

Letters

NIH Drug Tests

Constance Holden's article, "NIH scientists balk at random drug tests" (News & Comment, 12 Feb., p. 724), contains a series of one- and two-word quotes, attributed to me, which are presented out of context and woven into the story so that they create an inappropriate, adversarial, and inflammatory sentiment which I neither voiced nor do I hold. I have always had great respect for my scientific colleagues at the National Institutes of Health, and I can certainly understand the feelings that have been generated on this issue. The two principal points I attempted to convey in the interview were (i) that the "scientific and technical" aspects of the federal drug program are well documented (1) and that concerned individuals should review these materials and understand the procedures and safeguards that have been provided, and (ii) that the President's Executive Order for a Drug-Free Federal Workforce (2) requires the heads of Executive departments to implement drug-testing programs and is not discretionary.

The problem of drug abuse in America and the "appropriate" way in which to deal

with this problem is a complex and emotionally charged subject. My views on the issue are well documented (3) and support any substance abuse policy which manifests a basic philosophy of getting the substance-abusing employee into treatment and back on the job. The membership of the AAAS would be better served by accurate information, not rhetoric, to help employers, workers, and unions continue developing and refining ideas about these difficult issues.

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REFERENCES

1. *Technical and Scientific Guidelines for Federal Drug-Testing Programs* (Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC, 19 February 1987); Department of Health and Human Services, *Fed. Reg.*, 14 August 1987, p. 30640.
2. R. Reagan, Executive Order 12564, 15 September 1986.
3. J. M. Walsh and S. C. Yohay, *Drug and Alcohol Abuse in the Workplace: A Guide to the Issues* (National Foundation for the Study of Equal Employment Policy, Washington, DC, 1987); J. M. Walsh and S. W. Gust, *Semin. Occupa. Med.*, 1, 237 (1987); J. M. Walsh, *J. Am. Med. Assoc.*, 258, 2587 (1987).

Response: I am sorry Walsh did not like the things I quoted, as I certainly respect him and his commitment to carry out the President's order. However, I believe I accurately

conveyed the tone of the interview in which he sounded distinctly frustrated at scientists' opposition to the drug-screening program (he did not, for example, tell me he certainly understood the negative feelings that have been generated).—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

The Windscale Legacy

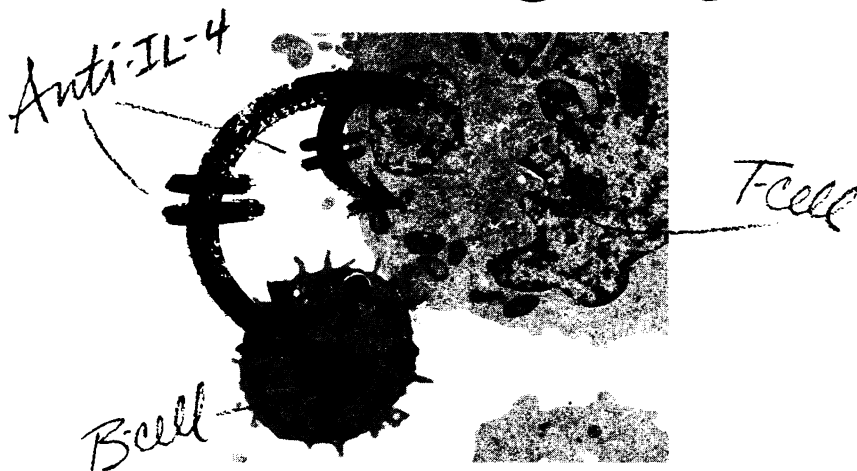
I should like to amplify one crucial interpretation stressed in David Dickson's excellent article about the importance of the release of the original official papers on the 1957 Windscale nuclear accident (News & Comment, 5 Feb., p. 556). I should also like to comment on the representation in the article of the polonium-210 release.

On the latter point, although the presence of polonium-210 is not mentioned in the Penny Report, released in sanitized form in November 1957, 1 month after the accident, it is mentioned in two papers published in 1958 by U.K. Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) staff scientists (1, 2).

What is curious is the way in which mention is made. Dunster *et al.* (2, p. 300) state:

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