



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

14 February 1983

Personal  
My dear Principal,

I did so enjoy my visit to Somerville.  
It was not only a richly nostalgic occasion  
but also a stimulating experience in itself.

Carol and I really enjoyed ourselves and  
she joins me in thanking you and all those who  
helped to make it such a memorable day for us  
both.

Yours sincerely  
Margaret Thatcher

Apologies for the delay.


Visit to Somerville College  
HL-572/83

11 February 1983

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 5 February about her recent visit to Oxford. While the students to whom you refer have every right to express their views, provided they remain within the law, the Prime Minister is confident that the recent vote at the Oxford Union is a much better reflection of student opinion than those who demonstrated against her visit.

Tim Flesher

Philip Hornby, Esq.



From the President of the J.C.R. · St. Catherine's College · Oxford

OX1 3UJ

Telephone Oxford (0865) 249541

5th February 1983.

R.10.

T.F.

Dear Mrs Thatcher,

Having witnessed today's disgraceful scenes at Somerville, I feel impelled to write to you to tell you how ashamed the vast majority of students here are of what went on.

The behaviour of those louts who caused the trouble can cause nothing but harm to the image of students and to the image of Oxford. Rest assured that these hooligans - who would disgrace the terraces of Chelsea F.C. at times - are totally unrepresentative of most students here who have reacted to today's events with feelings of shame and great sadness.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Hornby.



Callan

No reply  
i think. But  
have  
thank  
you letters  
gone at all?

10 DOWNING STREET

MR FLESHER

H.

When in Oxford, the attached statement and signed declaration were passed to the Prime Minister (via Romola). I think this is something for Private Office to deal with.

(It may help to know that para 4 of Romola's minute to PM of 31 January gives details of Chairman and members of the JCR.)

BETH FRIER  
PRESS OFFICE

8 February 1983

For Fily.

Romola is doing  
work for letter. cf.

File on  
PM's Visit to Somerville College

Whilst respecting the right of those Somervillians who object to Mrs Thatcher's visit and to the policies of her government to express their personal opinions as forcefully as they please, we would like to make it clear that the official attitude of the JCR in this matter is not exclusively representative of all members of the college. Due to the insistence of the dominant campaigners on 'democracy' many of us feel that we have not been given a chance to express our personal opinions either on the manner in which the JCR has gone about the question of representation or on the assumption that all morally upright people must necessarily share the political views of the majority and/or their chosen way of expressing them.

Necta Patel.

Ann Walsh.

E. Moss.

Melanie / Florence

Tanya Russell.

Fiona Catty.

Elizabeth Sord.

Susanne Thiemann

Elizabeth Allopp.

Ursula Cohen

Haya Mannai.

Helen M. Stevenson

Gillian Clark

Mary Cleary

R. J. J. J.

Ann Head

Victoria Canning.

D. Barber

Eva Kulakowski

Jackie Oliver

S. C. Smith

A. C. Smith

D. Lear

Sue Phillips

I. Brindley

N. Fletcher

S. Francis

F. Merrick

M. Mouoy

Jill Dennison

S. Rodger.

Laninda Halpikie.

Kay Griffiths

F. E. Hudson

Louise Jones

Jenny Burn

Vane Smart

Alexandra Colpe

Karen Ingersent.

C. Seddon

- and many  
others who didn't  
have a pen!

STATEMENT FROM SOMERVILLE JCR TO MRS THATCHER

We would like to take this opportunity to express the concern of Somerville JCR with regard to the Government's present policies. We cannot possibly confine our criticism to policy concerning Higher Education, since it has been made clear that if there were not cuts in this sector, there would be larger cuts elsewhere, and since we reject all cuts which attack the principles fundamental to the Welfare State. It was never imagined that the erosion of the Welfare State would be taken so far, or that the degree of hardship it has caused would be tolerated with such equanimity. Moreover the cuts have been presented as part of a much wider strategy which is itself basically flawed.

As we understand it, the present Government's policy of eliminating inflation and restoring competitiveness in British industry has taken the form of the deliberate creation of mass unemployment. Instead of achieving its professed aim only of eliminating unjustified increases in the money supply in order to control inflation, the Government has, in fact, brought down inflation by massive cuts in aggregate demand. The resultant unemployment has contributed to the slowing down of inflation primarily because the fear of unemployment has obliged workers to accept lower wage increases.

Any beneficial effects of this are outweighed by the fact that increased unemployment contributes to further reductions in demand that are leading to mounting redundancies and the bankruptcy of many of the firms which would be expected to provide the basis of an economic recovery; a criticism which has been levied from within industry itself. This means that, by the time that inflation has been eliminated, we shall be left not with an economy of lean, competitive firms, but with irreversible deindustrialisation.

Despite the overwhelming importance of these issues, we feel that, as students we are particularly qualified to highlight one aspect of Government policy which is currently being discussed.

The loans system currently being debated within the Conservative Party proposes to replace the present £1595 grant with a loan for half that amount and a means-tested grant for the other half. There would be no minimum grant. The average student will thus have run up a debt of around £2500 at the end of three years.

We believe that this scheme will not have the proposed effect of reducing Government Expenditure on student support. In particular there would be the difficulty of debts, which would require an expensive and intrusive bureaucracy to follow up all graduates, sometimes for years. Problems of default would arise, and unless current interest charges are to be made for each year until the debt is paid off, the government will incur great losses where graduates take several years to reach the minimum level for repayment. At a time of high and rising graduate unemployment, many will find themselves in this predicament.

Furthermore the scheme would have the tragic result of restricting access to Higher Education. Prospective students from poorer families, particularly those with no previous contact with Higher Education, will be deterred by the prospect of incurring a large debt which might often take years to pay off, whereas those students whose parents possess sufficient resources to settle the debt immediately will not incur accumulated interest charges.

Women normally take longer than men to reach higher income levels, due to discrimination and because of the time which they may spend in bringing up children before returning to their careers; the debt will thus hang over them for a longer period of time, and if interest charges are to be made for the whole of that period they will find themselves facing a far larger debt than their male counterparts. Mature students will also be deterred by the prospect of financial hardship.

We believe that this scheme marks a step back towards the idea that education is a privilege, enjoyed mainly by those who can afford it, not a right to be enjoyed by all. Restricted access to Higher Education is not only a waste of society's precious resources, but also demeans the principle that education is valuable for its own sake.