

VIEWS FROM

PRESIDENTS WEAIRE AND WOLFENDALE >>> 40 YEARS OF EPS

EUROPE – THE GREAT ADVENTURE

Dennis Weaire (Ireland),
President of the EPS, 1997-1999



For those of us whose life-span is long enough to include experience of the aftermath of the Second World War - with rationing and visas in the West and an Iron Curtain sealing off the East - today's Europe is a great adventure. We are not easily disillusioned by petty bureaucracy or the sporadic resurgences of nationalisms. A trip on the Thalys, crossing national frontiers at seemingly relativistic speed, remains a thrill.

It is saddening however that, if the Thalys terminates in Brussels, we see that the central institutions of our great conglomerate continent present a rather dismal picture, and ample opportunities for ridicule by a hostile press. But look outside that inner circle of mutual distrust and you see the spontaneous emergence of many organisations that seek to stimulate rather than to regulate. The EPS is one such, and to occupy its

Presidency was a unique privilege for me, especially as I came to it from the periphery of the continent.

Most new European societies of this kind struggle to survive. Up to a point this is a good thing: let those that are most effective survive. But too many of them remain precarious after several decades. They deserve some support from the centre, once they have proven their worth.

My years as President were the first after the move to Mulhouse. This was a survival tactic, dictated by finance, but location in an explicitly "European" region proved to offer symbolic value as well as economy. We have now taken firm root on the fine campus of the university. I have proposed to represent this rather literally by the planting of trees.

It was also the period during which David Lee joined us. We share a passion for rugby, so we were never short of a conversational topic, whenever we got tired of looking at the bottom line, or the necessary evil of our written constitution.

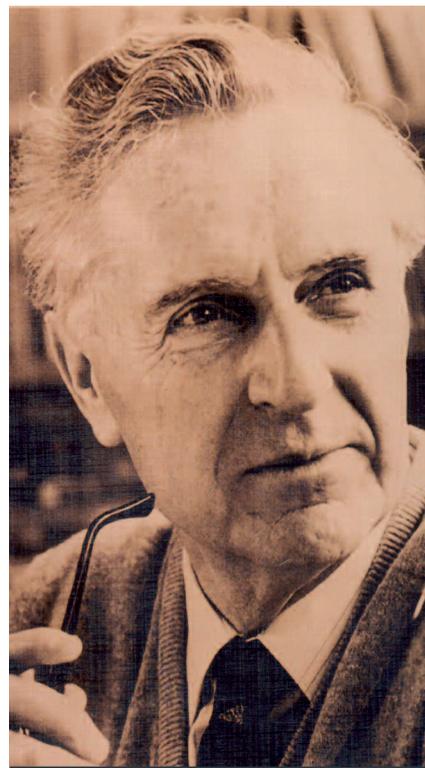
We agreed on one priority for development, which was conference organisation. This seems to have done well, but there is still more scope for ambitious plans in that area.

There is much to be done on behalf of our members. Many matters of public policy need our attention and advocacy. One has only to think of the rapid encroachment of new copyright legislation, eating away at our creative freedom, our precious time and perhaps eventually our funds as well. Who is speaking for its moderation in the academic world? It seems that the script-writers of Hollywood are more alert.

Having heaped praise on European integration, let me add the counterpoint: *que vivent les différences!* Just the other day, I was disputing a point in research with a German colleague in Paris. The problem is, I said, that a German says the bottle is half-empty while an Irishman says the bottle is half-full – and a Frenchman says "*Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une bouteille?*"

REPORT ON 'THE MAIN ACTIVITIES'

Sir Arnold Wolfendale FRS (UK),
President of the EPS, 1999-2001



1. General Remarks

The period 1999-2001 was a busy one for the EPS, indeed all periods seem busy for our Society; it marked the last occupancy of the 'old' building in Mulhouse, before its transfer to the present purpose-built location.

I was blessed with a very impressive and co-operative set of colleagues on the Executive Committee and the office staff, under the inspired leadership of David Lee, worked incredibly hard.

From the multitude of activities I shall pick out just a few.

2. The Malvern Seminar, September 1999

Organised, very largely, by John Lewis, another stalwart of the EPS, we had 23 presidents of European Physical Societies and as many deputies or past-Presidents. A number of Working Groups were set

up, dealing with such topics as 'the Public Understanding of Physics', 'Physics and the Human Condition', 'Physics and Wealth Creation', 'Physics Education' and 'Teacher Training'. The 'Report of the Malvern Seminar' was sent out to many individuals and institutions; indeed, it is still in demand. Contacts with other Presidents proved invaluable.

3. Position Papers

Considerable effort was put into the production of Position papers, on such topics as 'The Brain Drain', 'Nuclear Energy', 'Public Awareness', 'The funding of Physics'.... The first-mentioned was particularly important for our efforts to minimize the loss of scientific talent from Eastern and Central Europe; specifically we (Dalibor Krupa, from Bratislava, and I) recommended that the host country (usually the USA) should pay the donor country one million dollars per person. The funds so gained would be used to fund the educational base of the impoverished base and, hopefully – in that way – reduce the drain. Lest it be thought too much I would refer to a (later) visit to Belgrade and the Tesla Museum where I learned that Tesla's transfer to the USA had benefited the US economy to the extent of some two billion dollars!

4. Central Europe

I made a number of visits to countries in Central Europe, (specifically, Romania, Lithuania, Croatia, Albania, Serbia and Germany), where I met groups of politicians, as well as physicists. I was impressed by the generally favourable attitude of politicians towards science, although disappointed by their lack of knowledge.

Particularly important here were our Position Papers on 'National Funding of Physics' and 'The role of Research Institutes'. With the downfall of Communism, many Research Institutes in Central and Eastern Europe (the old Soviet bloc) were at risk, and needed to change their lines or be affiliated to Universities.

Efforts to fund visits by young scientists to our Conferences, and for other purposes, were strenuously made.

5. The Einstein Year (2005)

At Council's meeting in Berlin in 2001 we were alerted to the fact that 2005 would be the centenary of Einstein's famous 1905 papers on Brownian Motion, the Photo-electric effect and the Special Theory of Relativity. The original idea came from the next President-to-be (Professor Martial Ducloy) and I was able to achieve unanimous agreement of those present. The idea was taken to UNESCO and approved. In the event, the Year was very successful.

6. The EPS Congress

A very successful Congress was held in London, adjacent to Westminster Abbey. The student posters were particularly fine and it was excellent seeing so many young physicists from Europe present as well as admire the quality of their presentations.

7. Funding

The provision of adequate funding was always a problem and much discussion was devoted to national subscriptions. Surprisingly, even the UK's Institute of Physics needed convincing of the European case.

8. Posters for schools

A cause of great personal regret was the fate of the large number of excellent posters produced by Dr Svetlana Erlykin. These related to the lives (warts and all) of great European physicists, and were prepared with the help of physicists from all over Europe. They were virtually complete when I finished my term of office but – to the best of my knowledge – were never transmitted to schools. A glorious opportunity for the subject, and publicity for EPS, lost. Perhaps it is not too late? ■

Conference announcements

XRMS-09

The next workshop on X-Ray Spectroscopy of Magnetic Solids (XRMS) will be held at the French synchrotron radiation source SOLEIL, Gif sur Yvette (France), 19-20 January 2009.

This workshop continues a series started eight years ago in Berlin (XRMS-00). The most recent one was held this year in Hamburg (XRMS-08).

>>> E-mail:

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NANOMAGNET 2009

A European Workshop on Self-Organized Nano-magnets will be held at the CNRS Centre Paul-Langevin in Aussois (an Alpine winter sports resort, France), 29 March – 3 April 2009.

>>> Website:

<http://nanomagnets2009.neel.cnrs.fr>






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