

The travails of the girl from Grantham

by our London observer

Some wag once pointed out that British prime ministers are chosen more for their acting ability than for any other reason. So it was with poor old Maggie Thatcher. Like her predecessors, Callaghan, Wilson, and Macmillan, she had been chosen, above all, to project a certain kind of image into the United States. Actually, the most important part of the job of being a British prime minister, in the postwar period, has been the managing of the current President of the United States.

Look how quickly they gave Clem Atlee the old heave-ho when Eisenhower replaced Harry Truman, and how Harold Macmillan was kept on past his retirement, because it was thought R. A. Butler wouldn't handle JFK quite so well. Harold Wilson had Hubert Humphrey as his contact man inside the LBJ regime. And then Carrington and Heath were brought in to manage Nixon, and we all know what that led to.

Maggie, the shopkeeper's daughter from Isaac Newton's hometown of Grantham, had something of the synthetic quality of a Jimmy Carter, of course, compounded with the brittleness of character that flows from what you have to be to achieve what they call upward mobility in Britain these days. Not too pretty, but it was expected to find an echo of sympathy in the neo-conservatism created for the colonial cousins in the 1970s. Adam Smith and all that. Free enterprise unleashed against the evils of state and communist collectivism. A voice for the kind of routine the Heritage Foundation branch of the Fabian Society plays out for the KGB.

Somehow, if the Malvinas wasn't bad enough, she did seem to go right off the rails when she got re-elected. Came over here for her Winston Churchill Award, and gave a speech that Bertrand Russell would have been proud of. She kept away for a while after that, but look how often she's coming back now. Haven't seen anything like it since Macmillan's negotiations with Kennedy over Polaris, and that kind of thing, before the missile crisis. Her main job obviously isn't going so well.

You know though, if there are those who see her coming back almost every other week, saying the same things, and not really getting anything except an attempt at education, they shouldn't start to sympathize with those who think she's incredibly stupid. They should go back, and look again at that old speech. That speech gave the lie to those who dismiss her as unbelievably stupid. They should ask instead why she acted, and has continued to act, in such an incredibly stupid

fashion. Then, you know, they could do something. What is it, they should ask, that brings out the paranoia, that is the content of the opportunism of the upwardly mobile girl from Grantham?

Well, in the play she's part of, the directors do tend to do rather unpleasant things, when the actors speak out of turn. Sometimes they even kill. It all depends what they think the consequences are. Harold Macmillan, something of a critic of Thatcher himself, could probably have said a thing or two about that kind of matter. They do say that in his time he was quite close to the decisions that were made about Kennedy. Now though, he's a bit old and frail, but he still reflects those who do make those kinds of decisions, like he did a week or two ago.

They say it's quite a small group really, the government within the government, the people who pull the strings from behind the scenes. And to watch Maggie flying back and forth over the Atlantic, is to get some idea of what's stirred

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up among those types, when doing whatever they do over the weekend, at whomever's country estate, they eventually get round to expressing their distaste about what Reagan and his friends are up to in the United States.

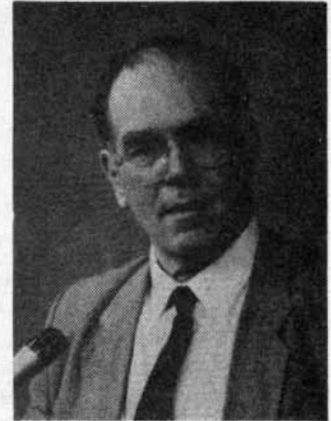
There's a handful of them you know, people like the permanent secretary to the Queen at the Palace, the cabinet secretary, the permanent secretary at the Foreign Office. And where you find one who's something like a Gordon-Lennox, or a Percy, or a Cecil, or a Charteris, watch what they do in the evenings, and especially at weekends, out there in Gloucestershire, or Wiltshire, or up in Scotland, or wherever they happen to go. Especially when they're out on the moors, or fields, away from the ladies. Ministers and governments come and go, they stay on. They have their purpose and their mission, compounded from the same special mixture of blood and soil, that every other kind of racial supremacist thinks is god-given to his people or group alone.

"The Russians are just like us," was one of the things Macmillan noted down at the time of his discussions with Kennedy.

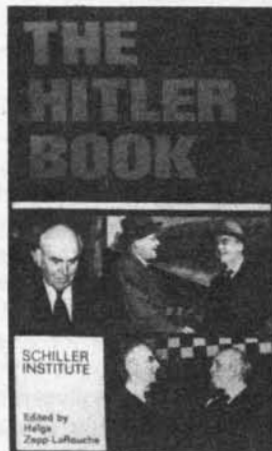
Those types, the younger, less sedentary ones, the majority among what passes as a British elite, they actually are as mad as the doctrine Bertrand Russell created for them, but they are thinking that way again.

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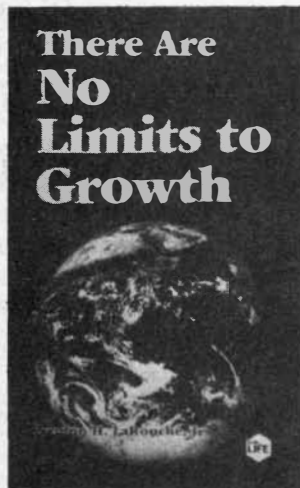
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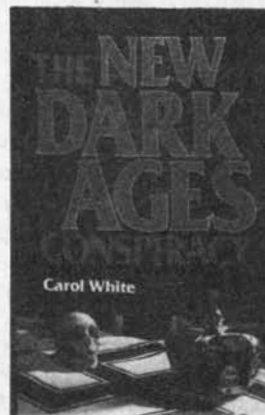
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