LETTERS

Oil Refinery near the Taj Mahal

The Indian government is building a large oil refinery in Mathura, 20 miles away from the Taj Mahal. The government says the refinery will have equipment to trap any corrosive chemical emissions. Government laboratories have pledged that this equipment will be effective. However, any mechanical device occasionally breaks down or malfunctions. If this should happen in the case of the refinery, then harmful emissions would spill into the sky, creating a serious danger to the Taj. Sulfur dioxide, when leaked into the atmosphere, mixes with water vapor and forms a sulfuric acid shower that can react with marble (calcium carbonate). Thus, the polished white surface of the Taj could first become discolored, then pitted.

Indian industrial licensing laws unfortunately do not include pollution control standards, with the result that, some years ago, effluents from a public sector refinery literally set the Ganges River on fire. The treasures of the Taj cannot be shifted, but the site of the refinery can be. The government has made a promise to Parliament that the plant will not be operated unless protection to the monument is ensured. The protection they were apparently referring to was to use only crude oil with a low sulfur content in the refinery.

This is not agreeable, either to the Archeological Survey of India or to those who are concerned with the preservation of the rich cultural and architectural heritage of the country. It is therefore necessary to form an International Action Committee to try to prevail upon the government of India to do something about the refinery. The committee will function at the address furnished below and welcomes communications from scientists and intellectuals throughout the world.

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Chrysotile Asbestos: Health Effects

In answer to my letter criticizing their report (17 June, p. 1319) on environmental asbestos pollution in Maryland, Rohl, Langer, and Selikoff (Letters, 19 Aug., p. 716) have produced a long involved effort at persuasion with a vast amount of information. My letter certainly called up a professional job. Unfortunately the information supplied would probably not