

GRADUATION 2010

Presentation speech for Sir Stuart Hampson for the honorary degree of Doctor of Science of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor, in 1929, John Spedan Lewis decided to distribute his company's profits to his staff. He did so largely because he had lost faith in the financial systems of the time and thought he could find a way to introduce a fairer form of capitalism. Some businessmen – Henry Ford for example – have said that 'History is bunk', but I disagree. I believe we can learn from the past. Indeed, the story of John Spedan Lewis is very much a case in point and so I hope that our Honorand today, Sir Stuart Hampson - perhaps best known to the public as Chairman of The John Lewis Partnership between 1993 and 2007 - thinks as I do.

Of course, 1929 marked the beginning of The Great Depression, the worst economic downturn since the early seventeenth century. In the past year or so, thousands of column inches have addressed the question of whether the story of 1929-32 is repeating itself. The Jury is still out on that but we can surely say – as Kipling said of the Boer War – that recent events have given us 'No end of a lesson'. But will that lesson 'Do us no end of good'? In other words, major economic crises demand new and radical thinking – exactly what John Spedan Lewis came up with in 1929.

Chancellor, The John Lewis Partnership and the University of Buckingham have at least one thing in common: we do things differently. The University itself was in some senses a response to the economic difficulties of the early 1970s. I must confess that, at the time, we made relatively little impact, but in the face of a much larger crisis, all that is changing. People are beginning to look at the Buckingham model with renewed interest – exactly in the way that they are looking at the John Lewis model.

I would be tempted to say that, in a depressingly uniform world, doing things differently is good in itself, but there is more to it than that. Conventionally, institutions providing goods or services can either be controlled by the state (just like most Universities in this country) or they can be controlled by shareholders and managers - distinct from the workforce - whose priorities are profits and bonuses (just like the for-

profit organisations springing up in Higher Education at the moment). In education and in other walks of life, both models have something to be said for them – but, especially at times like these, probably more that can be said against. The current woes of state universities and of many commercial undertakings reflect their respective shortcomings.

As I understand it, the best way to describe The John Lewis Partnership is that it is a 'mutual'. There has been a good deal of discussion recently about a 'revival of mutuals'. The University of Buckingham may not be technically a 'mutual' but there are many features of the Mutual about it – not least the concept of 'Members of the University and their increasingly role in deciding how it works. When he was with The John Lewis Partnership, Sir Stuart said that he measured success by the 'happiness factor' of staff and end customers – and that is really how we see things too.

It would of course be entirely misleading to suggest that in honouring Sir Stuart are simply honouring a symbol of an organisation – however successful and interesting. After leaving Oxford, Sir Stuart spent the first part of his career in the Civil Service, becoming an Assistant Secretary at the Department of Trade and Industry. More recently he has been President of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, Patron of the Home Farm Trust and one of Prince of Wales's Ambassadors promoting economic revival in deprived communities. He has just become Chairman of The Crown Estate

Chancellor, it is always a special pleasure to present an Honorand who has already developed close links with this University. This is certainly true of Sir Stuart. Last April he came to Buckingham to launch the Chartered Institute of Marketing Study Centre in our Business School and later gave a memorable lecture on The John Lewis Partnership. Since then he has been of enormous help to our colleagues in the Business School and, above all, to its students. We very much hope that these links with Sir Stuart will continue and become even closer in the future.

Chancellor, I call upon you to confer upon Sir Stuart Hampson the Degree of Doctor of Science, *Honoris causa*.

Professor John Clarke, MA, DPhil
26 February 2010