

Science Matters

Science Matters

No. 37

Labour Party

October 2009

The AGM of Scientists for Labour
Committee Room 10
House of Commons
1 pm Tuesday 27th October 2009

Followed by

“Priorities for Science Funding”
with Prof Sir Tom Blundell,
Lord O’Neil, Nigel Titchen,
Brian Iddon MP

Scientists for Labour

Secretary Paul Connell,
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www.scientists-for-labour.org.uk

Patrons include:

Prof Sir Tom Blundell
Sir Paul Nurse
Lord Martin Rees
Lord David Sainsbury



Scientists for Labour



Professor Sir Tom Blundell FRS, Chair of the bbsrc, Sir William Dunn Professor of Biochemistry at Cambridge University, President Biochemical Society and SfL patron will be speaking at the SfL AGM on Priorities for Science Funding.

Also: Lord O’Neill, member of House of Lords Science Committee, Nigel Titchen Vice President of Prospect and Brian Iddon MP.

NOTE change of room to committee room 10

Chair's report October 2009 Dr John Unsworth



Just 10 months ago Paul Drayson, then recently appointed as Minister for Science at last with a voice in Cabinet, joined our 2008 AGM. He gave a passionate account of how he would use experiences from his entrepreneurial background to bring science, including basic science, out of the political doldrums. By June Science had migrated into the new Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) – fortunately Paul remained in the science post, but now under Peter Mandelson's leadership. Such reorganisations always disrupt our line of communications to Government via special advisers, however following a hiatus in the early summer we have recently strengthened these links.

At the beginning of 2009 we forged a good relationship with Lord Drayson's researcher, Josie Cluer, and together we drew up a convincing list of "What Labour has done for science", which you may have read in Science Matters. We're justifiably proud of these achievements, some of which can be traced back to debates SfL held in the past decade. The challenge now is to help Labour get this message across at the General Election.

In recent years I have been pleased to discover an increasing number of scientific sound-bites creeping into Labour Ministers' speeches. But now I find Science at the top of Lord Mandelson's agenda, so much so that I can paraphrase a whole speech of his in an SfL Chair's annual report. 'An Enterprise-Led Recovery' (16 Oct in Oxford) addresses how a smart state working in partnership with business can foster growth as the answer to unemployment and debt. This focuses on a high tech entrepreneur who commercialises an innovative low carbon technology. Mandelson develops how this is founded not only on from the inventor's science education and her technical skills, but on the skills of all the scientists and engineers she employs, and on her ability to tap into our universities and our research programmes: in fact she depends on the whole of the UK's science base. The need for new initiatives, which bring together government, industry and researchers to trial and develop pre-commercial technologies, is not missed, neither is recognition of the government's role to find indirect ways to finance innovation.

This is a far cry from how science was viewed a decade ago. Interestingly the Tories have now founded "Conservative friends of science" - imitation is the best form of flattery.

In the need though to improve the utilisation of science to create jobs and wealth, we should not neglect our nation's strength in basic science and its role in improving all aspects of life. We can congratulate another UK Nobel Prize winner this year for Physics, Charles Kao, (actually he's Shanghai-born and a dual British American national who did his research in both countries), for his groundbreaking achievements in the transmission of light in optical fibres.



Charles Kao

I particularly want to thank Paul Connell for his big contribution to Sfl this year as Secretary and Editor of Science Matters, and also as a very energetic and enthusiastic delegate networking at this year's Annual conference in Brighton. Our links on science within the Socialist Societies group have grown this year; thanks are due to David Caplin's for his efforts here. For example, we are supporting a SERA plan to establish their own scientific advisory committee (which advises on resolutions submitted as SERA policy) by identifying appropriate scientists to provide peer review.

We very much value the input from all EC members into the range of e-mail debates on issues which often culminate in Science Matters articles. Like all political party organisations we have been appalled by the MPs expenses revelations. One particularly difficult debate related to Ian Gibson, who contributed greatly to our progress since 1995, both as a Patron and founder member of Sfl. We thank him for this. The idea of extending our links in the future beyond the UK towards establishing an international advisory board spun out of this debate.

As this parliament comes to an end one unfortunate trend will be the retirement of several MPs with scientific backgrounds such as Brian Iddon, Doug Naysmith, John Battle, Margaret Becket and Martyn Jones, have had strong links with Sfl. We thank them for their contribution to the furtherance of science in politics and wish them well for the future. We lost Glyn Ford as our link to the European Parliamentary Labour Party but we hope to keep in close touch. We are delighted that Glenis Willmott is taking over as our key contact there, especially as she is a Haematologist. We are beginning to make new links to some PPCs with science links to whom we plan to provide some help in their forthcoming campaigns.



Brian Iddon MP

We have been looking to improve our communications and to recruit new members. The website is currently being reconstructed and updated, thanks to Julian Crowe and our new webmaster, Willie Russell. In addition Steve Keevil is trying to find ways to link us all better via Facebook and Twitter.



Glenis Willmott MEP

Going forward we must identify within the Labour Party what still needs to be done both for basic science and for its exploitation. With pressures on public finances we will have to answer some difficult questions on the best shape of the science investment. We are currently well placed to put forward new ideas. We need your help to put these together before next year's General Election and I'm sure the meeting following our AGM will provide some insights on some of the priorities.

Sfl is pleased to share web links with Compass:

www.compassonline.org.uk/

compass
DIRECTION FOR
THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Conference special



Labour's Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Peter Mandelson's speech to the 2009 Labour Party Annual Conference: extracted by SfL

A Labour Government has never been more needed to fight back against the recession and to build and secure our future economic strength.

As we get closer to the election, I want to see them and Tory candidates across the country explaining why they wouldn't provide the money to help small businesses and families in this recession when they needed it most.

No extra money to boost family incomes.

No money for the tax deferment for business and no VAT cut.

No additional money to help those who have tragically lost their jobs and no funding for the car scrappage scheme.

They got it plain wrong at every step along the way and I say to every Labour member and campaigner across the country.

Conference, the foundation of all that we want to achieve is a strong economy. It means continuing to limit the recession's damage to our economy because when private demand plummets governments must step in.

And it means investing in future growth.

There are encouraging signs that the economy is picking up. But recovery remains fragile and uncertain, especially in manufacturing and one of its cornerstones, the car industry.

Our car scrappage scheme has been so successful the money is running out. The industry has asked that the scheme be topped up. Conference, we cannot do everything but that does not mean doing nothing. So today I am extending our popular car scrappage scheme with extra money for an additional 100,000 cars and vans.

But all of this only makes sense if we continue to invest in our country's future growth. It is growth that will see off recession. It is growth that is key to paying down debt.

More than ten years ago I spoke to this conference as Trade and Industry Secretary about how we needed to renew the British economy and build it around knowledge, **science, innovation** and enterprise.

But this isn't 1998. This is a different world. China and India are undergoing the greatest revolution in the economic history of the world. The greatest financial crisis of modern times also requires us to rethink our growth model for Britain.

Of course, we should be proud of our record. Production is up by a third we have more businesses, more **research and more** people than ever at university. There are more people learning new skills although still not yet enough **technicians** are being recruited for our new industries at the heart of

our growth strategy.

Some people think that Britain is a post-industrial country that doesn't make anything anymore. Well, someone needs to tell them that we are still the world's sixth biggest manufacturer and we will remain a modern manufacturing nation as long as I and the Government remain in our jobs.

The potential is there in Britain, in the services sector, the creative sector, the **biosciences** sector and the **hi-tech advanced manufacturing**.

First, with Labour in office, there will be no cap on talent in this country. People with university degrees and skills earn more, climb higher and create more value.

Second. I want to see an innovation nation.

Science is one of the jewels in the crown of Labour's years in office.

And we want closer links between businesses and universities so that good ideas don't stop at the **research lab** or the library door.

We're one of the world's biggest investors in **Research & Development**. But we still do the R better than the D and that must change.

Third. We're going to do more to put finance at the service of industry by building up new public channels to deliver private funds to innovative and fast growing companies.

We need less financial **engineering** and a lot more **real engineering**. (SfL comment: and genetic engineering!)

We've committed three quarters of a billion pounds to new **manufacturing innovation** in Britain. Investing in **low carbon cars and aircraft, new digital platforms, plastic electronics, life sciences, industrial biotechnology and wind turbine development and wave power**.

This is us giving public support to new **technologies** without which they may never get off the drawing board.

Finally, we're committed to making sure that the benefits of investment in growth are felt in every part of this country.

This is the industrial activism we need more of in this country and I am determined to provide it.

Full text <http://www.labour.org.uk/peter-mandelson-speech-conference>

Paul Drayson

"Picking winners: can engineering succeed where finance failed?"

Labour Party conference, Brighton 30 September 2009

The question before us is whether engineering can succeed where finance failed. My answer is an emphatic yes.

Engineering can be – in fact it must be – our route back to sustainable growth and prosperity. Indeed, the credit crunch and the global recession have presented us with little alternative but to

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rebalance our economy and compensate for the hit suffered by the banks.

I make no claim to have foreseen the downturn ahead of anyone else. But as someone whose background lies in engineering (my first job was at Longbridge); as someone who spent the large part of his working life as a science entrepreneur; as someone who was heavily involved in commercialising the outstanding intellectual property emerging from our universities, I've long wanted to see the UK known primarily for what it designs and produces; to see the UK celebrated as a world-leader in the technologies of the future.

Some people in this country are aware that Britain remains the world's sixth biggest manufacturer – but we're talking about the few, not the many. And overseas, Britain's manufacturing strength barely registers – as a visit to New York and Boston earlier this month made clear to me.

It's high time that we transform our national image and build a reputation as the place for leading-edge research; as the place to headquarter dynamic companies in life sciences and clean tech, in digital and advanced manufacturing.

Now, let me be clear that I'm not here to bash the banks. We obviously need a healthy financial sector, and we do still have to address a working culture in the City that encouraged the wrong sort of risk-taking.

But the bottom line is that City bonuses aren't the issue right now. Top of our agenda has to be wealth creation. Growth is by far the best antidote to public debt. And the people that really count are the ones with the drive and flair to build new businesses and take them global. It's engineers, scientists and entrepreneurs who are going to get this country back on track economically. That's the message we've got to communicate both domestically and internationally.

It starts with the Government's new industrial activism. "New Industry, New Jobs" lays out our strategy for creating the best possible conditions in which UK businesses can thrive in the key growth industries. I'm thinking of areas like pharmaceuticals, satellite communications and ultra-low carbon cars – where future demand is guaranteed, where the UK has clear competitive advantage, and where we have a realistic prospect of being a world leader.

So what's it going to take to make this happen? There are three things, I believe, that we've got to get right.

The first involves attracting the right people.

One group is the entrepreneurs already out there. We've got to persuade experienced entrepreneurs that the UK is the best place to both start and grow a high-tech business. With IP and capital ever more mobile, we need to examine the tax regime – so the motivation is there to build great companies, create jobs and get rich.

That also means continuing to work towards a simple regulatory environment and using the Government's considerable buying power to best effect, so that both entrepreneurs and investors have confidence in the size and shape of future markets.

The other group consists of the next generation of scientists and engineers, who require a different kind of pitch. To them, we need to sell the STEM subjects in school and degrees in physics and engineering as the stepping stones to fantastic careers. Careers in which they can help to tackle the abiding challenges of our times (climate change, global security, renewable energy), commercialise their ideas and make money.

Money – adequate, targeted investment – is my second criteria for success.

As signs of economic recovery emerge, Britain is in a position to seize fresh business opportunities precisely because of the record and sustained investment in science over the past decade.

UK science is the most efficient in the world. In terms of depth and scope, only the US research base bears comparison. The quality of our university spinouts has never been better. Yet, we can't be half-hearted about this kind of investment. President Obama has substantially boosted America's science – in part – to recover ground lost during the previous administration. We can't afford to end up in a similar situation – not least as a number of other countries eye up the same opportunities as us.

As with the research base, so with our tech-based companies: the watchwords are investment and patience. Many of these firms that depend on equity finance are currently fighting for survival. Capital is seriously hard to come by. Which is why the Government has established an innovation investment fund to help rescue and revive companies at all stages of development with the potential to achieve global reach.

The UKIIF will be a 10-year fund of funds with our cornerstone investment of £150 million intended to leverage private investments up to a total of £1 billion. Once operational, it will invest in a limited number of top-tier technology funds, with proven ability to generate returns. The Government will not be involved in investment decisions whatsoever.

This is about helping UK venture capital to reach the next level, through a large fund that replicates the scale of US equivalents.

We have the technology. We have the management. We will have the capital – including from overseas investors.

The final thing we've got to get right concerns how Government itself functions.

Industrial activism requires coordination of a different order to what we've undertaken previously.

If Britain, say, is to be the first place in the world to electrify personal transport, we will have to solve several inter-related problems: designing and manufacturing the vehicles; creating the infrastructure

to recharge them and pricing models which make them affordable; understanding how consumers will use them.

Without cross-departmental policies and budgets, we don't have a chance. So the creation of the Office of Low Emission Vehicles – with Whitehall-wide input as well as full participation from the automotive industry, power generating companies, city councils and local authorities – represents an important step towards achieving our goals.

The same goes for the Office for Life Sciences, where Government is working with industry, our universities and the NHS to drive innovation in this promising growth sector, stimulate investment and market our strengths internationally.

As we adopt this approach in other industries too, it's clear to me that we will need more scientists and engineers at the heart of Government: people with the technological savvy to make the right choices on behalf of the country, whether it's about wind power or high-speed broadband. Part of my ministerial brief is to ensure that such expertise is available – and properly utilised – in all Whitehall departments.

In summary, engineers and engineering will be front and centre stage as we set about rebalancing the economy and setting it upon a new path to long-term growth – where it's no longer the profits from financial services effectively bankrolling our research base, but globally successful medical device firms, video games companies and electric car manufacturers enabling further investment in new ideas. Engineers and engineering, then, will be at the heart of the action – whether in our universities, in business or in Government itself.

Conference report

Paul Connell

When I told friends that I was off to conference they smiled politely as if I was going to a funeral. Well it turned out to be more of a fight back.

I spent a lot of time in the exhibition hall on the Socialist Society stand and in Fringe meetings making contact with people than I did in the hall.

Fringe meetings attended:

The Nuclear industry association

This was an excellent meeting addressed by Lord O'Neill. Lord Hunt represented the Department of Energy. An announcement from DECC made by Lord Hunt can be found on:

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2009-07-15a.1169.10&s=speaker%3A10464#g1180.2>

Martin O'Neill's speech was very good and I am looking forward to hearing him again at the AGM.

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Lord Hunt

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What about Coal? Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth etc. Despite the anti-science agenda of some of the sponsors it was a very sensible meeting. Joan Ruddock from the Department of Energy and Climate change spoke very well indeed.

Unite for Jobs

Supporting Unite who generously sponsors SfL. One of the UNITE delegation, a member of SfL Tamsin Piper and long time member of SfL spoke on the main conference platform standing up for Technicians.



Tamsin Piper



Pat Mc Fadden MP

Skills for the future

Pat McFadden from BIS spoke well on the development of skills needed in the future from the point of view of modern apprenticeships and further and Higher education.

Chemical Industries association

This was an interesting but poorly attended meeting as it was after Gordon's speech and had many competitors. It did not help that the hidden venue was worthy of another organisation with the same initials.

I am hoping that they will provide me with a transcript so that I can put the meeting into a special report on our web site.

Engineering and the future

This was great meeting from the Engineering Employers Federation. Paul Drayson's speech is reproduced in this edition of Science Matters as an exclusive.

Speeches



The highlights of Peter Mandelson's speech are reproduced in this edition of Science Matters.

Gordon Brown's speech did not tackle science as such except via the recovery. It was not a barnstorm, after all he does not do Flash Gordon, but he rewrote the next 10 years of British politics. Ideas such as the new social care Health service combination are completely revolutionary and worthy of Nye Bevan at his best.

The full text of Gordon's speech can be found at:

http://www.labour.org.uk/gordon_brown_conference,2008-09-23

Update on the Simon Singh Case



Simon Singh will be addressing the AGM of Scientists for Labour.

Simon Singh is a science journalist who is being sued for libel by the British Chiropractic Association. He is fighting on after a preliminary judgment against him was overturned on appeal today.

Simon Singh was sued by the BCA after he wrote an article in [the Guardian](#) criticising the association for supporting members who claim that chiropractic treatments – which involve manipulation of the spine – can treat children's colic, sleeping and feeding problems, frequent ear infections, asthma and prolonged crying.

Simon described the treatments, for which he said there is not a lot of evidence, as "bogus" and criticised the BCA for "happily promoting" them.

In May, Mr Justice Eady in the high court ruled on the meaning of the words, saying they implied the association was being deliberately dishonest. Simon was initially refused leave to appeal, but Lord Justice Laws, who said Eady had risked swinging the balance of rights too far in favour of the right to reputation and against the right to free expression.

Many scientists and science writers have rallied to Singh's support, claiming that the freedom of scientific opinion is at stake. Speaking after the judgment, Singh said this was the "best possible result".

Singh's defence has turned into a campaign that has united campaigners from different causes.

The charity Sense About Science started a petition for libel law reform, which has gathered thousands of signatures. Its concern is that individuals should be able to critically evaluate scientific evidence without falling foul of libel laws, which exist to protect reputation. Index on Censorship, which advocates freedom of expression, has also rallied to Singh's defence. Professor Richard Dawkins addressed the Liberal conference urging cross-party support for an amendment to England's libel law.

Síle Lane

www.senseaboutscience.org

Sense About Science is a small charity that equips people to make sense of science and evidence. We depend on donations, large and small, from people who support our work.

SfL is pleased to share web links with Progress:

www.progressonline.org.uk/



Scientists for Labour AGM

The 2009 Annual General Meeting of Scientists for Labour ,Committee Room **10** (changed from 6), House of Commons, Parliament Square London, SW1P 0AA, 1 - 4 pm Tuesday 27th October 2009

All members are cordially invited to attend

1.00 pm: AGM

1. Minutes of 2008 AGM.
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. Emergency motion with supporting speaker will be taken at 1.35pm



SfL welcome the news of Simon Singh's successful appeal against his preliminary judgement so that he can continue to fight his case against the British Chiropractic Association. SfL supports the campaign run by Sense about Science for reform of the Libel laws in matters of scientific integrity and reporting.

This resolution will enable us to represent this issue to the party and seek cooperation with our fellow socialist society The society of Labour Layers on this matter.

2.00pm "Priorities for Science Funding" with

Prof Sir Tom Blundell, Lord O'Neil Nigel Titchen, Brian Iddon MP at 2.00 pm

Lord O'Neill is pictured above anticipating the weather. The "Priorities for Science Funding" meeting is expected to end at 4.00pm. The business AGM may need to be reconvened after 4.00.

Be prepared to go through security checks. It is strongly recommended that you do not attempt to bring penknives and scissors through security. The Room has been booked by Brian Iddon MP and Phyllis Starkey 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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