

Thatchers shaken by new scandal in U.K.

by Mark Burdman

It would have been hard for delegates at the first day of the annual British Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth to have accepted the explanation from an aide to former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that "extensive dental work" would be the cause of her woeful physical appearance. A Tory stalwart told the London *Independent* bluntly, "She looked bloody ill." The London *Times* said she looked "pale and gaunt, frail and thin," her face "painted with rouge," and had lost so much weight that she had gone from a size 14 to a size 10 in the past weeks.

The Conservative Party conference had begun only two days after an explosive front-page article in the Murdoch chain's *Sunday Times* of London on Oct. 9, reporting that Mark Thatcher, Son of Maggie, had made his early fortune by winning some \$20 million in commissions from the massive British-Saudi "Al Yamamah" (Arabic for "dove") arms deal concluded in 1984-85. The deal amounted to some \$30 billion in arms and related contracts. Under a two-stage contract signed in 1985 and 1988, Britain agreed to supply the Saudis with 120 British Aerospace Tornados, 120 Hawk trainer jets, 88 helicopters, and naval mine-hunters, and to construct air and naval bases.

The paper published purported transcripts of discussions among various Arab protagonists in the deal, arguing about whether to use the "Mark" channel as middleman, or someone named "John." One unidentified Arab man, believed to be Saudi wheeler-and-dealer Adnan Khashoggi, proclaimed that the young Thatcher would be preferable, even if he asked higher fees, since "Mark is more in power and he has influence with the military group and the government." The same source later observed: "These people will sell their families for money."

The *Sunday Times* story followed on the heels of an earlier embarrassment. A week earlier, the British press had revealed, and Texas sources confirmed, that Mark Thatcher would soon be hit with a major lawsuit, possibly under the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statutes, because of the illicit financial manipulations of himself and his business partner David Wallace, in the 1992-94 takeover of the Houston-based Ameristar jet fuels trading firm.

By the first day of the Tory conference, the issue of Thatcherite nepotism was overshadowing whatever effect

she may have hoped to accomplish by speaking there. The Labour Party, on Oct. 10, demanded an official government inquiry into the Al Yamamah contract. Mrs. Thatcher's office affirmed that she was "absolutely satisfied" that the contract had been properly negotiated. "She is proud that after a great deal of hard work by ministers and officials, it brought thousands of jobs and billions of pounds of exports to this country."

But even the pro-Thatcher *Daily Telegraph* was forced to comment on Oct. 12, that her statement "merely said that the deal between the two governments had been conducted absolutely properly," but that she had "failed to deny in plain terms the allegations that her son profited to the tune of millions of pounds in personal commissions." The paper said that "this most recent assault" on Mark Thatcher, while hardly the first, "may perhaps turn out to be the most ominous for the standing of the former prime minister's family."

Mrs. Thatcher, a seasoned politician and notorious *intrigueuse*, will have rapidly realized that there is more to the scandals than the facts. After all, if the events in question happened in 1984, why would they only be coming out now? The British establishment is engaging in its traditional mode of proxy "cabinet" politics, in which a change of personnel and policy approach is accomplished by rousing the outraged sentiments of the reading public.

The real issue is not the scandalous activity, but rather that the Thatcher clan, like the powerful royal House of Windsor, is seen by British establishment insiders as inappropriate expressions for the kind of leadership needed to steer the British and their oligarchic co-thinkers through the crises that the world is now entering. Rupert Murdoch and his media empire are the favored instruments for accomplishing such an objective. The Australian-born Murdoch has played a special role in British intelligence operations since his post-war training in the circles of top media magnate and intelligence coordinator Lord Beaverbrook.

A 'witch's warning'

In this scandal, Thatcher herself, more than her son, comes under scrutiny. As the *Sunday Times* stresses, in 1984, as the deal with Saudi Arabia was being concluded, Britain was rife with stories that Mark Thatcher had earlier profited from his mother's position, in winning commissions for a 1981 British deal with the Sultanate of Oman. "Mark's name kept coming up. He was a bad smell about the place," a British Aerospace official confided to the paper.

Sir Clive Whitmore, then permanent undersecretary at the Ministry of Defense, was asked to tell Mrs. Thatcher (for whom he had previously acted as private secretary), that her son's activities were threatening the deal. He delivered what British Aerospace executives nicknamed the "witch's warning," a "Macbeth-style omen of foreboding." But, the *Sunday Times* says, she dismissed the matter. According to one source, "When it came to Mark, she was blind."