



WATCHDOG

44 Kingsley Road, Horley, Surrey. RH6 8HR ☎01293 786166

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ELECTIONS TO RSPCA Council

Over 20 years ago, the following advice was given to the RSPCA Council:-

"It is necessary for the Society to review the system by which Regional Representatives are elected and the Society's rules should be amended so as to ensure that those who are elected as Regional Representatives have a proper mandate based on a fully comprehensive and **democratic system.**"

Whilst information about candidates standing for election to the Council as Regional Representatives is **UNKNOWN** to the vast majority of members, those seeking election as national Council members have to provide information about their qualifications, employment, leisure activities, branch and national membership **AND** their address **TO ALL VOTING MEMBERS**. The election procedure for electing Regional Representatives is undemocratic and a change to a fair procedure is long overdue. No Council member should hold branch office and this advice was also given 20 years ago by the Sparrow Report.

RSPCA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2003

Dave Wetton has written a very interesting report on the AGM which is included in this newsletter,

The voting figures reveal that 7,033 voting members have left the Society in the past 2 years. This is not surprising when you consider the very unfriendly attitude prevalent in the Society.

Only 190 members out of 41,000 attended the AGM. Again, not surprising when you consider how difficult it was to get to the chosen venue. Of course choosing a difficult venue may be deliberately done to stop too many awkward questions being asked. Only 80 members attended the Animal Welfare Conference. Why not **OPEN UP THE SOCIETY** and have a full day AGM and open it up to the press. The absurd secrecy and confidentiality about the work of the Council only encourages incompetence and infighting. Freedom of information is essential in a democratic society. Put the Council members on the platform so that we can see what they really look like and compare them to the photographs in the Election booklet!

RSPCA AGM 2003 – a report by Dave Wetton

The 174th AGM was held at the National Motorcycle Museum, on the outskirts of Birmingham, on Saturday 28th June 2003, between 10.30am and 1pm. Approximately 190 voting members attended out of a total membership of 41,000. Actually it didn't take that long for those of us travelling by car as the venue's at the hub of a motorway network but anyone using the rail network would have had a harder time.

A picket of RSPCA staff who had recently been made redundant as a result of the Council's forced commitment to overcoming the Society's financial problems met us outside the doors. They carried Unison posters and were handing out leaflets complaining bitterly about the Council's decision to close the ten Regional Communications Centres (RCCs) and replace them with an outsourced National Communication Centre (NCC). The protestors felt that such a move will lead to animal suffering due to the resultant effect on the public's ability to contact the RSPCA and therefore the number of calls dealt with by the Inspectors and Animal Collection Officers.

Once inside the assembly area we immediately spotted an excrescence of hunters – they're so identifiable (any other suggestions for a collective name for them by the way?) and, like flies attracted to unpleasant things, headed straight for them for a "spirited discussion". They're always too tempting a target. In addition to telling us how wonderful they were in safeguarding the countryside, and all the fauna who therein dwell, they also informed us that saboteurs still use Rentamob, that the going rate is still] £20 a day [what – no packed lunches any more?] and that sabs kill horses. When challenged the spokeswoman told us that the universities pay the sabs [it used to be the Kremlin and then Linda McCartney] and that she would get some back-up for her other allegations. Can't wait!

So, spiritually refreshed, in we went for the main proceedings.

The AGM - Part 1

Under Richard Ryder's suave chairmanship things went very smoothly.

The Awards

The awards were announced and distributed by Jackie Ballard. Her predecessor, Peter Davies, was there to collect his Queen Victoria Silver Medal and MPs Elliott Morley, Ian Cawsey & Norman Baker were there to collect their medals for their pro-animal campaign work. Each gave glowing references to the help they've received from the Society. There were also awards for pro-animal British media teams, an Italian anti vivisection campaign group and, finally, four Inspectors and an ACO. There were just two interruptions. The first, during Elliott Morley's "thank you" address, was from a stag hunting ~~Member~~ called, I believe, Peter Priesland. He yelled "What about the 10 million animals you slaughtered?" [i.e. the BSE crisis]. His reply came not from Mr. Morley but from a man three rows behind "Why don't you pipe down?" Surprisingly he did, but only for a while. During Jackie Ballard's intro to Ian Cawsey's anti hunt work he couldn't overcome his need to express his intellectual viewpoint again. "Rubbish" he interjected. He didn't say anything more though – his vocabulary had presumably been exhausted.

The Chairman's speech

Richard concentrated on the redundancies problem. It had been a last resort measure brought about by the financial situation. Last year's planned budget of £40 million had turned out to be just £30 million instead. As a result jobs had had to go. The decision had been to retain as much of the front line as possible [inspectors, collection services and hospitals] at the expense of campaign work, overseas work and HQ and regional admin & management. As a result of the cuts HQ had lost 2 directors, 7 middle level managers and 15 other posts. All this had resulted in a £2 million saving [*meanwhile "Freedom Food", which is a separately run meat promoting entity, was yet again subsidised to the tune of £1,816,00 from the central RSPCA funds last year.*]

Election results

Basic figures

Number of voting papers dispatched	41,001	(48,034 in 2001; 44,118 in 2002)
Number of voting papers returned	12,318 (30.04%)	
Invalidated papers (blank, spoilt etc.)	13	
Invalidated papers (less than 2 or more than 5 votes)	123	
Number of valid voting papers	12,182 (29.71%)	(11,396 in 2001; 18,024 in 2002)

2002's high response was a result of the "infiltration threat" letter that HQ sent out with the voting papers.

Voting figures (percentages relate to the 12,182 valid votes)

Successful candidates

1. Celia Hammond	6,980 (57.30%)
2. Margaret Baker	6,791 (55.75%)
3. Rosemary Collingbourne	6,524 (53.55%)
4. David Mawson	6,080 (49.91%)
5. Joseph Piccioni	5,979 (49.08%)

Unsuccessful candidates

6. Dave Wetton	5,893 (48.37%)
7. Jacqueline Laurie	4,635 (38.05%)
8. Jack Westlake	4,027 (33.06%)
9. Frances Miller	3,283 (26.95%)

The Annual Report for 2002

No problem; 157 votes in favour, 3 against (no one spoke against it though) and 5 abstentions.

The Annual Accounts for 2002

Again, no problem: 160 votes in favour, 4 against (again no one spoke) and 13 abstentions.

The Charities Bill

David Thomas spoke about the attempts to bring animal welfare campaigning properly under the umbrella of recognised charitable activity.

The Motions (in précised form)

- To expand the voting option range to allow for on-line computer and telephone voting in addition to standard postal voting: 169 in favour, 7 against, 5 abstentions.
- To allow HQ to temporarily administer the running of any branch, for not more than a year, if the branch doesn't hold an AGM or if there's no functioning branch committee: 170 in favour, 5 against, 7 abstentions.
- The RSPCA calls upon DEFRA to investigate the conditions in which Racing Greyhound are bred, trained, raced and finally disposed of at the end of their racing lives: 172 in favour, 10 against, 5 abstentions [the hunters who had voted "against" got a mouthful of abuse].
- The RSPCA calls upon racehorse trainers & owners to provide for the resting of horses for at least a week between races together with the provision of leisure time to reduce stress: 71 in favour, 61 against, 52 abstentions. This was the most contentious one of the day, and clearly the main reason for the hunters' attendance. Two of them spoke against the motion – Sarah Stafford (who'd earlier made the comments about sabs getting paid and killing horses) and Alex Mason (one of last year's failed pro hunt candidates). The high number of abstentions was due to the fact that many people either didn't know enough about horse racing or didn't want to be seen supporting it in any way.
- That the RSPCA should campaign to ensure that the UK government implements a total ban on the use of cages for laying hens including the prohibition of the "enriched cage": 162 in favour, 7 against, 20 abstentions. One of the hunters, Roger Helmer (MEP & member of the Leicester Branch) spoke against and then, referring back to Motion 3, went on to admit that he supported hare coursing because that was what greyhounds were bred for. Some of us knew this already but for those who didn't it came as a very unpleasant shock. He got a mouthful as a result. The hunters voted against the Motion and got another mouthful. They probably constituted the 20 abstention too.
- The RSPCA should press for the call for avoiding using animals in chemical testing, to strengthen the development of alternative methods to animals, seek additional funding from companies and ensure that the system is transparent so that duplicate testing is avoided: 179 in favour, 0 against and 7 abstentions. Maybe there's hope for the hunters yet!

The end

Richard Ryder then formally closed the AGM and we all drifted off to munch our animal carcasses (courtesy of "Freedom Food"), veggie or vegan grub prior to the less formal afternoon Open Session.

As ever I was left with the total lack of understanding as to why sliced up animals, who have undergone unpleasant deaths at the hands of slaughterhouse employees [not exactly the most intelligent or compassionate people on the planet], continue to be served up on plates at the AGMs of a Society which exists to "Prevent Cruelty to Animals". Surely on this one specific day RSPCA members and staff could leave their carnivorous instincts at home.

FREEDOM FOOD

If Council members had studied the 1991 WHO Report called "Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases" **BEFORE** voting to continue with Freedom Food, they might have realised the benefit to farm animals, the environment and to humans that would have been achieved by following the advice in the Report. As Dave Wetton pointed out, the cost to the Society of Freedom Food was £1,816,000 in 2002 (less £379,000 income) and saving this money would have helped in the present financial crisis.

The WHO Report refers again and again to the dangers of saturated fat. For example it says "Although a large number of dietary factors have been investigated, those most frequently linked to such diseases (heart disease, cancer, strokes etc) are embodied in the so-called affluent diet- energy dense foods of animal origin." The RSPCA is heavily involved in the intensive production of food animals with dairy animals, pigs chickens, eggs, turkeys and ducks. It would be fair to say that all the foods promoted by Freedom Food are fat containing and that the RSPCA encourages meat eating. The former DG Peter Davies claimed that the RSPCA's advertising is simply 'inter brand'. This was the argument used by the tobacco industry and has now been dismissed throughout Europe. Incidentally, the first official NHS guidance requiring doctors to advise patients to change their life styles (including diet) was published on July 23rd 2003.

Professor Colin Campbell, Prof Emeritus of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell University has said

"It is well nigh time to make clear that even **conservative** science is strongly trending in the direction of a plant-based diet."

As the 21st century progresses, promotion of a plant-based diet would mean **FEWER** farmed animals, **FEWER** slaughterhouses and less and less suffering and cruelty inflicted on farm animals. The public generally may not be interested in the way that farm animals are kept (you only have to stand by the meat counter in any supermarket to see that) but the public would respond to cutting back on meat if the danger to their health was promoted. As the WHO Report fears, there would be considerable opposition from the meat trade. The RSPCA was not formed to support the meat trade by promoting eating animals.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

I define 'cruelty' as the deliberate infliction of suffering upon a sentient

creature-when it is not performed for that individual animal's own benefit(for example in a veterinary operation). That hunting^{w. T. I.} dogs is 'cruel' is uncontestable. There is ample scientific evidence that all mammals experience stress, terror, shock, anxiety, fear, trauma, foreboding, as well as physical pain. It is also 'deliberate' in that those who hunt do so with the express aim of pursuing a creature to its death. Not all may witness the death, but those who participate can be in no doubt about the result, at least, for most of the hunted species.

But there is more. Hunting is not undertaken (as all killing should be) as a regrettable act sometimes made necessary in a sinful and fallen world. Rather it is celebrated as a 'sport'. It is here, most of all, that we should glimpse its utter incompatibility with the Gospel of God's free, generous love in Jesus Christ. People hunt because they enjoy it. In the words of Baroness Mallalieu: 'Hunting is our music, it is our poetry, it is our art, it is our pleasure.....'

Rev Professor Andrew Linzey. Extracts from a full page advertisement in the Church Times 20 December 2002 and sponsored by Lacs, IFAW and the RSPCA.)

A MATTER FOR CONCERN

On 4/07/03, a letter was sent by Margaret House to Mrs Collingborn asking if it was true that she was a subscriber to the vale of the White Horse fox hunt in Wiltshire.

In a reply dated 8/07/03, Mrs Collingborn completely ignored the question she had been asked. Her letter had no address, was initialed and not signed, Mrs House's name was wrongly spelt and the envelope was date stamped 15/07/03. The style of her letter was unlike her usual style. Why could Mrs Collingborn not have settled the matter pleasantly by denying that the allegation was true? Instead she claimed that her views were unimportant.

WE THINK THAT HER VIEWS ON HUNTING ARE VERY IMPORTANT.

In 1996, 500 hunters were admitted into membership of the RSPCA by resolution of the Council on a motion proposed by Owen Perks and seconded by Roy Forster. There is a very big difference in being an RSPCA member and being an RSPCA Council member. Council members decide on policies and are party to a lot of confidential information which would be very damaging to the Society if leaked to outside groups with different objects to those of the RSPCA. There is also the question of misleading information appearing in Mrs Collingborn's election addresses in 1998, 2000 and 2003. For example-

In 1998 she stated 'I have been hunting'.

cont) In 2000, Mrs Collingborn stated 'I agree with the RSPCA policies that cover animal welfare. I accept that 6.10 is RSPCA policy'. (This policy is one that opposes hunting. From the wording of the statement it has to be concluded that Mrs Collingborn does not rank policy 6.10 as covering animal welfare. It is interesting to note that Mrs Burton used exactly the same wording about policy 6.10 in her 2000 election address and is the ONLY other candidate since 1998 to do so.)

In 2003 Mrs Collingborn simply states that she 'agrees with the Society's animal welfare policies'. But not, we presume with policy 6.10 opposing hunting.

It is disturbing to read that a Vice President (Mrs A Cope) and 5 Regional Representatives on the Council supported Mrs Collingborn's Election Address. The Council members were - Mr AD Anyon, Mrs EG Unmack, Mrs DB Harris, Mr MS Tomlinson and Mrs K Bluett. Do these Council members support RSPCA policy 6.10 on hunting? Ordinary members have no means of knowing because Regional Representatives are not elected by the full membership.

We think that this whole matter is very important and members should be given the full facts and Mrs Collingborn should explain her attitude to the Society's policy on hunting or resign from the Council. It is not enough to state that she is 'aware' of the policy .

In Europe an animal is killed in a laboratory every three seconds. In Britain it's one every 12 seconds, in Japan one every other second and in the USA one per second.

THE ECOLOGIST
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The Council will before long be considering the governance of the Society. We urge council members to see that consideration is given to the treatment of the Society's members.

It is unacceptable that members should become stressed and unhappy for years due to the injustice inflicted on them by the RSPCA Council. In Watchdog we know from our own sad experience the distress suffered by June Page and Bernice Jones to the day that they died because of this. We supported Peter Clarke and the Wakefield members and we are upset about the unjust treatment of Joe Harris. There are many others.

Have council members any idea of the damage that is done to the Society by the injustice inflicted on members by them and branch committees?

In view of the very unpleasant comment made in The Independent on 21/07/03 about Jackie Ballard by a former Council member, we feel that Jackie Ballard deserves our full support. She did not cause the trouble that the Society is in - she inherited it. She is friendly and LISTENS.