

Cancer Meeting Under Boycott

Organizers of a boycott of the upcoming International Cancer Congress in Argentina have met with a significant but not decisive response from cancer researchers. Officials of the Geneva-based International Union Against Cancer, the convenor of the conference, are going ahead with plans to hold it in Buenos Aires this October.

From 400 to 500 American scientists have signed a petition saying they cannot attend the conference unless it is held elsewhere, according to Henry Rappaport of the City of Hope National Medical Center in Duarte, California. Rappaport, the prime mover behind the boycott, says that a similar petition circulated in France and Belgium has attracted some 250 names.

The call for a boycott, based on a desire to protest the political repression of scientists and others in Argentina, has come up for decision in two scientific groups. A recent meeting of scientists awarded career professorships by the American Cancer Society voted unanimously to boycott the meeting. The executive committee of the American Association for Cancer Research was deadlocked on the issue and held a ballot among its 2500 members as to whether it should propose the names of official delegates to the meeting. The motion passed by the narrow margin of 601 votes to 527.

The Buenos Aires conference is being supported with a \$250,000 grant from the National Cancer Institute. Gregory O'Connor, NCI associate director for international affairs, says that the boycott does not seem to be having a significant effect on attendance so far; advance registration is higher than for any previous conference in the series. But, says O'Connor, "I have the sense that the boycott will be effective in that a number of our top scientists will not be going and I think this will be a loss to the Congress."

The idea for the boycott started when an Argentinian scientist told Rappaport about the treatment his family has received from Argentine authorities. Rappaport, who narrowly escaped execution by the Nazis when he left Austria some 40 years ago, decided to protest holding the cancer congress in Buenos Aires. He spoke to Henry Kaplan of Stanford, who lined up Emil Frei, director of the Sidney Farber Cancer Institute, and reverse transcriptase finders David Baltimore and Howard Temin. The five wrote a letter to *Science* (21 October 1977) inviting American scientists to sign a petition which noted reports that scientists and others in Argentina have been arrested, often tortured and sometimes executed without trial. "We cannot in good conscience condone such actions, nor can we participate in an International Cancer Congress, however worthy its cause, if it is held in Argentina," the petition declares. It calls upon the International Union Against Cancer to hold the Congress elsewhere.

Secretary general of the IUAC is Gerald Murphy, director of the Roswell Park Memorial Institute. Murphy, who says he can speak only in a personal, not official capacity, believes that organizers of the boycott "are addressing themselves to a serious issue, but the conference has got nothing to do with the issue." The IUAC, Murphy observes, is a nonpolitical body. Its hosts in Argentina are voluntary societies. Murphy knows of no financial support for the conference from the Argentine government, nor is any government speaker addressing it. The IUAC has not yet received the petitions asking for the conference to be held elsewhere; Murphy does not know whether or not it would be technically feasible to do so.

NCI's O'Connor says he consulted with the U.S. State Department among others before deciding to continue the NCI's support of the conference. "My own opinion is that I am advising people not to boycott, for two reasons," O'Connor says: "Once you start bringing political considerations into scientific meetings, it's hard to know where to stop. Second, the very people you want to help will suffer most. They are looking forward to the meeting, which is a unique opportunity for many people in Latin America."

Proponents of the boycott argue that attendance at the conference is inevitably a political act implying approval of the Argentine government, regardless of the IUAC's claim of being nonpolitical. The closeness of the vote among the American Association for Cancer Research indicates that there is no easy solution to this perennially vexing issue.—N.W.

nor the basis for the indeterminate sentence is substantiated by the state of empirical research knowledge in the mid-1970's."

In other words: we have learned nothing about treatment of criminals since 1950, except for the fact that we know less than we thought we did.

The liberals were closing in on Patuxent because of the indeterminate sentence; the conservatives had begun to turn their backs because of the expense—\$13,500 a year, or double the cost of keeping someone in the regular system. John Wylie, a Patuxent psychiatrist, says the bilateral drying up of support for Patuxent has been evident even in cocktail party conversations—"half the people think I'm obnoxious for treating killers; the other half attack me for trying to control them."

The state, however, was not willing to abandon altogether its only formal commitment to rehabilitation, so it was salvaged by being defanged. In accordance with the CRC recommendations, the term "defective delinquent" was abolished, as was the indeterminate sentence. Prisoners referred to and accepted by the institution were allowed to be transferred within 90 days.

With these changes, the entire mandate of the institution became radically altered. The first criterion for admission to Patuxent is no longer "danger to society" but "treatability." Defective delinquents in the new law became "eligible persons." Such persons were defined as convicted criminals with at least 3 years remaining in their sentences, who had an intellectual deficiency or emotional imbalance, who were "likely to respond favorably to the programs and services at Patuxent," and who could be "better rehabilitated" there "than by other incarceration."

As soon as the new law passed, Patuxent released 33 prisoners who had been held beyond the maximum terms for their offenses; approximately 80 others petitioned for transfers. On the other hand, says Patuxent's associate director, psychologist Arthur Kandel, several former inmates who fought to get out of Patuxent and are in other jails are clamoring to get back in now that indeterminate stays have been eliminated. Whereas before, people were suing to get out, Kandel says he expects "to find ourselves in court soon defending decisions not to let guys in." He adds, "pretty much anyone with a brain in his head is going to want to get into Patuxent." This is because, in addition to the relatively cushy surroundings, Patuxent patients have the supreme privilege of