

AIDS Paper Raises Red Flag at PNAS

For a scientist who feels his ideas have not received a fair hearing, the observations of Peter Duesberg have sure gotten a lot of ink. Over the past 2 years, Duesberg's case against the human immunodeficiency virus and his insistence that the retrovirus is not the cause of AIDS have appeared not only in the popular press, but in review articles penned by Duesberg in *Cancer Research*, *Science*, and now the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The latest round in *Proceedings* (vol. 86, February 1989, p. 755) follows nearly 8 months of protracted, often testy, occasionally humorous negotiations between Duesberg, a professor of molecular biology at the University of California at Berkeley, and Igor Dawid, the chairman of the editorial board of *Proceedings*. Indeed, the 60 pages of correspondence between the two scientists would make a colorful companion piece to Duesberg's review article. For example, one letter from Dawid begins: "It is with a major exertion of self-control that I answer your letter of October 11 in what I hope will read as a calm and measured response."

The appearance of Duesberg's review article in last week's *Proceedings* is remarkable in several ways, not the least of which is its suggestion that AIDS is not caused by any contagious microbe, especially not the retrovirus HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), but instead by "chronic promiscuous male homosexual activity," parasitic infections, malnutrition, and "narcotic toxins." (Many AIDS researchers suspect that cofactors may hasten the development of AIDS following infection by HIV, though they maintain that without HIV, the cofactors alone fail to produce AIDS.)

Almost as noteworthy as Duesberg's objections to HIV is the attention lavished on his manuscript. Most of the 2000 articles printed in *Proceedings* each year slip quietly through without anonymous and vigorous peer review. The authors simply agree to pass their papers by a knowledgeable colleague for an informal look-see (Duesberg did show his manuscript to colleagues Harry Rubin and Steve Martin at Berkeley before submission.)

But certain manuscripts raise "the red flag," says Frances Zwanzig, managing editor of *Proceedings*. "Red flags" are "things that have the possibility of ending up on the front page of the *Washington Post*," particularly topics having to do with medicine, says Zwanzig. One of the most famous red flags was Linus Pauling's paper in 1972 on vitamin C and cancer. That paper, and a handful

of others, have never made it into print in the academy's journal.

Duesberg's paper almost suffered the same fate. Submitted in June, the manuscript was rejected by Maxine Singer, the former top editor at *Proceedings*, who explained to Duesberg, himself a member of the National Academy of Sciences, that his offering did not differ significantly from his *Cancer Research* article in 1987 (nor his shorter piece in *Science*), and as such lacked "originality." Duesberg replied that the new paper has over 100 fresh references.

At Duesberg's urging, the matter was taken up by Dawid, the new editorial chairman of the academy's twice monthly journal. Dawid wrote to Duesberg to say, in essence, that the topic was too controversial to rush into print, and that because most workers in the AIDS field find Duesberg's conclusions "erroneous," the journal should proceed fairly, but with due caution.

Determined to be a good sport and believing that "scientific truth is not decided by majority vote," Dawid suggested that three anonymous reviewers take a look at the piece. Duesberg agreed. The three reviewers included one "major AIDS researcher," one virologist not working on AIDS or HIV, and one "neutral" reviewer proposed by Duesberg.

All three were highly critical of the manuscript. Even the impartial reviewer mentioned "misleading arguments," "nonlogical statements," "misrepresentations," and hinted at political overtones. The other two reviewers were even less kind.

For the next 6 weeks, by express mail and by fax machine, Duesberg and Dawid duked it out. Though he did not alter his ultimate conclusion, Duesberg did modify or clarify a number of his objections to HIV as the cause of AIDS. Toward the end of the correspondence, though Dawid continued to challenge Duesberg's comments, he also seemed to have lost just a touch of his fighting spirit. A number of times, Dawid concedes that, though somewhat misleading or incomplete, Duesberg's statements about this or that were "legalistically correct." At one point, Dawid writes: "At this state of protracted discussion I shall not insist here—if you wish to make these unsupported, vague, and prejudicial statements in print, so be it. But I cannot see how this could be convincing to any scientifically trained reader."

The Duesberg article is now out. Whether it will win any converts is to be seen. A footnote in the *Proceedings* states simply: "This paper, which reflects the author's views on the causes of AIDS, will be followed in a future issue by a paper presenting a different view of the subject." Robert Gallo of NIH has been asked to write it.

■ WILLIAM BOOTH

Leakey Reinstated as Museums' Head

Following a dramatic reversal of events, anthropologist Richard Leakey once again is director of the National Museums of Kenya. Leakey resigned from the directorship 2 weeks ago after the country's vice president, Josephat Karanja, had replaced the museums' board of governors (*Science*, 27 January, p. 473). Karanja had not consulted Leakey on the change, an act that "showed a lack of confidence in my leadership," Leakey told *Science*.

Last week the new board of governors was removed and the old one reinstated. "This action effectively removed my reason for standing down, and I was therefore able to withdraw my resignation," says Leakey. There had been concern among researchers in this country and elsewhere that, with Leakey no longer in power at the museums, anthropological expeditions to fossil-rich sites in Kenya might have been hampered.

The episode has caused considerable official embarrassment, because it involved some of the most powerful politicians in the country. Vice President Karanja's unilateral

decision to replace the board of governors, and thus force Leakey out of the directorship, was considered to be the result of Leakey's outspoken criticism of the government's ineffective antipoaching efforts. Only one man could have overruled Karanja, and that is President Daniel Arap Moi.

■ ROGER LEWIN

Ames Named Director of N.Y. Academy

Oakes Ames, a physicist and former president of Connecticut College, is the new executive director of the New York Academy of Sciences. He succeeds the late Heinz Pagels who was killed in a hiking fall several months ago.

Ames, 57, is currently a visiting fellow at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the defense and arms control studies program. A Harvard graduate, he received his Ph.D. in 1957 from Johns Hopkins.

■ BARBARA J. CULLITON