

LETTERS

Cancer Congress Boycott

David Baltimore *et al.* (Letters, 21 Oct., p. 253) call for the relocation of the 12th International Cancer Congress, scheduled to be held in Argentina in 1978. A relocation may well save the "international effort against cancer," if indeed the congress is boycotted by prospective participants; but such a protest will probably have no effect on the reported practice of political repression, torture, and execution in that country.

If the congress were held in Buenos Aires, it would constitute an influential congregation of prominent cancer researchers who would then have the opportunity to voice their concerns over human rights either personally or as a group. Moreover, the international community of cancer scientists at the congress would provide important support for the morale of the local scientists, physicians, and other intellectuals and citizens. In securing liberty for political prisoners, Amnesty International, a recipient of the 1977 Nobel Peace Prize, appears to have adequately demonstrated the effectiveness of personal and peaceful appeals to governments rather than boycotts and widely publicized hostile protests. If, after having personally experienced the social and political atmosphere in Argentina, every participant at the congress (perhaps after leaving the country, for obvious reasons) were to write officials of the Argentine government, it would constitute a more substantial and effective show of concern.

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Scientific Announcements

The relationships between the scientific community and the press have often been uneasy. Many scientists are convinced that reporters are frequently inaccurate, that they oversimplify, and that in their rush for headlines and deadlines they fail to wait for completion of the orderly processes of scientific journal review and publication. Science writers, on the other hand, frequently complain that many scientists are adamant in their inaccessibility, obscurantist in their language, and unwilling to recognize the legitimate public accountability of their enterprise.

As a journalist my practice has generally been to await publication in refereed journals, or public discussion at scientific meetings, before leaping to my typewriter with news of the latest breakthrough. I was dismayed, therefore, to note the revelation of Herbert Boyer's most recent recombinant DNA work by Dr. Philip Handler, president of the National Academy of Sciences, in testimony before a Senate subcommittee on 2 November. At the time of Dr. Handler's disclosure that somatostatin had been produced in hybrid bacteria, using recombinant techniques, the manuscript by Boyer *et al.* had not yet been accepted for publication by *Science*.

A double standard of scientific announcement seems to be operating here: The "orderly processes" of refereeing and publication remain in force for journalists and the public. But when the political process is operating in Congress—in this case, apparently, the spectre of political regulation for a new field of science—then the rules of science go by the board, and the public learns of a new scientific triumph via a congressional hearing rather than through the pages of *Science* or the annual meetings of the American Society of Biological Chemists.

I do not believe that a political debate is an appropriate forum for scientific announcements—especially when the scientific community itself purports to guard its traditional processes so zealously. The propriety of Dr. Handler's testimony, however politically useful, should, I believe, be widely discussed.

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A Question about !Kung Ecology

The hypothesis that hunting-and-gathering peoples do not suffer from a shortage of food but have a superabundant supply has become well known to the lay public as well as within anthropology. In my review (13 May, p. 761) of *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers: Studies of the !Kung San and Their Neighbors* (1), I questioned whether the hypothesis has been demonstrated to be correct in the case of the !Kung San. In particular, I wrote that in Richard Lee's 1965 doctoral dissertation (2) he noted that two-thirds of the San population in the Dobe region had been removed from the region in a resettlement program several years previously, and I commented, "That there were superabundant foods after two-

thirds of the population had been removed is not surprising."

Lee, Howell, and Harpending (23 Sept., p. 1234) have replied to this point, saying, "No such statement appears in Lee's dissertation, nor did such an exodus occur." They go on to say, "The settlement of the !Kung of Nyae Nyae, a different population, did not add a single square mile of foraging area to the space available to the Dobe !Kung." That the Nyae Nyae !Kung are a different population is a bit beside the point, for they occupied a part of the same region, the interior region, as the Dobe !Kung, and the Nyae Nyae area was easily reachable by the Dobe !Kung. Perhaps it would be best to quote Lee on this point.

The distinction between periphery and interior has been applied to the country of the central !Kung by John Marshall . . . and Lorna Marshall . . . it seems more useful to include all the central water sources under the term "interior" and consider all the other river dwelling and farm !Kung as peripheral. . . . A further stricture must be applied to the !Kung of the interior. In 1960 a Government Station was built at Tsumkwe, S.W.A. Since then the 800 interior !Kung on the South West African side of the border have settled there and are receiving instruction in agriculture. The !Kung on the Bechuanaland side of the border have not been permitted to participate in this program (2, pp. 31-32).

The Dobe area also includes a large tract of ground in South West Africa where Bechuanaland Bushmen traditionally go to hunt and gather (2, p. 38).

Since 1957, the South African police have patrolled the border road and they have shot on sight any cattle that stray across the line into South West Africa. The Bushmen residents of Bechuanaland, however, were not immediately affected by these restrictions. They continued to hunt and gather on the South West side and to visit their kinsmen in the Nyae Nyae area. . . . By 1964, over 800 !Kung Bushmen had been settled [by the South West African government] at Tsumkwe. Less than 50 of these people had come from the Bechuanaland side (2, pp. 66-67).

That 800 !Kung were settled is clear. And that the 400 !Kung around the Dobe well from the Bechuanaland side of the border still had access to this area also seems clear. It would be a strange situation if this had no impact on food availability to the Dobe !Kung.

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References

1. R. Lee and I. DeVore, Eds., *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers: Studies of the !Kung San and Their Neighbors* (Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1977).
2. R. Lee, "Subsistence ecology of !Kung Bushmen," doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley (1965).