

Science Matters

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No. 34

AGM December 2008

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Scientists for Labour

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Honorary Patrons

Sir Tom Blundell
Mrs. Anne Campbell
Dr Ian Gibson, MP
Sir Paul Nurse
Lord Martin Rees
Lord David Sainsbury



Scientists for Labour



AGM 9th December 2008

The 2008 Annual General Meeting of Scientists for Labour will take place at 13.00 – 15.00 in the Boothroyd Room at Portcullis House, Westminster, SW1A 2LW.

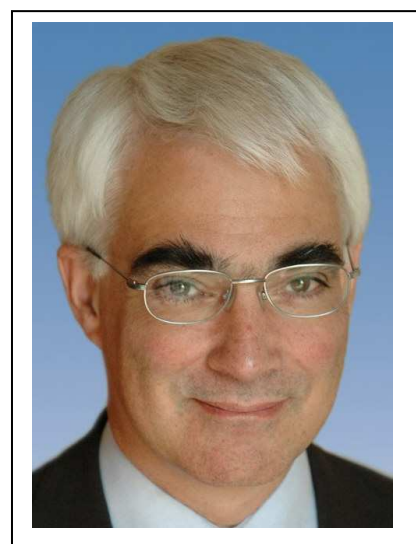
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Darling excited about future for Bioscience

On the Today programme on 25th November Alistair Darling, Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

As part of the Governments help to Manufacturing Industry we are encouraging growth of new businesses in the Bioscience and Pharmaceutical sector.

We are spending a lot of money on science, particularly in the form of Tax Credits for Research which is where the ideas of the future will come.



The Science Select Committee, the debate continues

The Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee has decided to hold an inquiry called 'Putting science and engineering at the heart of government policy'. The Committee invites evidence on the following issues:

- whether the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Science and Innovation and the Council for Science and Technology put science and engineering at the heart of policy-making and whether there should be a Department for Science
- how Government formulates science and engineering policy (strengths and weaknesses of the current system)
- whether the views of the science and engineering community are, or should be, central to the formulation of government policy, and how the success of any consultation is assessed
- the case for a regional science policy (versus national science policy) and whether the Haldane principle needs updating
- engaging the public and increasing public confidence in science and engineering policy
- the role of GO-Science, DIUS and other Government departments, charities, learned societies, Regional Development Agencies, industry and other stakeholders in determining UK science and engineering policy
- how government science and engineering policy should be scrutinised

More information can be found on:

http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/ius/ius_131108a.cfm

SfL will be collecting responses from members and making a submission. We will be discussing this at the AGM. Even if you are not able to come to the AGM please feel free to send your responses in to us.



Stephen Keevil

When this issue was raised, last year when the DIUS was formed, SfL had more responses from members than for any other topic. Following that SfL's Chair John Unsworth collected together a series of suggestions which the EC plan to put to Lord Drayson in the New Year.

Stephen Keevil, Vice Chair of SfL wrote to John Denham Secretary of State at the DIUS expressing our concern that the new Science select committee would be a sub-committee and lack clout. Twenty four notes of support from SfL members received within 24 hours of the letter issued.

Sir Paul Nurse, one of our Patrons, wrote directly to John Denham

Dear John,

Let me add my support for retention of the Science and Technology Select Committee which has operated extremely well. My position is well stated in the letter from Scientists for Labour sent to you last week.

Sincerely, Paul Nurse

2001 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine, Member of Council of Science and Technology, President of the Rockefeller University



Paul Nurse

SfL is pleased to share web links with Compass:

www.compassonline.org.uk/

compass
DIRECTION FOR
THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT



Did you notice Ian Pearson on the front bench behind the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the television. He joined the treasury team in the September reshuffle. We wish him all the best in his new Job. He was very responsive when SfL Executive spent an hour with him earlier in the year. During conference he spoke at many fringe meetings. During Conference week the Guardian printed an article where he supported GM technology and said that we need to start the debate again. The Environment minister Phil Woolas also supported this move.

The new minister Dr Paul Drayson, Lord Drayson of Kensington, has a strong history in the Bioscience sector. SfL supports the idea of reinvigorating the GM debate and looks forward to playing it's part.

Lord Drayson, the new Minister for Science and Innovation



Dr Paul Drayson gained a PhD in Robotics. In 1993 he co-founded PowderJect Pharmaceuticals plc in Oxford which specialised in the production of vaccines, and was Chief Executive until 2003.

Lord Drayson is a member of the House of Lords and a former Minister for Defence Procurement. He took a leave of absence from his post to fulfil his dream of competing at the 24 Hours of Le Mans, where he was pictured to the left.

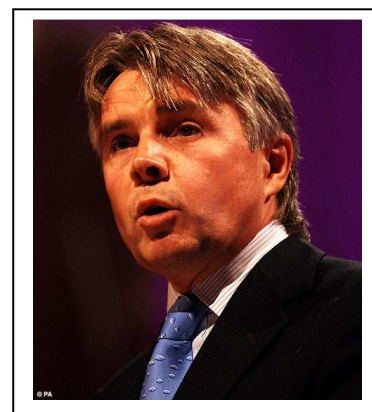
He is recently reported by the BBC as saying "'I'm delighted - it's my absolute dream job. I have worked all my life in science and technology, and so the opportunity now to make a real difference in this area is a real honour, and I can't wait to get started."

Lord Drayson said his appointment represented an upgrading of the science minister's role. He is to attend cabinet and will chair a new Cabinet Committee for Science and Innovation.

And Professor Colin Blakemore, former head of the Medical Research Council and SfL member , added: "There's no doubt he's been very creative in recognising opportunities to move from basic research into innovation in his own career, so he chimes very much with the government's current focus on translational research. "However, I do think he can be trusted to defend the investment needed for the basic research which is essential for innovation in the future."

Lord Drayson speaks to the Royal Society on 20 November 2008

In 1983, I'd just begun a PhD in robotics. That experience was the basis for everything I've done in my career - from working in the car industry to setting up a biotech company to becoming a government minister. It taught me to work things out for myself and, in line with the Royal Society's motto, *Nullis in verba*, not to accept anything on hearsay. That is especially true in Politics.



For almost 350 years, the prestige of the Royal Society, and this country's reputation for science, have been built on curiosity-driven inquiry and the pursuit of excellence. Undertaking research to understand how the world works is the real joy of science. It's the route to many of the most groundbreaking discoveries. The Government believes in doing it, so does industry and so do I.

And for the last 25 years, it's the blue-skies research conducted by many of the fellows gathered here that has helped them to reshape scientific discourse and has generated tangible benefits for mankind. It has made this one of the most competitive and sought-after programmes across Europe and my department is proud to help finance it. Tonight, I want to talk briefly about my priorities for UK science - and though it may well be a case of preaching to the converted this evening, it will also give you a clearer sense of my position.

I do have strong views about the accountability of scientists. The UK needs to excel in chemistry and computing, in physics and pharmacology - but it also has to be comfortable discussing the methods and outcomes of scientific research, comfortable debating the ethical dilemmas that sometimes emerge.

A fortnight ago, I caught Stephen Fry's US travel show on the BBC, where he ventured that the States is an easier place to do science - and to debate it. Well, he may have been right about that a few ago, but not now. It's this country that has created robust frameworks for stem cell research, for exploring the incredible opportunities posed by nanotechnology. More than that, we enjoy a real competitive advantage in the UK through our willingness to engage in genuine public dialogue on science. And that's one reason why the Government is going to such lengths to ensure we have an effective science and society strategy.

This goes beyond general scientific literacy. When people understand how scientists operate, when they trust the businesses and policy makers who apply scientific insight, the appetite for bold new technologies increases. Our ability to address the major issues like climate change, global security and disease is enhanced. Our democracy grows stronger.

A critical part of science and society, of course, is the STEM agenda. We seek a constant flow of young people studying the STEM subjects at undergraduate level and beyond. But I've recently highlighted the problem that while more children now appreciate the importance of science - and enjoy it at school - they still don't appreciate the career options it opens up for them.

We've got to tackle this issue by improving careers advice for young people, and involve the media much more. We need to be explaining to young girls and boys that there's a whole army of engineers responsible for Lewis Hamilton becoming Formula 1 world champion - and that to be part of it requires a certain academic grounding. You do have to do your maths homework. For school pupils who've been inspired by seeing the facilities at CERN on television, we should have the current crop of UK scientists describe how they got to work

there. For an undergraduate who sees herself as a future science entrepreneur, we need experts who can advise her on the kinds of experiences that will set her on the right path.

If I cast my mind back to the 1980s once more, there's no question that we've seen a major change to the way this country operates and to the culture within our universities. Even in the early 90s, I remember the situation at Oxford University, when any researchers with half an eye on exploring the commercial possibilities arising from their work risked sabotaging their academic careers. It's thanks to the initiatives brought in under my predecessor Lord Sainsbury that we're now in a much stronger position.

The Higher Education Innovation Fund started out in 2001 to support knowledge transfer. By 2010/11, it will be worth £150 million. The Research Councils are placing the right emphasis on economic impact. And last year's Sainsbury Review of the UK's science and innovation system provided a clear direction for increasing capacity further and maintaining our global competitiveness - work that's proceeding following this year's innovation white paper.

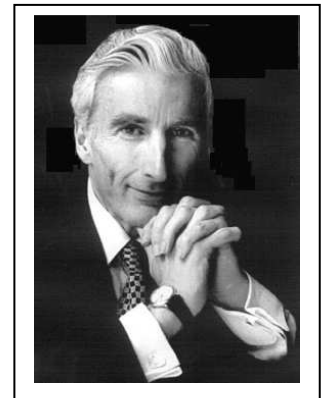
We need to raise our game nationally, because we're simply not producing enough world-leading science-based businesses. There's been no UK Genentech or Google. Earlier this week, I laid down a challenge to the UK venture capital industry - and to the major UK institutions and pension funds - to start investing seriously in our promising start-ups and spinouts.

This isn't so much about the economic downturn - though early-stage companies urgently need cash to keep going, and the Government will do whatever it takes to protect small businesses. It's more the fact that the global economy will recover and our scientists and engineers are already at the forefront of next-generation research - nanotech, biotech, clean tech, renewables. We cannot afford to miss out on these opportunities that are certain to come along in the next few years.

We have to target greater investment at the things we do best, celebrate our successes, and achieve critical mass in our research clusters. I came into this job really believing that the policies the Government has been pursuing on science and innovation are right for the country.

UK science has never been in better shape - and, given all I've just said - it needs to be. By 2010/11, the science budget will have tripled in little over a decade. The Research Councils have substantial funds to work collaboratively on fundamental issues like global security and our ageing society. We're making every effort to ensure we have the highly-skilled scientists, engineers and technicians to drive our knowledge economy.

It's my responsibility to implement these policies energetically, to make a convincing case for ongoing public investment, and to champion science in every sphere. Twenty-five years from now, I want to see a UK which continues to be the place of choice for pure research in many fields; where schools and universities are turning out class after class of promising mathematicians, scientists and engineers; where those scientists make a substantial contribution to public life as teachers, communicators and government advisers and, in particular, where science has become the platform for national wealth creation.



Prof. Lord Rees, Astronomer Royal, President of the Royal Society and Patron of SfL

AGM Agenda

The 2008 Annual General Meeting of Scientists for Labour is on 9th December 13.00 – 15.00 in the Boothroyd Room at Portcullis House, Westminster, SW1A 2LW.

All members are cordially invited to attend. Non-members will be made most welcome.

13.00 pm: AGM

1. Minutes of 2007 AGM, see Science Matters 33. If you wish to see the minutes of last year before the meeting and you cannot find your Science Matters 33 please email the Secretary.
2. Matters arising
3. Chair's Report
4. Secretary's Report
5. Conference report
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Editor's report
8. Report on Socialist Societies
9. Election of EC members (nominations to Paul Connell)
10. AOCs

Reports will be on paper so that business can proceed smartly as we only have two hours.

SfL's response to the Select Committee inquiry

14.40 pm A discussion on SfL's response to the Select Committee inquiry.



Ian Gibson MP

Speaking to this debate will be **DR Martin Yuille**, Director UK DNA Banking Network at The Centre for Integrated Genomic Medical Research, University of Manchester, and Dr Ian Gibson MP, former Chair, and longstanding member, of the committee and SfL's most active Patron.



Martin Yuille

15.20 pm John Unsworth will lead a discussion on how we can use the Science section of the Education Policy Commission report to spread the message among the science community and support any future General Election campaign.

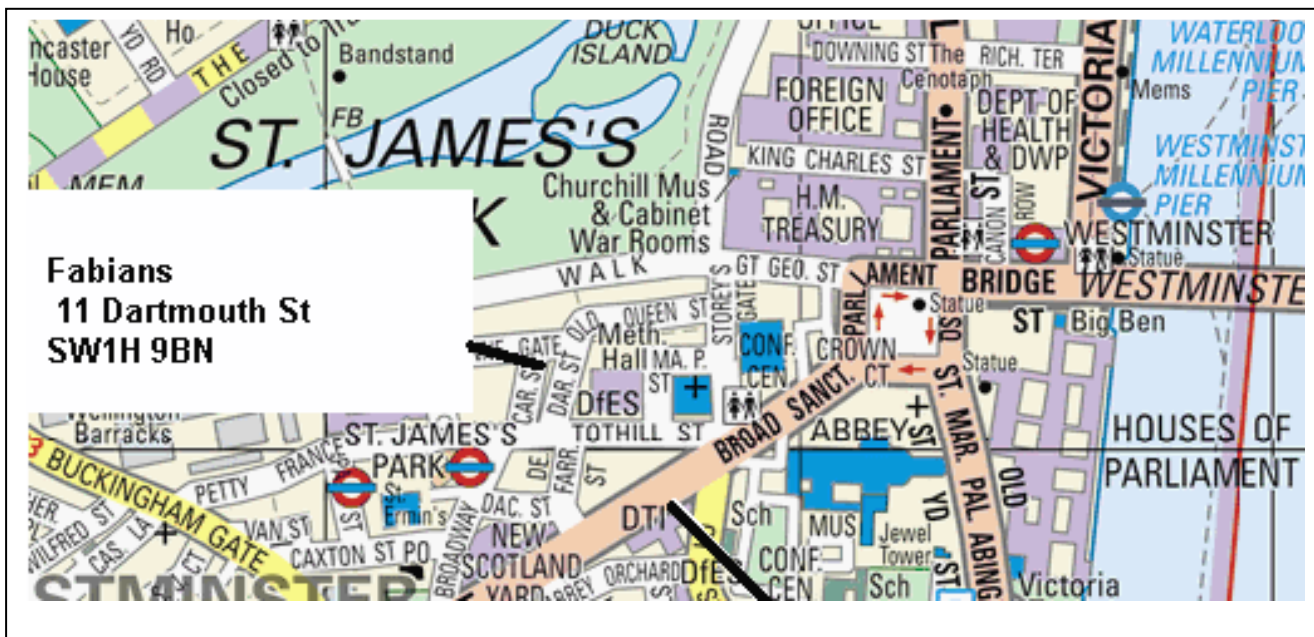
The meeting will end at 15.50 sharp as we need to be out of the room by 16.00

We will then adjourn the meeting and recommence at the:

Cole Room at the Headquarters of the Fabian Society down the Road 11 Dartmouth St London SW1H 9BN.



Dr John Unsworth
Chair of SfL



There are 3 coffee shops on the way.

A meeting of the EC will take place to appoint office bearers

- a. Chair
- b. Vice Chair
- c. Treasurer and nomination of auditors
- d. Secretary
- e. Membership Secretary
- f. Editor of Science Matters.
- g. Webmaster
- h. Rep on Socialist Societies Committee
- i. Ratification of Conference delegate

Secretary's notes

We had planned the AGM to be just after the local elections. However we lost the couple of months before and after the reshuffle trying to secure the Minister as a speaker. Although we are late I am glad that we have left it till now as our morale as Labour Party members is a lot better than it was in May.

I really hope to see you at the AGM, particularly if you have not been before.

I especially want to thank Liz Gibson, Ian Gibson's PA, for arranging the booking at Portcullis House for us.



SfL is pleased to share web links with Progress:

www.progressonline.org.uk/



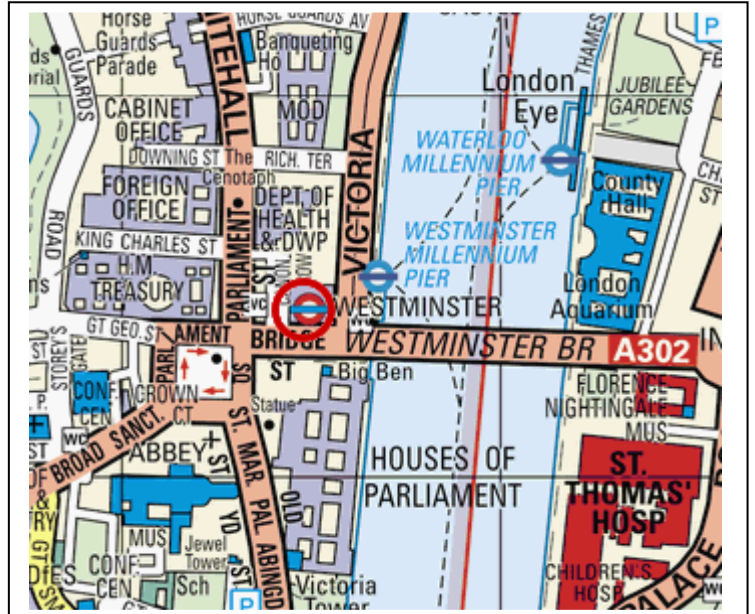
Notice of AGM

The 2008 Annual General Meeting of Scientists for Labour is on 9th December 13.00 – 15.00 in the Boothroyd Room at Portcullis House, Westminster, SW1A 2LW. Portcullis House is Just opposite the House of Commons.

How to get to the Houses of Parliament



Portcullis House is Just opposite the House of Commons. The nearest Underground station is Westminster.



Be prepared to go through security checks. The Boothroyd Room has been booked by Ian Gibson MP. It is possible that a different committee room will be made available on the day.

'Science Matters' is the newsletter of Scientists for Labour, a Socialist Society affiliated to the Labour Party.

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