

PETER CARR

Mr. Chancellor,

Early one morning, a sharply dressed commuter leapt onto the London tube at Fenchurch Street station, bound for Westminster. The doors closed briskly, and the train started to move.

Unfortunately his left foot had not made it in time, and as he struggled to release it, a brand new shoe fell onto the tracks in the dark tunnel below. Bare footed, he made his way to his seat – ignored, as usual, by the other passengers. As luck would have it, the rain poured heavily on his way to work. He dodged the puddles, tiptoeing with one very wet sock. Defeated, he hailed a taxi.

The cab driver was the first to really enjoy the situation, and they made their way to a shop selling his usual over-sized shoes. Before alighting, the driver offered to spit the cost of the journey.....but only if the single-shod-passenger agreed to try and buy just the one, *single* replacement shoe.

The deal seemed fair, and so, straight faced, the passenger argued his case strongly in the shoe shop: “Are you suggesting that an unfortunate accident victim with one leg would be forced to buy *twice* as many shoes as he needed?” The

assistant nodded, carefully trying to avoid any hidden cameras that might have recorded his politically incorrect stance. But unfortunately, despite considerable experience in some of the most hard-core industrial disputes, the one-shoed shopper could not close the one-shoe deal. Defeated, he left the premises with a new complete pair.

Mr Chancellor, I suspect that Peter Carr knew deep-down that these “shop-floor” negotiations were destined to fail from the outset – but, as always, his eye was on the bigger picture. He knew that he would have to buy two shoes.....but at least he arrived at work having only paid half of the taxi fare!

Currently chairman of the North East Strategic Health Authority, and lay member of Newcastle University Court, Sir Peter Carr has been in public service for most of his professional life. He has made a major contribution to the north east of England – both in shaping the Health Service in response to local needs, and by forging closer links between our University Medical School and the wider region.

Reading his autobiography, it is clear that his work has been based on a strong sense of social justice, underpinned by a solid family base. In the book he describes his early memories of Blackpool in the blitz, and of leaving school at 13 years of age to become an apprentice joiner. As a teenager, he worked with

builders, cabinet makers and even funeral directors, before returning to his studies in the austerity of post-war Britain.

After National Service, he returned to full time education on a shoe-string. And with a young family in toe, he studied Politics and Economics at Oxford before begin his teaching career in Halifax. Lecturing in Management Systems and Labour Market Economics, he was drawn into industrial relations through the National Board for Prices and Incomes. Here he developed his commitment to collective bargaining rights for the workforce, eventually being appointed Director of the Commission on Industrial Relations, a Royal Commission set up to reform the labour market. It was, therefore, a natural next step to be appointed as Director of the National Office of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) in the mid 1970s – a time of major Union reform and industrial dispute.

During this time, a short trip to the United States gave him the taste for more, and he began a five year post as Labour and Economic Attache to the British Embassy in Washington. This brought him into close contact with great American labour leaders, such as A Philip Randolph and George Meany, and the civil rights champion Bayard Rustin. Renting a house close to the Potomac River, Peter had the misfortune to be personally presented with a stiff final demand from the US Internal Revenue Service, or IRS. It requested that all future rent be

paid direct to the IRS to cover a heavy tax debt owed by his landlord, then based in Beirut. This would, of course, have been fine - were it not for the fact that Peter had paid his rent upfront, in a non-returnable deposit. Faced with an order to sequester funds from his personal bank account, Attache Carr had no choice other than to speak to his boss, the British Ambassador and diplomatic immunity saved the day. I'm sure that Sir Peter frequently longed for this "diplomatic wand" at later stages in your career.

Travelling back across the Atlantic, he returned to his roots in the north of England, initially as Regional Director for the Department of Employment, before taking up post as Chairman of the Northern Regional Health Authority. He oversaw major change in the organisation and delivery of health care within our region, driving a cultural change from intransigence, to a well managed organisation capable of innovation, delivered at a local level for local needs. Overseeing a budget of £1.5 billion covering 26,000 staff, he started to tackle the inequalities of health and economic deprivation in the north east. With a steady hand on the tiller, he systematically improved the quality of NHS management, and bolstered our Medical School through the establishment of five new Professors whose clinical base was in socially deprived areas within our region. Serving under four Secretaries of State, he resisted the introduction of a "market" in public health, arguing that choice was only possible if there was an

over-supply of services, whilst he oversaw the introduction of NHS Trusts. After chairing the Occupational Pensions Board, he returned to the Health Service as chair of the evolving local organisation: from the Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority, through to the North East Strategic Health Authority which leads to the present day.

Reflecting on his autobiography, it becomes very clear that Peter Carr has always had his eye on the underdog. From his earliest professional roles as teacher and lecturer, then labour market advisor, or as Director of ACAS; in the Diplomatic Service or running the Health Service, he has always fought the case of the disadvantaged. His work was underpinned by a strong sense of fairness, and with a strong sense of purpose, irrespective of the prevailing political mood of the day.

Our University has also benefitted greatly from his experience and commitment. Sir Peter has played a key role in developing the strategic partnership between The Faculty of Medical Sciences and the National Health Service. He remains an active member of Court, our Nominations Committee, and sits on the Newcastle University Business School Advisory Board.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of his contribution to the National Health Service in the north east of England, and his

enduring support of our University, I ask that you bestow upon him an Honorary Fellowship of Newcastle University.

Citation by Professor Patrick Chinnery