

MARGARET LEVY

Mr. Chancellor,

This year marked the fortieth anniversary of a successful 'work-in' among the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in Glasgow which thwarted the then Conservative government's attempts to close the famous Clydeside shipyards. The 'work-in', organised by Jimmy Reid and fellow shop-stewards Jimmy Airlie and Sammy Barr, was an alternative to a strike. It came after the new Conservative government insisted that shipbuilding should not rely on government subsidies, and refused to hand over more money to keep them open. The decision meant at least 6,000 of the 8,500 shipyard workers would have to be made redundant.

The 'work-in' saw workers manage and operate the Upper Clyde shipyards until the government changed its policy. It was intended to prove that the yards were viable, and Jimmy Reid insisted on tight discipline to ensure workers projected the best possible image.

In a famous speech to workers, broadcast across the UK and beyond, he said: "We are not going to strike. We are not even having a sit-in strike. Nobody and nothing will come in and nothing will go out without our permission. And there will be no hooliganism, there will be no vandalism, there will be no bevvying because the world is watching us."

The Tory government, led by Ted Heath, finally relented in February 1972 and announced a £35 million injection of cash into the yards at Govan, Scotstoun and Linthouse. Within three years, shipbuilding on the Upper Clyde had received over £100 million in public grants and credits, with £20 million going to the UCS.

Jimmy Reid himself was a one-time member of the Communist Party. He sprang from the same proud tradition of Glasgow trade union activism as our Honorary Fellow this evening, Margaret Levy. Yet while Jimmy Reid seemed to typify sociologist Max Weber's idea of the 'charismatic leader' (renouncing his Party membership to join the Scottish Labour party at one stage), Margaret Levy's strong political principles have held true to the ideal of the collective exercise of power. Unlike the late Jimmy Reid, she has remained a lifelong Communist Party member. It is for her many years of principled and dedicated service to representing the interests of clerical and auxiliary staff at Newcastle University via her Trades Union activities, and for her leading role in overseeing the University's Retirement Benefit Plan, including two terms as a Member Nominated Trustee and sometime Chair of the Trustee Board, that we are honouring her tonight.

Margaret's father was a miner who left school at 14, but who demonstrated the importance to his daughter of education through visits to the Mitchell Library in Glasgow. In 1959, he took up the opportunity of a place on the Scottish Council for the Training of

Teachers and himself started a degree in English at Glasgow University just as Margaret was starting secondary school. Later, Margaret herself went on to take an Open University Bachelor of Arts degree, successfully combining work, family life and study. She married the Physical Chemist Martin Levy, with whom she has three children – Joanna and twins Jonny and Paul – all of whom graduated in 1998. Synchronized educational achievement evidently runs in the Levy household. Via her husband's career moves, Margaret spent much of the 1970s and early 1980s in various places as far-flung as Cambridge, California, New Jersey and – latterly – Bedford. The Levys and their children moved to Newcastle when Margaret's husband took up a lectureship at the then Newcastle Polytechnic in 1985.

In May 1986, Margaret began working for Newcastle University in the East Asia Centre, a subdivision of the Department of Politics. The Centre collaborated with Cardiff University Press on a series of books on East Asian topics. She recalls that she used an Amstrad computer to produce camera-ready copy, in itself not an easy task. The job was 12 hours a week, made up to a half time post. In July 1989 she began working 8 hours a week for the Journal of Soil Science. In early 1993, the series came to an end and she began a number of temporary jobs in the University while applying for other more permanent positions. Finally, she went to the Department of Primary Health Care in the Medical School, and stayed through lots of changes until retirement in 2007, when she finally left the School of Medical Education.

Her early temporary jobs gave Margaret insight into a variety of workplaces and also to people's attitudes to different aspects of working in the University. This she found useful at times in her other role – that of a Union representative. Margaret joined what was then NALGO soon after her arrival at Newcastle University. She did a basic Shop Stewards' course at Newcastle College (one day a week for 10 weeks) and underwent various training course via NALGO, and later Unison. Margaret recalls how that period of about 20 years saw many changes – in the Union, the University and in wider society. She was originally chair of the local branch, sitting on various meetings such as Safety Committee, and Joint Negotiating Committees, with rapid changes in personnel and style of management in the University. Before the advent of job evaluation there was an annual review exercise which took up a lot of her time and energy. 'Fair Measures' negotiations brought further changes. The University's restructuring – which brought three new Faculties, was another major upheaval. 'Change is constant', says Margaret, 'and one of the functions of a Trade Union is to try to ensure that such change doesn't disadvantage members – or perhaps I should say to try to minimise the disadvantage.'

Member Nominated Trustees first arrived on the University pension scheme boards in the mid- to late 1990s. Another Unison activist had stood in the first elections in early 1997. She had enjoyed the experience, but decided not to stand again, with some trepidation Margaret decided to stand, in 2002. She had taken a Unison pensions course and knew trustees had good training

opportunities, so she took the plunge. She is now coming to the end of her second term of office as a Member Nominated Trustee, one of nine Trustees – including three Member-nominated Trustees, three Lay members, and three University senior managers - who oversee the University's pension scheme for 1500 active members, 1100 retired staff and 1000 deferred benefit members. With a fund of £140 million and so many people's interests to safeguard, it is a considerable responsibility. Vervan Johnson applauds Margaret's calm, rational and mature approach to negotiations between the Union and the University, her dry sense of humour, and strong moral stand. Richard Burrow, who has worked closely with Margaret on the Trustee Board, also commends her non-confrontational, harmonious and constructive track record of reaching a compromise. Our Deputy Vice-Chancellor Ella Ritchie, describes Margaret as easy to work with, with a good eye for detail, 'someone who is highly principled and prepared to go to the stake for her beliefs. Nothing went lightly by [which sometimes] led to interesting clashes.' Tim Gray, Margaret's former colleague in the Politics Department, recalls 'I remember Margaret Levy as someone who was highly critical of what she saw as a masculine culture in the Politics Department – no doubt rightly! However, this led her sometimes to make assumptions that were based less on evidence than on guesswork. For example, in the coffee room I made some reference to washing-up, and Margaret said that she suspected that I never did any washing-up at home! However, I found Margaret's radical critique of the University system as undemocratic, male-dominated and elitist very refreshing. My abiding memory of Margaret is of an unforgettable person who stuck

consistently to her convictions, took no prisoners in dialectic combat, and made me think a bit harder about practices that I took for granted. She is the grit in the wheel of complacency!

A down to earth person, Margaret herself observes, 'The Scots have an attitude towards people that takes them down to the everyday level.... I've always had support from my family for the Union activity and the pension responsibilities. It would have been much harder without that.'

Mr. Chancellor, for her dedicated service to the interests and welfare of Newcastle University employees, I present Mrs. Margaret Levy as a candidate for an Honorary Fellowship.

Citation by Dr Helen Berry