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[[Journal Index](#)]

Prime Minister Mrs. Margaret Thatcher Advancing Gender Equality:

Recruitment, Roles, Pay, and Pensions in the Armed Forces

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Abstract

Margaret Thatcher, the United Kingdom 's first female Prime Minister, moved to initiate policy that would see gender equality in recruitment and pay in the armed forces, but not for pensions or combatant roles. In a review of the events and Thatcher's formulation of policy toward women in the armed forces, as a debate on gender equality and social justice, the salient variables and issues taken into consideration include: Thatcher's personal agenda; her ideological position; her policy priorities; her relations with women organizations; the domestic and international political situation in which she lived; and such concerns that she might have entertained, such as appearing to show favoritism toward other women or indeed appearing to be weak. Thatcher, the Member of Parliament, had preference to gender equality, though, once elected Prime Minister, prioritized pragmatism and patriotism due to circumstances.

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Adrian Kay (2005) succinctly summed up the debate on equality, noting that it exerts a powerful hold on contemporary thinking about justice (Sen, 1992). Kay quotes G. A. Cohen (1989), who states that justice is about rendering people equal in some respect, and Brian Barry (1989) who affirms that "the central issue in any theory of justice is the defensibility of unequal relations between people" (p. 3). Kay continues by highlighting that

A question for all discussions of justice is: what is the right way to treat people equally? The answer to this question will always have two components: what is to be allocated equally (or in alternative terms, what is the *distribuendum*) and how is it to be allocated equally (i.e. according to which principle). (2005, p. 545)

Taking these notions into consideration and to further debate them with evidence, this article will use the case of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, Member of Parliament and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom , who by

way of legislation and executive decisions introduced certain but not other changes to further gender equality and social justice in the armed forces. There is no other writing that tackles this issue in such a fashion.

The debate on equality and justice, in particular, gender equality and social justice, is salient to Thatcher's political career as a Member of Parliament, and subsequently as Prime Minister. Thatcher (1993, 1995, 2002) notes this frequently in her autobiographies and writings. These writings, and indeed the election of Margaret Thatcher as the United Kingdom's first female Prime Minister in 1979, might have led to an underlying assumption that she would necessarily champion equal opportunities and equal rights for women in all walks of life. This assumption has also been noted in many writings, including those of Arnold (1984), Cosgrave (1985), Ewing (1990), Harris (1988), Kavanagh and Seldon (1989), Riddell (1989), and Thomson, (1989). Such an assumption might well have been based on the 1,287 public speeches on women and gender equality that Thatcher had made reference to in the period 1945-1979 prior to having been elected Prime Minister. These speeches indicate that there is no doubt that Thatcher was a protagonist of policy changes for women at work throughout her career as a politician. When Thatcher (1999) was questioned about her stance on gender equality in an interview, "Do you not think women should be given extra help?", she responded, "I would do anything to try to give them extra help" (Speech 47). When interviewed in a radio interview with Radio New Zealand on August 10, 1982, she expressed this as a social justice and not as feminism. She pragmatically stated,

Feminism-no, I get along quite well without it. I think that the main battles for women's right to vote and to stand in Parliament were won quite a long time ago and it now is up to us what we do with those freedoms, but there's no need any more I think to be strident about them, I think we should see them wholly in perspective. (Thatcher, 1999, Speech 245)

There is no doubt that when reading the hundreds of Parliamentary speeches made by Thatcher, both as a Member of Parliament and as Prime Minister, that she was an ardent supporter of gender equality. In speaking out, Thatcher maintained independence of opinion and action and would not be cajoled by any women organizations of which she was closely associated with, such as the Federation of Business and Professional Women, Women's International Zionist Organization, Women at Westminster, Women in Conservative Politics, Women's Own, Erith Conservative Women, Women of Our Time, Finchley Conservative Women, and Women's Royal Voluntary Service. Despite fostering close working relations with these and many other women and women's organizations, there is no indication that any of these had an undue influence on her opinion or actions. However, once elected Prime Minister, and despite her personal stance, she would not always favour gender equality above everything else, especially in matters of defence and security. As Prime Minister, Thatcher, in the same fashion as previous and subsequent Prime Ministers, would have to make decisions comparing options and selecting the best for the country. Hence, pragmatism prevailed where patriotism would come before social justice and gender equality. This was exemplified during the Falklands Conflict when Thatcher sought the advice of the Chiefs of Staff and adhered to it, as noted by Dorman (2002).

In continuing to deliberate such matters, the emphasis of this article will focus on those parts of policy that Thatcher personally authored or lobbied from her early career as a Member of Parliament through to her position as Prime Minister. This will be compared to policy changes as a whole in government to determine how commonly they addressed gender and, indeed, the specific role of Thatcher. Specific examples to illuminate this are drawn from the armed forces on the topics of recruitment, roles, pay, and pensions. This article will expand on Kavanagh and Seldon (1989) and Seldon and Collings (2000) to show the diversity of women's work lives under Thatcher's government.

A notable example of Thatcher's ardent stance on gender equality and the significance of the legislative process to affect social justice arose in the Equal Pay Bill debate of February 9, 1970, some nine years before assuming the premiership. Thatcher stood her ground in a fierce Parliamentary debate, basing her argument on the two documents she had sponsored toward the Bill--"Fair Share for the Fair Sex" and "Opportunity for Women." Thatcher (1999) spoke her mind about the frequently quoted Royal Commission on equal pay in the civil services that had reported in 1946 that too little had been done over a prolonged period of time:

The theoretical argument advanced by the majority to account for the lower wages of women in terms of lower efficiency, used in its widest sense, seems to us unconvincing and on the evidence their case is not proven. So many people have supported the idea of equal pay for so long that one wonders at the continuing inequality of payment between men and women. I believe that the Bill will lead to better pay for many jobs and I support it as another step in the equal pay story. (House of Commons, 1979)

Another example of Thatcher furthering gender equality and social justice through the legislative process was on May 15, 1973, when Thatcher was adamant that society needed a firm hand from government to move it in the right direction. To further this, she was instrumental in introducing legislation to assist in removing discrimination against women in the field of employment and training associated with employment. Thatcher (1999) expressed this as

No doubt you will wish to question us about those two areas, but I repeat, we are persuaded that legislation has a useful part to play. I hope that you will feel from that point of view that parliament and its instruments have indeed played a part in this process. (Speech 567)

Placing such initiatives in perspective and in considering all Prime Ministers prior to Thatcher, who were male, it is possible to specifically note Thatcher's impact on gender equality and social justice. This is notable in the example of the armed forces where none of these previous Prime Ministers specifically addressed advancing gender equality. Despite this specific example of the armed forces, which was clearly a Thatcher initiative, previous Prime Ministers had addressed gender equality in general terms as one part of evolving norms in British society. Thatcher was quick to point this out, with particular support for her political party, the Conservative Party, a topic that has been written on extensively by Cosgrave (1978). On July 3, 1978, she gave a speech celebrating the 50th anniversary of equal female suffrage. In that speech Thatcher (1999) stated,

I am particularly pleased that the 1928 Act on female suffrage was the work of a Conservative Government. Women are tired of being patronized and condescended to. Thus, in celebrating the anniversary of 1928, we also celebrate those measures which made this nation a true democracy-which involved men and women as equal human beings in the destiny of Britain . (Speech 761)

Such speeches and promotion of legislation provide insight to Thatcher as a person, her political agenda, and her valuing the legislative process to effect changes. However, despite the 1,287 public speeches on women and gender equality that Thatcher had made reference to in the period 1945-1979, Thatcher was often criticized for not having done enough for women. Thatcher was criticized as "too much talk - too little action." This point was made in TV coverage for Central TV on June 18, 1986, when she was quizzed on her view about women. She said that she wished she could get more women into Parliament, noting that in 1986 there were not any more really than there were in the 1930s (26 female Members of Parliament out of a then total 652 seats). She offered the explanation for as this resting in the nature of the British system of democracy--notably the gap between policy formulation and implementation. The governmental executive can do little to implement legislation unless the population actively wishes to have such changes introduced.

Recognizing that in a democracy legislation needs popular support to have successful and widespread

implementation, Thatcher (1999) was known to have said, "I cannot easily foresee the time when we have a woman Minister of Defence. But it would give me enormous joy to have the navy singing there is nothing like a dame" (Speech 58). Hence, despite the criticism, Thatcher's ability to introduce such dry humour added to her popular support. The most famous example of such humour pertaining to gender issues arose during a "Desert Island Discs" radio show interview with Roy Plomley in February 1978, when Thatcher (1999) quoted Socrates: "I think it was Socrates who said long, long ago that when woman is made equal to man she becomes his superior, and I would not dissent from anyone as wise as Socrates" (Speech 79).

Although Thatcher was unable to affect as many changes as she desired, she was able to generate a greater awareness than any previous Prime Minister for gender equality and social justice. This was occasionally expressed through her ability to laugh at herself, exemplified when the press, and on some occasions the public, chose to portray Thatcher as a masculine figure with the statement, "She is the best man in politics." Thatcher (1999) commonly responded to this statement, "Oh no, much better than that; she is the best woman" (Speech 106). Clearly the public was extremely fond of having such an outspoken and witty female Prime Minister advancing gender equality and expressed this by electing her thrice to the position of Prime Minister. It was of no surprise that when Thatcher advanced gender equality in the armed forces it also generated previously unheard of media coverage of security and defense affairs.

Gender Equality, Pragmatism, and Patriotism

Indicative of one of the most prized virtues that held the public in esteem of Thatcher was her consistency to her values and ideals. From the start of her political career, through her time as Prime Minister and subsequently in the House of Lords, she maintained the same image, values of command, initiative, leadership, and symbolism. This was espoused in her nickname, "The Iron Lady." It was this nickname that also earned her global respect as a leader where her sex, her origins as the daughter of a shopkeeper, and her convictions to effect change in social justice and the economy also symbolized an overall transformation in the Conservative Party, and indeed that of government in the United Kingdom. However, in terms of priority, patriotism would come before her political party, where gender equality would come third.

Examining this shows that Thatcher was a pragmatic person and chose not to pursue avenues to advance gender equality that clearly would not result in any success. Similarly, Thatcher would prioritize, as any Prime Minister must do as noted by Kavanagh (1985), and frequently this resulted in decisions that did not favor gender equality. She was careful to choose her words, and when first questioned in 1979 which was more important, "gender equality or military efficiency," Thatcher (1999) responded,

You do not start to think: Now look, I am a woman Prime Minister, I am different. You think: I am a Prime Minister. What do I want to do as representing my country? You do not think in terms of being a woman prime minister or a woman minister or a woman Member of Parliament. You think in terms of: This is my job, how am I going to achieve my objectives? How best can I do it? What is the best way to do it? (Speech 231)

She remained consistent on this stance, and when interviewed eight years later on February 18, 1987, by Women Magazine and BBC Radio London, Thatcher (1999) said,

You see, you do not actually elect women Prime Ministers or women Secretaries of Defence. You elect a person, and when a person comes along who is right for that job, it is the person who is right for the job, and the fact that they are either men or women is secondary. (Speech 301)

Such pragmatism and humour was also evident when she spoke of her family, often conveying the impression that her desire for social justice and gender equality was an expression of family and community values. This was throughout her political career most succinctly expressed shortly after becoming Prime

Minister in 1979 in a conversation with Kenneth Harris when Thatcher (1999) stated, "I'm a mum, and I like to think that those who believe in keeping Britain strong, free and properly defended belong in mum's army" (Speech 231). Such patriotism and leadership qualities came to the fore when Thatcher, as the United Kingdom's last Cold War Prime Minister, would lead the United Kingdom to assert itself more on the world stage than at any other time since the 1956 loss of the Suez Canal, an event widely regarded as the end of the country's days as a major world power. Pursuant to such assertiveness was Thatcher's personality and stance on Britain being an ardent participant in international affairs in addition to effecting domestic changes.

This was exemplified in Thatcher's "Leader's Speech" at the Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth in October, 1990, when Thatcher (1999) trounced the Labour Party for even contemplating giving up the nuclear deterrent. In a patriotic flourish, Thatcher announced to the House of Commons, "this government will maintain our nuclear deterrent, guardian of the peace for 40 years. We shall keep Britain strong and secure. We will never take risks with our defense" (Speech 469). In a similar voice, she also announced that Britain would not neglect its conventional forces.

This vocal stance gained her respect from the armed forces that would be cemented in her decisive actions to regain the Falklands Islands using the armed forces with impeccable democratic civil-military control. Such respect was recounted by Admiral Lewin, the Chief of the Defence Staff, who recollected the admiration that the Admirals had for Thatcher in sending a military force to the Falklands in 1982:

We don't want somebody who vacillates, we want to be able to put the case to her, the requirements to her, and say this is how it is, this is the decision we want, we want it now and we want it quickly and we don't want a wishy-washy decision, we want a clear-cut decision. She was magnificent in her support of the military. (House of Commons Written Answers, 1990a)

Another example of her patriotism and continual support to the armed forces was reflected in her thinking on the Cold War. Campbell (2001) has noted that throughout her life and premiership she considered that the Soviets had never given up their original objective, even after Gorbachov pronounced Glasnost and Perestroika. She insisted that it was an obligation for Britain to stand up for democracy if need be with the use of armed forces and with a credible nuclear deterrent. This stance was evident when Thatcher (1999) responded to questioning by Brigitte Aides and Patrick Wajzman in January 1986: "Their ultimate objective is a communist system throughout the world, and they will continue to pursue that objective by one means or another - whether there is detente or not, and this must be opposed" (Speech 606). This strength was evident when Thatcher supported a NATO initiative to install intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe to counter the Soviet SS-20s. Subsequently, at Thatcher's pressure, the Soviets, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, returned to the bargaining table to negotiate the INF Treaty on disarmament in Europe . President Reagan recollected in May 1989 as being one of the great turning points in the post-war world.

Cole (1987) notes that Thatcher made numerous attempts, especially in media interviews, to capitalize on the fervour of patriotism and reciprocal support of the armed forces. One of these was her first re-election campaign. Another was to further gender equality in the military workplace. The choice of the military workplace was clearly the ability to enforce implementation by command as enactment of legislation. Parliamentary reflection was positive on this and recognized this in hindsight:

.she was so clearly the best man among them and she was an enormous advantage in being a woman too. I can't help feeling a thrill . . . I have been saying for a long time that this country was ready - even more than ready - for a woman prime minister. (*House of Commons Select Committee Report* , 1999)

It was due to thisstead-fast continuity, firm patriotism, and support for the armed forces throughout her

premiership from 1979 to 1991 that gave rise to the context through which she would be able to offer women workplace equality in the armed forces--in recruitment, pay, and pensions. She would initiate the legislation and use the respect gained to implement gender equality through the military command structure. As Tony Benn would later say in an interview with Studemann (2005), "Mrs Thatcher said what she meant and meant what she said ... she did not do anything by deception."

Gender Equality in Armed Forces Recruitment

The catalyst that gave Thatcher an opportunity to offer and then implement policy changes from the legislation process into practice, in matters of gender equality, arose from recruitment and retention deficiencies in the armed forces. Conscription was abolished in 1957 due to the dismantling of the Empire and the onset of the Cold War, neither of which required a large and expensive standing armed force. The all-volunteer armed force that arose from this situation did not see the need to debate the whys and wherefores of anyone, including women, who did not wish to volunteer for military service. Nor did it see the need to make any provisions for any type of military other than one based and built upon single-sex facilities, such as accommodation and bathing. This was especially on ships seen to be too expensive to be altered to serve any form of privacy for anything other than single sex living--traditionally predominately male.

However, by 1979, when Thatcher was elected Prime Minister, the all-volunteer British armed forces were experiencing a recruitment and retention crises. Thatcher was quick to announce it would be prudent to make policy changes allowing greater female opportunities to alleviate this crisis. To be sure neither the cabinet nor any Member of Parliament could oppose policy changes initiated by the new Prime Minister, it was made in the name of strengthening the armed forces and alleviating the overall recruitment and retention deficiencies. Similarly, neither the public nor the press opposed these policy changes given that when Thatcher announced them there was no immediate need to use the armed forces and hence no danger of loss of life. Even in hindsight, Parliamentary debates noted missed further opportunities for achieving greater gender equality in the armed forces given the pacific state of world affairs at the time (*House of Commons Debates* , 1994).

Thus, in consideration of operational necessity, Thatcher, on being elected Prime Minister in 1979, decided to introduce gender equality legislation based on the necessity to improve recruitment and retention in the armed forces. In making the offer of gender equality, Thatcher's underlying goal was social justice. She did not contemplate sending women to their death in combat; even though Thatcher was an ardent internationalist, she was not intrinsically militaristic to secure Britain 's role in world affairs.

The formal process commenced i n 1980 when Thatcher issued her *First Annual Statement on Defense Estimates* as part of the annual budget that made clear "all three services have current plans to broaden the already substantial role of service women." The glimpse of Thatcher's personal influence on this recruitment drive was a n initial one sentence low key-statement: "decisions taken over the last year will lead to a considerable expansion in the types of employment open to women in all three services" (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990a).

The recruitment of women to the armed forces increased immediately. Showing practicality, all branches of the armed forces implemented Thatcher's recruitment policy initiatives according to their operational needs and job vacancies. For example, the RAF started recruiting women in ground trades (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990a). The House of Command evaluated Thatcher's policy and found them to be well accepted within the armed forces reporting "there is no evidence that Royal Navy personnel are refusing to re-enlist or taking premature voluntary retirement because of the decision to employ women at sea"(*House of Commons Debates* , 1990).

In Thatcher's first year of office as Prime Minister, the number of posts opens to women in the Regular Army increased by 6,000 and in the Territorial Army by 4,000. Similarly, in the initial recruitment drive of the Royal Navy, 278 WRNS ratings and 90 officers volunteered to go to sea. Of these, 147 female ratings and 16 female officers were trained to serve on the first group of five ships then being prepared to provide suitable accommodation. Further, it would appear that most, if not all, female applicants were in fact accepted to the branch of the armed forces of their choice (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990b). Nevertheless, in real terms, the increased female recruitment into the armed forces did not substantially make a major difference since that at the time, the total number of serving personnel in the armed forces was 320,000.

The increased recruitment became an immediate publicity coup showing that the new Prime Minister meant business and that business was gender equality enhancing social justice. However, the small number of female volunteers, the nature of an all-volunteer armed forces, and intensive training would not be affected in any fashion by gender. Clearly then, the few critics of the increased recruitment of more women into the armed forces were not able to substantiate the concern suggested that the military acceptance toward changes in gender composition could in part be symptom, part cause, of the decline of the role of the armed forces in a Cold War environment (Coker & Elshtain, 2000; Von Creveld, 2000). Further, there does not appear to be any traceable link that increased recruitment of women into the military would necessarily lead toward a weakening of the military. Similarly, the operational tactics and strategy of the armed forces did not in any fashion alter with changes in the gender composition of the force structure. Nor was there any indication that the new policy would evoke a growing feminist movement.

The point was that the new Prime Minister was not apprehensive in voicing preference for gender equality and in introducing legislation to that effect. The public at large was further given this impression in 1982, when Thatcher made claim that: "The battle for women's rights has largely been won. The days when they were demanded and discussed in strident tones should be gone forever" (*House of Commons Debates* , 1994). Thatcher's recruitment policy to the armed forces would subsequently set a trend for other sectors of the economy, such as the civil service and defence industries.

Gender Equality in Pay and Pensions

It would be expected that increased gender equality in recruitment to the armed forces would be followed by increased gender equality in pay and pensions. The notable underlying assumption being that the same job deserves the same rewards. There was no doubt that a single pay scale existed. If a person, man or woman, managed to reach a certain rank in the armed forces, then that person would receive the same pay as any other person at the same rank. This was a recent phenomenon. The immediate previous Prime Minister to Thatcher, Prime Minister Callaghan, had only introduced equal pay for equal work in the government sector in April 1978.

This was a progressive step for gender equality in pay; however, not all pension schemes met the same criteria of gender equality. The personal pensions of service women, by virtue of pay, were in line with those of their male colleagues. However, unlike the widows and dependent children of service men, the widowers and dependent children of service women were not eligible for pensions at the time that Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979 (*House of Commons Debates* , 1979).

Reading Thatcher's autobiographies (1993, 1995, 2002) do not give any indication why she did not wish to tackle this issue immediately on being elected Prime Minister in 1979. It would have been a publicity coup to have done so and would have furthered Thatcher's agenda of social justice. Reading Evans (2002), it may be assumed that her considerations were pure financial savings given that gender equality in pensions could have been achieved through allocating resources from the Treasury by way of an executive decision. This would not have entailed a large amount of resources given that the number of women who would have

benefited in 1979 from receiving an equal pension would have been less than 100, mainly from the Northern Ireland situation. Reading Dorman (2002), another assumption was perhaps Thatcher was apprehensive that should the Cold War deteriorate into battle then Britain would be in a worse financial situation than she had been following World War II that had forced the country into a welfare state environment.

The issue of gender equality for all pension schemes would lie smouldering in the committee rooms of Westminster from 1979 for ten years with constant deliberations but with no decisive decision or intervention by Thatcher. It would take a bold move in 1989 by the then six surviving ex-chiefs of the defence staff and three former chiefs of the air staff to challenge the Prime Minister in public when they wrote a letter to *The Times* newspaper on November 22, 1989, criticizing the unequal pension schemes. They described the sharp difference in entitlements as "cruel" and "unjust," and strongly condemned the division of war widows into first and second-class citizens (*House of Commons Debates* , 1989).

Part of the ensuing fiery debate in the House of Commons noted that the situation had arisen from a decision taken in March 1973, when the armed forces had moved into a new pension scheme that gave higher benefits, but that also cost them more. So those on pensions prior to March 1973 were not included in the new scheme. Eventually in 1990, following intense and prolonged media coverage, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton) announced to the House of Commons "all widows of service men killed in Northern Ireland before 31 March 1973 should now be in receipt of the new tax-free special payment of £40 per week in addition to their war widows' pension" (*House of Commons Debates* , 1990). This signaled an overall change granting gender equality in pensions. The change had come albeit too little too late bearing in mind the fact that by 1990 there were only 34 such widows.

Nevertheless, it is historically recorded that increased gender equality in the matter of pensions in the armed services was achieved under the premiership of Mrs. Margaret Thatcher in 1990. However, in not introducing gender equality in pensions immediately on being elected Prime Minister in 1979, it would to a certain extent negate the positive public support gained by immediately introducing enhanced gender equality in recruitment to the armed forces in 1979.

Gender Equality in Roles

The most controversial issue of gender and equality and the armed forces that persisted throughout Thatcher's 11 years as Prime Minister was that of women in combat roles and tasks. Legislative changes were not introduced by Thatcher or by her successors, John Major (Prime Minister 1991-1997) and Tony Blair (Prime Minister 1997-present). The protracted debate noted in Thatcher's (1999) public speeches provides a fabulous insight on whether the overriding consideration was military or political and the role of Thatcher, the Prime Minister. Indicative of Thatcher's personal views on women in combat was a statement delivered at a speech at the Hoover Institution in the United States, where Thatcher (1999) pronounced: "equality of opportunity sounds fine as a principle; it must not override considerations of military effectiveness; to treat war-fighting as an equal opportunities activity is extremely foolish" (Speech 1201).

Such a statement provides an insight to the intriguing nature of the role of the Prime Minister in British politics. Thatcher, and indeed all other Prime Ministers (past and present), have the authority, jurisdiction, and legitimacy as elected Members of Parliament to initiate legislation and then as the governmental executive to exert their prerogative in interpretation of legislation. The Select Committees of the House of Commons, other Members of Parliament, as well as the Courts of Law, closely monitor such interpretation, should the government in anyway not follow the spirit of intent of the legislation or in any manner infringe or violate the legislation. Ultimately, in British democracy it is society that decides if they wish to accept and implement the legislation. Exceptional legislation can be introduced by command in the armed forces, though society could still protest resulting in the changes being rescinded. In this instance, the official statement in the House of Commons noted in the debate on legislation and government policy on the matter

of women in the armed forces was "all applicants to join the Ministry of Defense and all members of staff are treated equally for employment and advancement on the basis of their ability, qualifications and suitability for work" (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990b).

Thatcher as Prime Minister voiced this interpretation of legislation as, "we have widened the opportunities for employment of members to include all posts except those which would deploy into forward areas in war" (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990a). In doing so and from the onset of her premiership in 1979 until John Major succeeded her in 1991, Thatcher was of the opinion that women should not have equal roles to their male counterparts in combat situations. From the commencement to the termination of her premiership, women in the Army and the RAF were not employed in direct combat duties, and women in the Royal Navy were not employed in the submarine service, in the Royal Marines, or as naval aircrew (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990a). As noted, there was no explicit legislation to bar women from such roles, nor was there explicit legislation to provide them with the right to take such roles.

Complicating the issue and firing the debate was the contention that the issue was not the physical presence of women in combat areas but of women's roles when in combat areas. As during the Falklands War of 1982, so as in the Gulf War of 1990, Members of Parliament in Parliamentary opposition were astute to pick up the nature of such dichotomies. In an attempt to ascertain whether the instructions were coming from the Prime Minister or whether the decisions were being taken on the military level, the Parliamentary opposition asked the Secretary of State for Defense whether naval commanding officers during the deployment of armed forces to the Gulf in December 1990 were on instructions not to permit women reporters on naval vessels that would enter combat zones. The response being, "No such instructions have been issued; both female and male reporters are permitted, depending on the facilities available, to go on board Royal Navy vessels serving in the Gulf" (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1990c).

It therefore appeared that the decision-making was more by the political echelons than the military chiefs. However, when first questioned in the House of Commons in 1979 over this, Thatcher placed the onus on the military by noting interpretation of general legislation to justify specific policy to the effect, "the Armed Forces are exempt from the Sex Discrimination Act, [hence] our policy is to treat men and women equally except where there are good reasons for doing otherwise" (*House of Commons Debates* , 1979). When pushed to elaborate on what such good reasons might be, she dithered and inferred that she was acting on the advice of the military decision makers by saying, "The ability of women to fly aircraft is not in question" (House of Commons Written Answers, 1990a).

It later emerged, eleven years after leaving office, when giving an acceptance speech in 2001 after receiving the Chesney Gold Medal at the Royal United Services Institute, that she clearly had been actively responsible for ensuring that gender equality in military tasks and roles had not been introduced. Thatcher stated she was of the opinion that women should not be allowed to fight in the front-line based not on ability or qualifications, but on her own view of ad hoc suitability. Neither the select committees, nor Parliamentary opposition, nor the courts of law could take her to task on this since it conformed to the broad legislation that permitted distinction of roles in practice dependent upon ability, qualifications, and suitability (House of Commons Written Answers, 1990a).

Further, to mitigate the expected backlash from women's organizations, Thatcher (1999) quoted studies provided by the Chiefs of Staff to support her policy orientation and interpretations. To this end Thatcher (1999) said,

.it is a great error to suppose that women can in general play precisely the same role as men in the front line of our armed forces. Even in the age of the cyber-warrior and smart weaponry, war still favours the swift and the strong. Courage is not the issue. I hardly need say that. There is only one issue: military effectiveness. Making sure that women pass the same tests of physical stamina as men will limit the number

of women playing front line roles. (Speech 1283)

In hindsight, Thatcher's political opponents, such as Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde in December 2001, would never forgive her for this ambiguity and dithering:

I am not making a political point, but when Mrs. Thatcher was elected Prime Minister - much as I did not agree for political reasons - I felt that we might see more women in the Cabinet and that they would drive forward policies for women. We were, of course, dreadfully disappointed. (*House of Lords Debates* , 2001)

Similarly, a Select Committee Report to the House of Commons on March 23, 1999, could not have been more succinct when it noted on this issue, "During the 1980s and 1990s equal opportunities became a secondary priority. The priorities of the Thatcher government in regards to the Civil Service and armed forces meant a severe abatement in the furtherance of equal opportunity" (House of Commons Select Committee, 1999).

It was only after the end of the Cold War and well into the 1990s that the situation changed, not due to new legislation introduced by Thatcher's successors as Prime Minister, John Major and Tony Blair, nor due to their interpretation of existing legislation. The changes emerged due to decisions taken by military officers on an ad hoc basis in low-level decisions. These changes were a natural progression from gender equality in recruitment, pay, and pensions. The changes toward gender equality in combat roles can therefore be attributed to a process that Thatcher had introduced many years previously even if she was not actively implicated. Hence, increased gender equality was introduced into the armed forces when women were permitted to become pilots in the Royal Air Force and to serve on Royal Navy ships at sea. A reading of this indicates how the United Kingdom was amongst the first country to effect overall changes in the military (Barkawi, Dandeker, Wells-Petry, & Kier, 1999; Committee of Women in NATO Forces 2002; Dandeker, 1994; Dandeker & Paton, 1997; Dandeker & Segal, 1996; Rosen, Durand, Bliese, Halverson, Rothberg, & Harrison, 1996; Titunik, 2000). However, in the grand scheme of British society, these changes did not signify an overall shift in social justice. The armed forces only provided direct employment to less than 1% of the overall work force (*House of Commons Written Answers* , 1991).

Conclusion

In sum, Thatcher succeeded in enhancing social justice through increased gender equality in the armed forces in the matters of recruitment and pay policy, dithered on pension's policy, and was intransigent on combat roles. In providing the above narrative and critique on these issues, this article has shown the diversity of women's lives under Thatcher. This narrative has also shown that the conception and inception of Thatcher's initiatives and policies were not as a response to any direct or immediate political, military, or civil pressure, or as a reaction to an escalation in any overall threat to Britain . In fact, the opposite was occurring as the threats were reduced given the declining Soviet Union and eventually ending of the Cold War with the fall of the Berlin wall. The policies were fuelled by Thatcher's personal agenda toward gender equality. Moreover, the increased recruitment of women in the armed forces provides an insight of how the cause of gender quality in the armed forces was advanced without compromising on military effectiveness, either as a weakening of the military or as a feminisation of it.

In doing so, the writings noted at the start of this article by Kay, Sen, Cohen, and Barry are recalled. Kay and Sen's view that equality exerts a powerful hold on contemporary thinking about justice has been substantiated given the numerous and fierce debates surrounding Thatcher's initiatives. These initiatives and the debates also substantiate Barry and Cohen's writing that justice is about rendering people equal in some respect, and that the central issue in any theory of justice is the defensibility of unequal relations between people. Further, it was Kay's question, "what is to be allocated equally and how is it to be allocated equally," that was highlighted by the different attitudes of Thatcher to recruitment, pay, pensions, and combat roles.

These attitudes have shown that pragmatism, patriotism, and bureaucratic processes of government sometimes curtail even good intentions.

Consequently, the conclusions of this article tend toward the understanding that in democracies decisions on the legislative or policy level take many years to implement. Ultimately, society will decide how society best wishes to interpret and adopt legislation. The example of this article on the armed forces is unique in showing how changes can be made through command in the armed forces and then accepted by society as exemplary. This is because there is no doubt that Thatcher made good decisions with good intentions. It would be speculative to assume that without Thatcher whether these changes would have happened in any event. Nevertheless, it was Mrs. Margaret Thatcher that started the ball rolling when elected Prime Minister in 1979. From this analysis, it is notable that the overall concept of gender equality and social justice in the armed forces provides a unique critique of the narrative that female leaders necessarily advance gender equality in the workplace--assuming that gender equality in matters of recruitment, pay, pensions, and combat roles in the armed forces is an advance.

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