

Letters

Aldabra: An Expensive Folly

We in England are grateful to *Science* for sharing our concern over the island of Aldabra north of Madagascar (Letters, 7 July, and Editorial, 21 July). May I call attention to the article by the defense correspondent of the London *Times* (16 Aug.) that America is contributing two-thirds of the cost of buying the islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory and will also pay half the cost of any military development of them. In the present state of its economic affairs the British government could not possibly afford this adventure otherwise; but now we are handicapped in arguing against it by this national commitment to a foreign power. Even as things stand, our contribution seems likely to be more than we can decently afford; and if the base were deflected to the only likely alternative site, Wizar Island in the Cosmoledo group, it would cost twice as much. Public opinion in this country is now increasingly aroused in resentment against this expensive folly; may we look to the leaders of opinion among your readers to make more civilized views felt in the region of its origin as well?

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Stanford: Student Organizations

In the enlightening account by Langer (News and Comment, 4 Aug.) of the House Un-American Activities Committee's interest in student organizations, the box on page 525 begins: "Last summer the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) went foraging in the nation's universities for lists of members of student organizations known to oppose U.S. policies in Southeast Asia. At least two universities—Stanford and the University of Michigan—complied." With respect to Stanford, at least, the statement is wrong. Stanford substantially preceded the American Council on Education in deciding that it should not keep membership lists of student or-

ganizations, and it does not have them. For reasons primarily related to problems of financial responsibility, it does list the *officers* of such organizations. HUAC was, not surprisingly, quite interested in these; but it is hardly fair to describe Stanford's response as "compliance" with a "foraging" expedition. In fact, HUAC subpoenaed them.

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Inequities of a Draft Lottery

Samuelson's otherwise excellent review of the new draft legislation (21 July, p. 290) errs, I believe, in evaluating congressional action as a "setback to reform." What constitutes reform, like what constitutes fairness, is highly subjective. . . . Take the statement that "the Marshall Commission concentrated . . . on the most prevalent complaint about the draft: that it was unfair." So it did, and it concluded that "there is no evidence that the variability of the Selective Service System leads to any systematic biases against poor people, or Negroes, insofar as the final proportion of men serving in the Armed Forces is a measure of this." It also found that the percentage of men being called to serve was practically the same whether they were high school dropouts, high school graduates, college dropouts, or college graduates. The Marshall Commission's finding tended to show that the draft was *not* unfair, insofar as it was being applied to major social groups. Its recommendations for changing the system were made more in spite of, than because of, its factual findings.

The Commission also found a need for "personalizing" the Selective Service system, but it proposed to do this by eliminating the local boards and providing for selection of men at random from a nationwide pool using "modern data handling equipment." How much more impersonal could a system be? Congressional rejection of

this idea may have been influenced by factors other than anger, preoccupation with draft-card burners, time pressure, and stubbornness, as alleged by Samuelson.

Surely scientists will not equate random chance (a lottery) with fairness or equity. If it is wrong for a particular man to be drafted, doing it by random selection will not make it right. Equity involves making the best judgment in the light of all existing circumstances, not drawing names out of a hat. Samuelson brands the opposition as "anti-lottery, anti-reform forces." There is no room in his concept for anyone who does not consider a lottery as being inherently a reform. As a matter of fact, the draft lottery proposals raised more questions than their proponents were able to answer. The Marshall Commission itself recognized that it could lead to serious problems in procuring enough officers for the armed forces. Other study groups such as the Clark panel pointed out areas where draft by lottery could lead to unanticipated pitfalls and to malutilization of scarce and irreplaceable manpower resources.

Congress, in its 1967 draft law deliberations, refused to adopt an untried "cure" whose side effects might well be worse than the disease. Inequities will always exist when some, but not all, must serve, whether men are selected in the national interest or drafted at random. The Military Selective Service Act of 1967 may have been a setback to the lottery proponents, but it should not therefore be branded as a setback to reform.

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Further Detractions of Smoking

Carter's interesting article, "Smoking and health" (28 July, p. 406), called attention to cigarette advertising "subtly associating smoking with the joys of sex." I wonder if this is not a subconscious psychological defense on the part of Madison Avenue. An early authority on the pathology of tobacco has stated that, while nicotine may be initially exciting, its ultimate effect is to paralyze the sympathetic ganglia, including especially those leading to the sexual organs (*1*). Possibly Kipling had this in mind when he wrote: "And a woman is only a woman, but a good