

THE 2005 ANNUAL MEETING OF SCIENTISTS FOR LABOUR,

held on 14 July 2005, in committee room 7 at the House of Commons, Westminster

Guest Speaker Lord David Sainsbury.

Chair Willie Russell introduced the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Science and Innovation, Lord Sainsbury, who spoke about the valuable role of SfL and what we might do in the future. Lord Sainsbury considered this was a time when there was beginning to be a shift towards greater public acknowledgement of the role science and technology could play in tackling some of the major problems facing society. He also remarked that the perception that there was a crisis in number of students taking science and engineering degrees was not supported by the facts. There were 120,000 more science students today than in 1997/98. Students needed to see the relevance of their studies to everyday issues.

He suggested that SfL should concentrate less on trying to provide advice to government, which had ample access to independent advice, but more on informing Party members and the wider public about the importance of using science to tackle problems. Lord Sainsbury pointed towards four areas where science would be important in the immediate future: climate change, energy provision, combating infectious diseases and issues of "third world" development. Lord Sainsbury was warmly thanked for his stimulating talk. He went on to answer questions and take part in a brief discussion of his ideas.

Chair's report

Willie Russell was disappointed that Anne Campbell was not re-elected to Parliament in the General Election. He gave his thanks to Steve Keevil for representing SfL on various consultations and at Conference. Willie also thanked David Caplin for representing SfL at meetings of the Socialist Societies. It was noted with deep regret that Willie, who had been the Chair of SfL since its inception in 1994, would not be standing this year. The meeting passed a unanimous vote of thanks to Willie for all his outstanding work for SfL as Chair for more than ten years.

SfL Chair John Unsworth pays tribute to Prof. Willie Russell....

Willie Russell has been Chair of SfL since its inception in 1994. Willie has decided to step down as chair but has stayed on the Executive. The SfL AGM passed a unanimous vote of thanks to Willie for all his outstanding work for as Chair for more than ten years. I am sure that SfL members will join me in saying thank you for all your hard work and dedication have been an inspiration to us all.

...and Dennis Risby

Dennis is also standing down as Secretary and editor of Science matters. We will certainly miss Dennis as a man with two jobs who has done more than anyone to keep us in touch with each other, particularly through Science Matters.

Secretary's report

In speaking to his written report which had been circulated in "Science Matters", Dennis Risby was pleased to report that since its publication there had been one more new member. However, recruitment generally had been slow. Word of mouth and the web site remained the main avenues for recruiting new members. The EC had not met formally during the year, though much business had been conducted by e-mail. Three issues of "Science Matters" had been produced. Dennis was thanked for his work for SfL over many years and presented with a copy of Jeremy Bray's book, "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants".

Treasurer's report

John Unsworth circulated copies of the accounts. It was agreed that the auditors appointed at this AGM should also undertake the audit of these accounts. Membership had remained fairly constant with around 110 members paying by Standing Order. The balance to date stood at around £6,400 though it was noted that there would be some expenses arising from today's meeting. Other major items of expenditure were our affiliation fees, attendance at Annual Conference and costs

associated with the web site. John was warmly thanked for his work as treasurer. Malcolm Hill and Barry Tylee were elected as auditors.

Sfl Officers for 2006

Chair	John Unsworth
Vice-chair	David Caplin
Treasurer	Sean Munro
Secretary	Steve Keevil
Membership secretary	Ann Kingsbury
Editor of "Science Matters"	Paul Connell
Web-master	Fred Mellon
Socialist Societies rep	David Caplin

Sfl and the future

A discussion was then held on the mode of operation and potential future activities for Sfl and the following points were agreed:

- the EC should bear in mind Lord Sainsbury's earlier remarks, in particular the four problem areas where science could have a key role to play (See item 4. above.)
- Sfl should be open to people who would not describe themselves as scientists but have an interest in promoting science
- Sfl should continue to respond to government consultation exercises
- more effort should be made to involve members in consultations, possibly by e-mail
- a new logo should be designed, possibly by competition amongst members and should exclude the Labour "rose"
- EC should consider contacting Labour Students and university Labour clubs with a view to making Sfl literature available at freshers' weeks
- EC should consider making early plans for the 2006 LP Conference in Manchester and possibly hold a members' meeting at Conference.

The meeting was then addressed by the MPs, Dr Phyllis Starkey and Dr Ian Gibson.

Dr Starkey, who is Chair of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology and therefore responsible for providing Parliamentary briefings on scientific issues, stressed that although there is support for science in the Government, there is still a need for Sfl to make the case for science within the wider Party. Dr Starkey warned that without Party and public support for science spending this could become a relatively easy target for cutbacks should the need arise. Dr Gibson suggested that Sfl needed its own manifesto and should focus on its priorities. His suggestions were: tackling problems of short-term contracts, the grant awarding process, science education and lack of science teachers and the public understanding of science. He urged scientists not to be neutral in political issues but to be more aggressive in promoting scientists' concerns.



Dr Phyllis Starkey MP, Dr Ian Gibson MP and Prof. Willie Russell