

[NB: In this statement I misidentified the two officials involved in my removal as the Scottish Trades Union Congress' Grahame Smith and Ann Henderson, when they were in fact the RMT's regional organiser Denis Connor and equalities officer Jessica Webb respectively. This was due to a form of visual agnosia which makes it difficult for me to recognise people by their facial features. I stress, neither Mr Smith nor Ms Henderson played any part in the affair and I apologise unreservedly for the error. - Rory MacKinnon, 02/08/14]

**STATEMENT ON EJECTION FROM THE RMT WOMEN'S CONFERENCE, JURY'S INN
JAMAICA ST, GLASGOW ON 08/03/2014**

by Rory MacKinnon

I am writing this statement as a record of the events that led to my being ejected from the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union women's conference in Glasgow today. As this statement will show, I believe my behaviour as a reporter and representative for the Morning Star was above reproach; my subsequent removal by STUC officials was therefore an act of pure retaliation for an inconvenient line of questioning and an unjustifiable attack on press freedom.

On 06 March, two days before the conference, I contacted Mike Barry and Diane McKellar at the RMT's Scotland office to obtain a copy of the agenda and ask what time the conference started, having identified myself as a Morning Star reporter. My email records show that this request was forwarded to the RMT's Equal Opportunities officer Jessica Webb, who responded "Sure. 2pm start tomorrow."

When I arrived in conference suite 109 at 10am I immediately identified myself by name and organisation to the officers at the door, displayed my press card and asked again whether I would be allowed to sit in on the conference. I was then escorted to the front of the room, where the official explicitly asked STUC assistant secretary Ann Henderson whether I was allowed to sit in on the conference. I again identified myself to Ms Henderson and asked again whether this would be alright. Ms Henderson explicitly assured me it would be fine. I then moved to the back row and quietly took my place in a seat on the aisle.

From the conference's opening at 10am to the break for lunch at 12:45pm, I took notes and spoke only once. I believe this single question was the reason for my subsequent removal.

My question followed an address by the RMT's national organising co-ordinator Alan Pottage on the subject of recruiting women organisers and combating sexism in the workplace, both inside and outside the union. Mr Pottage began his own address recounting the abuse a female RMT member had suffered during a conference in 1991, and that he hoped the union had come a long way in combating such attitudes. "If you've got someone going around the workplace abusing their fellow workers - whether they're an RMT member or not - they don't deserve to be in that workplace".

When Mr Pottage concluded his address the chair opened the discussion to the floor with a Q & A session with Mr Pottage. After waiting several seconds to see if anyone else would raise their hand, I silently raised my own and was called on by the chair. I then stood, identified myself by name as a reporter for the Morning Star and asked if I could follow up on his comments about combating sexist abuse both within and outside the union. I then asked, "How do you think the lack of resolution over Caroline Leneghan's case for domestic violence against Steve Hedley may have affected women members' perceptions of the union as an organising force?" I believe this is an accurate recollection of my wording.

I immediately sat down and listened without interjection to Mr Pottage's reply. Mr Pottage declined to comment directly on the case, saying "I can't answer that question." Mr Pottage then said he expected the female delegates in the room would be better qualified to answer my question. He added, referring to the 1991 incident cited in his address, "I would like to think that now, 20 years on, we could resolve the issue in a way that's fair on both sides".

I remained silent for the remainder of the Q&A session, during which no other delegate made reference to the Leneghan/Hedley investigation. When the chair suspended the conference at 12:45pm for lunch I quietly packed up and left the conference suite without incident.

I likewise encountered no difficulty when I returned at around 1:30pm to take my seat again at the back, still wearing my press card and with the intention of filing several stories on the various motions up for discussion that afternoon.

But at around 1:45pm when the conference was due to begin, I was approached by the STUC's general secretary Grahame Smith and Ms Henderson. Both Mr Smith and Ms Henderson stood over me in what I feel was an intimidating manner, with Ms Henderson asking what paper I was from. I reminded her I was from the Morning Star and showed her my NUJ press card, only for Ms Henderson to tell me she did not believe I was from the Morning Star and ask for further identification. I pointed out that my press card was hanging from a Morning Star lanyard and reminded her that I was the paper's designated Scotland reporter. Ms Henderson then told me that I was not allowed to remain in the conference suite as the conference was "closed to the press". I told Ms Henderson that the RMT's officials had approved my attendance in writing, only for Ms Henderson to insist that I leave. I asked Ms Henderson whether there had been a vote to hold the conference in closed session, with Ms Henderson responding that the conference "had always been closed - it's always been that way". I asked Ms Henderson if my removal was related to the question I had asked earlier, but Ms Henderson insisted that the conference was simply closed to the press and public. Throughout this discussion I retained a polite tone and did not raise my voice or alert delegates to the affair, as I did not wish to bring the Morning Star into disrepute. Ms Henderson and Mr Smith both stood over me as I gathered my things, packed my laptop case and the pair then escorted me to the door, with Mr Smith closing it behind me. I then immediately left the hotel.

Around five minutes after leaving the hotel my phone displayed a call from the STUC's press secretary Kevin Buchanan. I decided not to answer the phone or engage further with STUC representatives until I had discussed the matter with my news editor and line manager Will Stone.

I do not wish to make any claims here regarding the Leneghan/Hedley investigation or the RMT union's handling of it. I write this record only to demonstrate that I conducted myself with professionalism and integrity as a journalist for the Morning Star, pursuing a newsworthy story on an issue of significant interest to its readers in the trade union movement - particularly given its falling on International Women's Day - only to sustain intimidation and blackballing by officials who should know better.