, as well as the economic and political argument. And that was sort of tacitly acknowledged even by people who didn't like her. Once she'd won, everything changes. The whole –

Peter Robinson: What changes?

Charles Moore: – this, this lifted the incubus which had been on British governments about trade union power since the war.

Peter Robinson: Falklands War in '82 gives her stature and in '84 she uses it – she changes Britain, is that fair?

Charles Moore: That's fair. And in between she won a huge majority in the general election in 1983 and so she felt she had a real mandate.

Peter Robinson: Hmm, Charles once again, this question of tough – well really a question of courage, an old-fashioned virtue of courage. Falklands first, 1956 – Prime Minister Anthony Eden bungles the brief Suez operation against Egypt in the Suez Canal and it ends up costing him the premiership. She knows as she goes to war in the Falklands that if that fails, she's gone.

Charles Moore: Yes.

Peter Robinson: There's a clear precedent in British history.

Charles Moore: Yes.

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Peter Robinson: Her government, her job, her entire – everything is at stake.

Charles Moore: Yes.

Peter Robinson: She does it anyway.

Charles Moore: Yeah.

Peter Robinson: And then we come to 1984 and this National Union of Mine Workers' strike . Just a decade earlier they'd gone out on strike with Edward Heath. Edward Heath had been Prime Minister, her predecessor as a Tory prime minister. He had been putting in place some free market reforms. He'd been tough by the standards of the day. They bring the country to its knees and it forced him to reverse himself and it costs Heath the government and the premiership. She, within twenty-four months, she risks everything twice. Where did this come from? This mettle, this courage?

Charles Moore: Well, it's innate in her character, but it's also to do with the fact at this point, that she is all alone. She knows that no excuses are going to be made for her if anything goes wrong. That there are no pals to cover up for her, hold her in office, after any disaster. And she would always say that a woman's only got one chance.

Peter Robinson: Uhm, hmm.

Charles Moore: So in a way she'd done what you're not supposed to do in politics, which is, "If you're in a hole, stop digging." She was in the hole and went on digging in the sense that she knew only by playing the game as hard as you could, could you win. .

Peter Robinson: Segment four – the Cold War. Even under Mrs. Thatcher, Britain remains a power of the second rank. It's not a super power, it's not a nation that can in any way conceivably set forward it's military as a counterweight to the Soviet Union or it's economy as a counterweight to the United States'. And yet Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev and every right-minded historian of whom I am aware, recognizes that she played a central role in the end of the Cold War.

Charles Moore: Yes.

Peter Robinson: Why is that recognition accorded to her?

Charles Moore: I think because she knew when to hold them and when to fold them.

[Laughter]

Charles Moore: And also to do with the alliance with Reagan. Because essentially, she and Reagan had analyzed the situation correctly in the '70s when they were not yet in office.

Peter Robinson: Uhm, hmm.

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Charles Moore: Which was that Soviet power was becoming more and more threatening and it had both political and military consequences. The thing was in the balance. And she led the fight in western Europe to install cruise and Pershing missiles to counter the Soviet nuclear missiles in the early '80s.

Peter Robinson: 1983, the United States places missiles –

Charles Moore: Deployed.

Peter Robinson: Yeah, it deployed missiles in Britain and West Germany and I think there were a couple – a small deployment in Italy as well, if I am not mistaken.

Charles Moore: Yes.

Peter Robinson: And she takes an anti-nuclear demonstration in Hyde Park, as I recall, but as I recall was to that point the largest public demonstration in British history.

Charles Moore: Ahh, certainly very big and – but it turned out in the 1983 election that the Labour belief in unilateral nuclear disarmament had helped them to lose very big. And she realized a simple point, but important, that if you use the word, “unilateral,” not many people know what it means. But if you say, “one-sided,” they do know way it means. And she would said the Labour wants one-sided disarmament. And this proved to be very, very effective for her. So once she carried this with the European allies, with her own electorate, she's in a very strong position to say, “Well, what happens next. We've pushed the Soviets back on this, what happens next?”

Peter Robinson: Can we – I would just like to play a clip from her eulogy – she recorded it about eighteen months before President Reagan died but it was played at his funeral and there are a couple points about this I would like to ask you about, Charles. [Video clip of Margaret Thatcher]

Margaret Thatcher: Yes, he did not shrink from denouncing Moscow's evil empire, but he realized that a man of good will might nonetheless emerge from within its dark corridors. So the President resisted Soviet expansion and pressed down on Soviet weakness at every point until the day came that communism began to collapse from the weight of those pressures and its own failures. And when a man of good will did emerge from the ruins, President Reagan stepped forward to shake his hand and to offer sincere cooperation.

Peter Robinson: She met Gorbachev, still a junior member of the Politburo about three months before the unexpected death of Chernenko and Gorbachev's elevation to General Secretary.

Charles Moore: Yeah.

Peter Robinson: As I recall, they met at Checkers, the prime minister's country residence, they were scheduled to meet for about an hour – it ran five hours and she made a point of saying publicly

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soon thereafter, "I like Mr. Gorbachev, we can do business together." And here in this eulogy, she calls him a man of good will.

Charles Moore: Yeah.

Peter Robinson: Now what's so striking about the event as it takes place in 1985, "I like Mr. Gorbachev" – and this eulogy, "a man of good will." Here we have Margaret Thatcher, the unreconstructed, unrepentant, anti-communist, cold warrior par excellence, and she sees Gorbachev and changes her thinking or at least recognizes something. In other words you get a remarkable intellectual agility, no?

Charles Moore: I think that's correct. She never thought that Soviet communism had anything good about it, but she detected in Gorbachev a readiness to recognize reality. And she thought – that conversation you mentioned at Checkers was vital. Because if you read – I'm sorry you can't yet do so, but people will eventually be able to read the conversation and the tremendous argument that they have with one another, where they are very, very frank and each attacks the other's system and so on . But this actually built up a basis of trust. Nobody is conceding points of principle, but they enjoy the talk and it's very frank and clear. And they then see that there are actually things that they can actually think about together. And so some sort of human rapport is established and some idea that "well, we don't have to be threatening one another all the time." And from that, Mrs. Thatcher thought "right, we can move." She had the confidence that the western system would ultimately prevail, both economically and militarily and politically. And with that confidence pushed her forward to think, "well you can also negotiate." And so, off she went to President Reagan that very week, through – via Peking and Hong Kong and Pearl Harbor – she dropped in on the way in the middle of the night, by the way, to Washington. Saw President Reagan to talk about this to tell him, because the Reagan administration needing some persuading on this matter. And a lot of people who admire Mrs. Thatcher in the Reagan administration did not agree with her about this, that this was –

Peter Robinson: He did.

Charles Moore: – worth pursuing.

Peter Robinson: When she got to him, Reagan did.

Charles Moore: Yes, and of course that was the key thing that Reagan did. And what she was trying to do all the time was to keep the alliance together, prevent Gorbachev from driving a wedge between western allies, but help move President Reagan on. And so when in that tribute she was talking about Gorbachev as a man of good will, that's a good phrase because she wasn't saying he was right about anything, but she was saying that he had the necessary will. You could have the conversation with him.

Peter Robinson: Charles, let me ask you about one – this is frustrating because even if it is a web and we can talk about it – I would like to have a five-hour conversation with you. I like Mr. Moore, we can do business together.

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[Laughter]

Peter Robinson: But let me ask about one aspect of her relationship with Ronald Reagan. And this is to me so fascinating because it's a disagreement and there's policy and there were questions of analysis, but also the friendship all bound up in this. Reagan, strategic defense initiative or Star Wars – now she doesn't like it and in fact, I can't remember the year, '84 perhaps? She flies to Camp David and hammers out this agreement, four points –

Charles Moore: Yes, this was the same occasion that she saw him about Gorbachev.

Peter Robinson: Yes and one of the four points was that the strategic defense initiative would be used to enhance deterrence rather than undermine it. As best I read the situation, President Reagan just said, well whatever her form of words will please her, let her have it. But she wanted to tie the strategic defense initiative into the status quo, which wasn't the game he was playing at all. He wanted to overturn the status quo. Reykjavik 1986, Reagan almost agrees to Gorbachev's sweeping proposals to reduce nuclear weapons and walks out in the end, because Gorbachev says you must limit SDI to research only – no deployment. Mrs. Thatcher in her autobiography on Reykjavik "It was like an earthquake. There was no place where you could put your political feet." And yet later she writes, "...the decision to pursue the Strategic Defense Initiative was the most far reaching and consequential of Reagan's administration." Put all of that together for me, will you?

Charles Moore: Well I think it can be done, I mean she was very shocked, not by SDI, but by Reagan's belief that you could just do away with nuclear weapons. She did not agree with him about that. She thought that nuclear weapons were the best guarantee of peace in a wicked world because of the deterrent effect. And whenever he said let's get rid of the whole lot, this really frightened her. She was worried about SDI for similar reasons, because she thought this was a utopian idea on how you could supersede all existing – but she also could see it's great political utility and it's capacity to make the Russians feel that they couldn't keep up. So when she was doing all this stuff about you can have the research, but not the deployment, what she was trying to do was get a line which all the allies could agree on, so that there wouldn't be a terrible bust-up between the other allies and the United States. She was very happy that Reagan pushed SDI forward, not as an actual reality of exactly what you're going to do, but as a sort of concept that would terrify the Russians.

Peter Robinson: Charles – Segment Five – the last segment alas – What she leaves us? 1990, Margaret Thatcher's final appearance in the House of Commons as Prime Minister after eleven years, they made her the longest serving prime minister since Lord Liverpool and that's a test of how long ago it was, because no one remembers Lord Liverpool. So question – is she worn out? Is she weary? Is she fatigued? Take a look [video of Margaret Thatcher]

Margaret Thatcher: I give way to the honorable gentleman.

Unidentified MP: I'm extremely grateful. I'm extremely grateful. The Prime Minister is aware that I detest every single one of her domestic policies and I've never heard that.

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Margaret Thatcher: I think that the honorable gentleman knows that I have the same contempt for his socialist policies as the people of east Europe who have experienced it having [cross talk] . I think I must have hit the right nail on the head when I pointed out that the logic of those policies are they would rather have the poor poorer. Once they start to talk about the gap, they'd rather the gap was that [while holding both hands below her shoulders with index fingers extended parallel to the ground, the right a few inches above the left]. Down here, that. Not that [raises both index fingers above her shoulders and slightly widens the gap between them].

Peter Robinson: She is superb, isn't she? [Video continues]

Margaret Thatcher: Or that [widens the gap between index fingers more].. So long as the gap is smaller, so long as the gap is smaller –

Unidentified presider: Order!

Margaret Thatcher: – they'd rather have the poor poorer. You do not create wealth and opportunity that way. You do not create a property-owning democracy that way.

Peter Robinson: She'd won the Falklands War. She played a central role in the western victory, in the west's victory in the Cold War. She led the Conservative Party to three victories in general elections. Behind Germany, Italy, and France in living standards when she took office, Britain has essentially pulled even by the time she leaves office and she has set policies in place that permit Britain to overtake all three in the following decade. Her own colleagues in the Conservative Party turfed her out. Why?

Charles Moore: Well, my own interpretation of it was that it was a top down revolt, rather than a bottom up revolt. And I think it was really because her colleagues were fed up with her being in charge of them for so long and she was not always polite to them. And also a lot of –

Peter Robinson: She did not mellow.

Charles Moore: No, she didn't mellow, no. And in fact she probably got more arrogant with the passing of the years. And she also had a profound difference of opinion with them about the European Union because she believed that the European Union was going to take away British sovereignty and become a United States of Europe of a very dangerous kind. And many of them disagreed. And so they capitalized on her wider unpopularity which was more to do with a particular tax that she had introduced and the fact that she had been in for long and they led a sort of coup against her. Even in that coup against her, which was a leadership ballot of her and members of Parliament, she won. She got more votes than her opponent, but not enough to prevent a second ballot and therefore, she was advised that this was unwise to push it any longer. There wasn't enough backing and she went and she was probably right to do that. But it was an extraordinary thing because I saw her shortly afterwards and I said – she had begun to write her memoirs which of course she did. And I said, "What are going to call them?" And she said, "Undefeated." And the reason for that was of course, that it was absolutely true that she was undefeated. She won, as you

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say, all those elections and she'd actually won the leadership ballot, which caused her to leave. But it also expressed her character, because she felt she prevailed in the matters in which she wished to prevail.

Peter Robinson: Charles, her legacy. Mrs. Thatcher wants the United Kingdom ruled from the Palace of Westminster. She defeats the unions in 1984. She completes a thousand years of British political development, the House of Commons rules Britain. And now, we have an assembly in Scotland, an assembly in Wales that have taken sovereignty away the House of Commons, and still more to the point, a constant leaching of sovereignty to Brussels. She wanted a Britain that was proud of its own identity, today we're well into multiculturalism, and with twenty years of immigration and high birth rates among the Muslim population, there are neighborhoods particularly in the North where Sharia law is an alternative to British law. She wants free markets. She wants constant pressure on the welfare state. Today, the Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron talks incessantly about social services. He sounds more like Edward Heath than like Margaret Thatcher. She wanted a Britain that was strong, as strong as was reasonable based on the size of its economy and this past spring, Prime Minister David Cameron, a Conservative, her successor as Conservative prime minister. Even as he was calling on NATO to commence operations in Libya, he was shrinking British defense spending and decommissioning the last British aircraft carrier, the *Ark Royal*. Which by the way in this morning's news, they put it up for auction and a Hong Kong firm wants to buy the *Ark Royal* and turn it into a floating shopping mall. What did she leave that lasts?

Charles Moore: Well, I would say that she left first of all a huge change in economic ideas, so that nobody wants to go back to all the state subsidy, union power, nationalized industries, and this became a global concept that she exported of which privatization is the best known. So that is common ground even with the moderate left these days. I mean they don't really like it, but nobody wants to go back. Secondly, I think she left an idea which in my opinion will go on, as much as one can say in politics forever all over the world, which is a certain robust idea of freedom., a sort of active idea of freedom. And a sense that if you work hard enough on this, you can prevail. It's true that the immediate legacy sort of twenty years on, is very contested. And Mrs. Thatcher is a very, very controversial figure and she never took any prisoners so there were people who were horrified by what she did and wished to overturn it and so – she is someone who stirs up tremendous emotions. There was an element of damage in that, but it was a price worth paying, I think, for her belief that you must tell the truth. And that the trouble with democratic politics is that illusions tend to prevail, because illusions are easier. Now I notice that as we're in an era of deficits and massive debt problems and massive government spending problems, I notice because I have been working on this for some time that her reputation is growing very much in the United Kingdom, having been gone quite low at one point. Because people see how much she tried to deal with real problems. And what they tend to notice is the current politicians are not dealing so much with real problems and I detect a similar debate going on in the United States. I think there's a feeling and you often get people say – and not that people necessarily agree, but they say, “We need a Maggie Thatcher.”

Peter Robinson: So her example itself is substantive achievement.

Charles Moore -- The Legacy of Margaret Thatcher
interviewed on July 14, 2011
This is an unedited transcript of the interview

Charles Moore: Yes, I think it's very much –

Peter Robinson: It gives rising generations something to hold onto.

Charles Moore: Everything to do with Margaret Thatcher is not precisely ideological. It is very much to do with character, as well. It's to do with how can somebody and here is an example of this woman all alone – tackle the problems that need tackling? Margaret Thatcher is a titanic figure in the history of Britain and I think she has already entered myth and – so as you know, the symbols of monarchy in Britain are the orb and scepter, but the symbol of power with Margaret Thatcher is the handbag and this thing could come to mean so much. And this thing wielded by her, this symbol of power, tells you a huge amount about the change of the role of women in society, the importance of character and the importance of a particularly British approach to political rule which I think will continue to mean a lot for centuries.

Peter Robinson: Final question. Margaret Thatcher summed up Ronald Reagan's place in history in one sentence – “Ronald Reagan won the Cold War without firing a shot.” You produced a book on Margaret Thatcher. Could I ask you to try for one sentence? What should we hold onto about her?

Charles Moore: She had the courage of her convictions and her convictions were proved right by the course of history.

Peter Robinson: Charles Moore, journalist and biographer of Margaret Thatcher, thank you. For Uncommon Knowledge, I'm Peter Robinson and before I say goodbye, I'd like you to know that for access to thousands of historical documents relating to Mrs. Thatcher and her time in the government, you can visit the Thatcher Foundation at the easiest web address in the world to remember – margarethatthatcher – one word – margarethatthatcher.org and now, this is Peter Robinson for Uncommon Knowledge saying thank you.