

Fluoridation: A Meeting in Detroit Raises Some Questions

Older scientists may possibly recall the era when rational discourse predominated on the subject of fluoridation. But reasoned talk was long ago obscured by a grim guerrilla warfare in which bands of anti-fluoridationists fight from ambush, while pro-fluoridationists, under the banner of the Public Health Service, conduct clear and bold operations. For an insight into the nature of this warfare, it is useful to look to the city of Detroit, where, on 8 November, the citizens will vote on whether they wish to join the 60 million other citizens and 3000 towns and cities that have fluoridated water supplies.

Last June, a number of scientists who have published on the subject of fluorine received letters inviting them to participate in a conference, 25-27 September in Detroit, under the auspices of "The newly formed American Society for Fluoride Research." The letters, signed by Albert W. Burgstahler, professor of chemistry at the University of Kansas, stated, "The meeting will be restricted to professional scientists and will be concerned primarily with recent research on physiological effects of fluoride." The addressee of each letter was praised for his scientific accomplishment, advised that scientists from India and Switzerland had accepted invitations, and was told that there was a chance, though no certainty, that funds would be available for travel expenses. All in all, it was the sort of correspondence that is commonplace among inhabitants of the scientific community.

Prompt acceptance was received from several invitees, including a number who now acknowledge that they had never before heard of Burgstahler or the American Society of Fluoride Research. Then the pro-fluoridation network began to buzz, though at first very softly, with inquiries about the meeting. A faculty member at the University of Rochester School of Medicine raised some questions, and one of the invitees who had agreed to attend brought the forthcoming conference to the atten-

tion of what serves as the CIA and USIA of the pro-fluoridationists, the National Fluoridation Information Service of the Division of Dental Health of the U.S. Public Health Service. The Service, which has a staff of five and an annual budget of \$70,000, makes it its business to know who stands where in the fluoridation controversy.

Investigation quickly produced a suspicion that the place and timing of the conference was not unrelated to the forthcoming referendum, for there in the background was none other than George L. Waldbott, M.D., a Detroit allergist, who has toured the nation, vigorously proclaiming an association between fluorine and an immense catalog of misfortunes. As stated in his recently published book, *A Struggle with Titans* (Carlton Press, 1965), these include cataracts, partial deafness, arthritis, convulsions, hemorrhages in the upper stomach and bowel, kidney disease, acne, still birth, black teeth, mongolism, changes in the sex organs, and corrosion of the plumbing (human and mechanical).

Once Waldbott's presence was established, the pro-fluoridation network resonated with warnings. "Your suspicions were completely correct," a scientist who had accepted an invitation wrote to a colleague, adding the view that "the meeting was set up to be held just a few weeks before Detroit holds a referendum on fluoridation, with sufficient time to get the conference results semi-published for referendum use. . . . I am most grateful for your suspicions and for raising the questions that will keep me from getting our names and our data used in such an unsavory manner." The author of the letter said that he had withdrawn from the meeting and that, on his advice, another colleague was withdrawing. Ironically, the day after this letter was written, a letter was dispatched to this same scientist advising him that the conference would be able to reimburse him for his travel expenses. The scientist replied that he had just recalled a prior

commitment and would be unable to attend.

Meanwhile, Waldbott himself had sent at least one letter of invitation, but his association with the conference was not realized by many of the invitees until a preliminary program showed him scheduled to head a panel on "Problems in Fluoride Research," and to speak on "Calcium and Fluoride Levels in the Aorta." As for the rest of the program, the selection of speakers and subjects suggested that the proceedings of the American Society for Fluoride Research were not likely to reassure the people of Detroit as to the safety and efficacy of putting fluorine in their water supply.

For example, in a symposium that begins the first full day of meetings, the opening speaker will be Philip E. Zanfagna, M.D., of Lawrence, Mass., who will talk on "Hydrofluorosis—An Appraisal of Four U.S. Fatalities." Zanfagna is on the medical advisory board of the National Fluoridation News, which says it is published for those "concerned with keeping our drinking water free of chemicals not needed for purification." One of the newspaper's corresponding editors, Helen E. MacDonald, identified as "Ph.D., Berkeley, Calif.," will speak on "Fluoride as Air Pollutant." Amarjit Singh, M.D., of the Medical College, Patiala, India, will speak on "Endemic Fluorosis in India." A paper on "Fluoride as Water Pollutant" will be delivered by J. H. Mick, D.D.S., of Laurel Springs, New Jersey, long associated with the anti's. Other subjects to be covered include, "Fluoride and Eye Disease," "Fluoride and Kidney Disease," "Allergy and Fluoride," and "Fluoride Effect on Domestic Animals." Clayton Rich, M.D., of the Radioisotope Service in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Seattle, is listed in the preliminary program to speak on "Use of Fluoride in the Treatment of Bone Disease," but he has withdrawn from the meeting along with several others who, though not listed as speakers, had planned to attend.

Partisan fervor is likely to shape one's attitude toward the American Society for Fluoride Research and its curious proximity to the Detroit referendum, but there are several perplexing questions in connection with this business that merit cool meditation. First of all, what is a scientific society? In practice, a scientific society is what any group of professionals in or around the scientific community choose to call a scientific society. But is this sufficient

Soviet Science Aide Ousted by United States

One of the firmest traditions of Soviet-American diplomatic relations is reciprocal ouster: if they bounce out one of our diplomats, we bounce out one of theirs, and vice versa. According to the scorekeepers of Foggy Bottom, this parity principle has been invoked, on an average, once a year since 1946.

The latest round, which was completed last week, was a bit out of the ordinary, for it involved an area in which, on the surface at least, East and West have striven for amicable relations—namely, science. The American side of the story, as related by the State Department and the FBI, is as follows:

In 1961 a member of the Soviet embassy struck up an acquaintanceship, at a technical meeting, with an American scientist who was connected with a business firm in the Washington area. The Russian, who was not identified, asked the American, also unidentified, to obtain some technical documents. Though the documents were unclassified, the American notified the FBI, which asked him to maintain the contact by appearing to cooperate. Presumably the FBI was hoping that the contact might put it on to other clandestine operations. Whatever was supplied to the Soviets, the FBI reports, was either publicly available material or classified documents which had been "sanitized" or made deliberately misleading. The businessman-scientist, the FBI reports, sometimes conveyed the documents by depositing them at inconspicuous "drops" that were designated by coded messages left in telephone directories.

The Russian who made the initial contact, the FBI reports, was replaced in 1964 by an embassy official who

raised the possibility, in talks with the American, that the Soviets might buy some products from his firm. Early last year this second official was replaced by the only person in the whole affair who has been officially identified, Valentin A. Revin, a chemist in his early thirties. Revin, who studied English as an exchange student at Berkeley in 1959, was one of the seven science officers on the embassy staff. According to the FBI, Revin continued to talk to the American about the possibility of Soviet purchases from his firm, but last fall, after a trip to the Soviet Union, he said a contract could not be arranged. At the same time, Revin offered to buy information on missiles, aircraft, and the space program, with particular emphasis, curiously enough, on the Surveyor moon probe—despite the fact that everything about Surveyor is unclassified and available for the asking.

Revin, according to the FBI, paid something over \$5000, in return for which the American supplied him with documents of no security value.

It may be that the Russians were getting suspicious or peeved at paying high prices for trash, but whatever the reason, the FBI soon decided to bring the game to an end. On 20 July, the American, under instructions from Revin, marked a telephone book in a booth in College Park to signal that some documents had been left at a "drop" (The Washington Post this week identified the American as John Huminik, 31, who was described as having founded the Chemprox Corporation, Mt. Rainier, Maryland. He is also a senior materials engineer at the Fairchild Technology Center, Germantown, Maryland.) Less than a hour later Revin



Revin in the phone booth

showed up in the booth and was photographed by an American agent. On Labor Day weekend he was declared *persona non grata* and given 3 days in which to leave the United States. Last week the Soviets reciprocated by ousting an American embassy staff man in Moscow, but, as the signs are read in diplomatic circles, the Russians apparently were not too aggrieved by the Revin case. They did not take their vengeance on the lone science officer assigned to the U.S. Embassy but, rather, chose for ouster a man who was going anyway, Donald R. Lesh, a second secretary in the political section who was 1 month away from completing his Moscow tour.

Persons who knew Revin here recall that, from his arrival in Washington early last year until his visit home last fall, he was one of the more cheery and affable of the Soviet science officers and, at least on one occasion, quickly cut through some red tape to assist some Soviet-American scientific cooperation.

—D.S.G.

to protect the integrity and quality of science and, if matters of science and public well-being are concerned, also protect the public well being? Affiliation with the AAAS is something of a mark of a society's acceptance by the scientific community. At present, societies and academies associated with the AAAS total 296, thus covering a vast proportion of all of American scientific and technical activity. The criteria for affiliation state that the proposed affiliate usually must be at least five years old and have at least 200 members,

as well as a regular publication and "methods of inquiry . . . consistent with scientific standards and procedures." But there is nothing to prevent organizations that do not meet these standards from presenting themselves to the public with all the prestige and trappings of science. Is some sort of policeman called for in this regard? Obviously, it is not a welcome or bloodless task, but that has nothing to do with the issue of whether the interests of science and the public welfare require that it be performed.

Finally, there is the matter of the boycott of the conference by those who suspect its motivations. If, as seems possible, the conference produces little but scientific-sounding scare stories for the people of Detroit, the boycotters can feel pleased that they did not lend their prestige to the proceedings. On the other hand, their self-decreed absence has left the field open to the anti's, and if they prevail the pro's can only blame themselves. Sometimes, the best way to meet an ambush to fight rather than run.—D. S. GREENBERG