

Letters

Archeology Congress

Having read the article "Archeology congress threatened" by Roger Lewin (News and Comment, 22 Nov., p. 921), I feel constrained to register dismay at and disapprobation of the actions of those who would isolate the scientific community of the Republic of South Africa from the rest of the world: actions which are, as is so correctly stated, contrary to the principles of the International Council of Scientific Unions.

I am the President of the South African Council for Natural Scientists, which is an autonomous body consisting of eminent persons who are nominated by their peers from all the branches of the natural sciences.

The Council's terms of reference, which are entrenched in an Act of Parliament, are

- to register adequately qualified natural scientists and to promote the interests of their profession;

- to protect public health, safety, and interests generally against actions by inadequately qualified or nonqualified persons who venture into the natural scientist's field;

- to apply a code of professional conduct for registered scientists.

The Council, which is totally nonracial, issued a policy statement early in 1985 in which it reaffirmed its attitude in support of the universality of science. The Council further expressed itself in favor of the free and unfettered pursuit of science and reasserted its constant aim to promote the interests of all natural scientists, irrespective of race, color, creed, or sex.

The Council is extremely perturbed at the unjustifiable attempts, at an international level, of a vociferous minority of individuals, groups, and organizations who wish to impair the free movement of scientists and scientific information to and from the Republic of South Africa. Many, if not most, of those taking part in this campaign are, significantly, not members of the scientific community, but would nevertheless presume to speak on its behalf. One is fortunately aware of many published statements by scientists and others overseas condemning these attempts to isolate the South African scientists. This is also borne out by the large number of letters received by scientists in this country from their colleagues worldwide in which the activities of the would-be "isolationists" are vigorously slated.

Political arguments are bandied about by the proponents of South Africa's scientific isolation. But these are spurious in the very context of what science is all about: the pursuit of knowledge. Surely scientific contribution or discovery cannot in the least be

discounted or deemed irrelevant or less cogent merely because it emanates from a particular individual, or country for that matter!

We believe that scientists worldwide are, by and large, men and women who are intelligent, objective, and fair-minded. These attributes, fairly applied, cannot but give the lie to the attempts of those who would wish to drive us into the proverbial laager.

I would, in conclusion, quote Frederick Seitz, a former President of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences: "Above all regardless of the diversity of nationalities, personalities, and specialties, scientists everywhere—intentionally or not—are bound together by a common purpose: the advancement of human capabilities." And I venture to state, without fear of contradiction, that history will deal appropriately with those who ever seek to sever that bond.

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The Executive Committee of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) on 6 December 1985 issued a statement condemning the actions of the Executive Committee of the World Archaeological Congress 1986 (WAC) that banned scholars with South African institutional affiliations. The SAA Executive Committee based their condemnation on the inhibition of international scholarly communication. Their statement totally disregarded the fact that this was a protest against the system of apartheid in South Africa, against that country's racial policy, and not directed against any individual scholar. Unfortunately, the action of the SAA Executive Committee will only be viewed as opposed to the antiapartheid movement in England, which gains additional strength each day. It also should be noted that while one may regret the lack of consultation by the WAC Executive Committee in reaching its decision, the SAA Executive Committee also failed to consult and discuss with its members.

Apartheid is the problem. We wish to disassociate ourselves from the SAA Executive Committee statement for the following two reasons: (i) the system of apartheid prevents "free and open intellectual exchange" both within South Africa and internationally, that is, we support the important principle of academic freedom; (ii) whatever the intentions of the SAA Executive Committee, its statement will be viewed internationally as support for apartheid. We recognize that individual South African scholars

have struggled against the system of apartheid. We applaud their efforts and will lament their absence.

In order that American archaeologists' failure to participate in the World Archaeological Congress not be interpreted as a statement of support for the apartheid policies of South Africa, we are forming a group, American Archaeologists Against Apartheid. We urge American archaeologists to ignore the SAA Executive Committee's statement and attend the congress. All interested archaeologists should contact one of us.

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Complexity

The statement that the cochlea is the most complex mechanical apparatus in the human body (Editorial, 15 Nov., p. 743; Article, 15 Nov., p. 745) should not pass without challenge. The assertion is based on the number of moving parts in the organ—some 16,000 hair cells, each with about 100 stereocilia, making a total of more than 1 million organelles.

However, if number of moving parts is the criterion, then the human voice may be even more complex. Here the unit moving organelle is the group of muscle fibers supplied by the same nerve fiber. Untold numbers of motor units in the respiratory, laryngeal, lingual, buccal, and facial muscles participate in producing the fundamental frequency, harmonics, and formants of the voice. The enormous complexity of the mechanical apparatus is apparent in the signals produced. A person may not only identify another individual from the very first word spoken over the telephone, but even discern that individual's mood.

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Erratum: In the review of *Polycyclic Hydrocarbons and Carcinogenesis* (6 Dec., p. 1155), the fourth sentence of the third paragraph should have read: "A higher proportion of anti BPDE is produced in peroxide-dependent oxidation than in cytochrome P-450-dependent epoxidation, for example."