

# Letters

## Message from Prague

In spite of recent events in Czechoslovakia, the Council of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences has unanimously decided to hold its 8th International Congress in Prague as previously planned 28 August–5 September 1969. We wish to keep the international scientific unions as free of political issues as possible, and also, we believe our best service to fellow scientists within the iron curtain countries as well as elsewhere is to proceed with the Congress if conditions offer a responsible promise of successful development of plans. These plans are described in the following announcement by Z. Slabochova, secretary-general of the Congress:

Prague, 30 October 1968

The Prague Secretariat of the VIIIth International Congress of Nutrition takes great pleasure in informing all its collaborators abroad of the progress of preparations of the Congress programme. By the end of July 1968 the number of preliminary applications received from 47 countries of the world amounted to 1000. Further applications continue to arrive, particularly in recent weeks.

The second information booklet is in print and its distribution is planned for the turn of the year. It will be mailed to all potential participants who sent their preliminary applications as well as to those whose names appear on the mailing list of the Prague Secretariat, i.e. to about 12,000 persons. In addition to a more detailed scientific programme, the booklet will offer information on the cultural and social programmes, approximate prices of hotel accommodation and meals. Enclosed will be also all forms for the registration of lectures, abstracts, etc.

The abstracts of all contributions, including those to be read by title only, and symposium lectures will be published before the opening of the Congress. We intend to publish the full text of all symposium lectures, probably in two volumes, during the year following the Congress.

We should like to avail ourselves of this opportunity to thank all our collaborators for their continued help. We should appreciate it if all our collaborators stay in touch with us and help us prepare an interesting programme.

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## As History Will See Us

The groups cited (Pueblo Indians, Eskimos, and others) perhaps may not be classified as developing societies (E. Llewellyn Thomas, *Letters*, 8 Nov.) by our own ethnocentric definition, but successful they were. They evolved mechanisms that enabled them to survive in relative harmony with the largesse of nature and with great stability. Their difficulties arise from their inability to cope with externally induced change. They did not, however, introduce changes internally that disrupted their social cohesion.

In the fullness of time we may be judged the first people capable of controlling our environment, while both unsuccessfully handling the societal stresses produced by the environmental control mechanisms, and retaining the salubrious aspects of the environment.

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## London: Where Smog Was Born

It is perhaps fortunate that there is no Patent Office for Words because the invention of the word "smog" attributed by Finkle to an anonymous Chicagoan would be rejected (*Letters*, 29 Nov.). The first written usage of the word is ascribed by *The Oxford English Dictionary* to the *Globe* (3 July 1905, p. 27): "The other day at a meeting of the Public Health Congress Dr. Des Voeux did a public service in coining a new word for the London Fog, which was referred to as 'smog' a compound of smoke and fog." Since there are two other references in the same entry (for 1918 and 1921, the latter lamenting a decline in the "body and bouquet" of Glasgow's smog) which predate those cited by O'Connell (*Letters*, 29 Nov.) . . . it is possible that smog was already part of the spoken language before 1905.

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"Smog" may have been invented independently on many occasions, but it was commonly used in London 60 years ago. C. W. Saleeby, a physician who wrote a number of books on social biology, and who was particularly interested in the importance of sunshine to the human being, used the word in several of his writings during the first decade of the century, and credited it to a well-known scientist whose name I do not recall. In any event, it may be agreed that London was a logical place for the word to appear.

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## New Drug Investigations

I have just read Lowinger's letter on the toxicity of new drugs (16 Aug.) and his urging that investigators express themselves to a senate subcommittee. Although a foreigner cannot do that, Lowinger raises points of concern to all scientists. Suppression of information to a lawfully appointed agency is a grave social misdeed, but his recommendations should be examined carefully, particularly the one requiring each investigator of new drugs to receive reports from all other investigators studying the same or similar drugs.

The first trial in man of a drug which has completed animal toxicity tests is a most anxious one. Certainly every investigator should consider all the information available up to that point before beginning his trial. However, a report on the effects in man from a celebrated center could well influence another clinical investigator, especially if it concerned mainly subjective phenomena.

There can surely be no other scientific discipline where anyone would so consciously tolerate bias in attempting to confirm an observation. "Information" is, alas, not the abstraction that Lowinger implies. It has degrees of quality and reliability much affected by the small sample size which is likely in these early stages and by the investigator's anxiety. Interpretation of it . . . is an art. "Maximum safety" to the community in the long run depends on securing knowledge of maximum reliability. There is little evidence of governments' "collaboration" in recognizing differences in quality of information, though many workers will